INTERGENERATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING/MUTILATION AMONG WOMEN OF SUDANESE ORIGIN IN MASSACHUSETTS, USA

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Abstract

Female genital cutting (FGC) plays a major role in increasing the gender gap in the Sudanese community. The FGC experience breaks women's self-trust from childhood and makes them submissive and subservient to a world controlled by men.

In this paper, I will share a true story of a girl who underwent the FGC practice to help the readers understand the cultural importance of the practice in the Sudanese community, regardless of the pain and suffering the female child goes through. This paper will begin with a general overview of the FGC practice. Next, from a medical perspective, the paper will discuss the different FGC types and their complications. Following that, the paper will explore the history of FGC in Sudan and the Islamic perspective regarding FGC. Specifically, the paper will explain how the FGC practice is not mentioned in the Quran or by the Prophet Mohamed Hadith. Next, using a feminist lens to look at a selection of Sudanese states, the paper will explore how women and the practice of FGC have been affected by the patriarchal political struggles. Sudanese women were feminists and pioneers before Omar Al Bashir's leadership. Under the complex system of rule created by him, women were oppressed.

Finally, the FGC practice is deeply internalized by Sudanese women and men, even outside of Sudan. This practice in the community has remained highly influenced by their mental enslavement to patriarchal power. For Sudanese women who have immigrated to Massachusetts, this practice has created challenges for them in their new home country. Thus, establishing the African Women's Health Center (AWHC) in July 1999 at the Brigham and Women's Hospital

has been especially important for this community. It provides infibulated women (who have undergone the most aggressive FGC) with specialized care and surgical techniques created by Dr. Nawal Noor. Finally, 2020 was a turning point as both Massachusetts and Sudan finally passed legislation banning the FGC practice and making it a criminal offense.

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Chapter I

Introduction

A child under the knife of Tradition

Allow me to share a story of a 9-year-old girl who underwent FGC In Sudan. In 1999 in a small city in Sudan called "Rufa," Zainab lived with her amazing parents and siblings (one brother and one sister). Zainab was the eldest; she was doing great at school, a very polite kid, quiet, and full of energy. Her parents surrounded her with love, comfort, and trust. Her Dad was a teacher at a school in Rufa, but originally, they are from Omdurman, located in the northern part of Khartoum, a cultural center in Sudan. Residents of Omdurman are heavily attached to the culture and tradition of Sudan.

Zainab was nine years old when her mother started preparing her for FGC and explained that the procedure would occur at her grandfather's house in Omdurman during the summer vacation. Her Mom kept telling her, "FGC is a must to assure a girl's purity and cleanliness, and no Sudanese man will accept marrying a Sudanese girl who has not undergone FGC."

Zainab did ask her mother once if her dad was aware of this procedure or not, but Zainab's mother simply answered, "This is a women's business; he shouldn't get involved." Summertime came, and Zainab was so excited about meeting her cousins and family members in Omdurman. Her mother and cousins assured her that it is a painless, easy procedure and will take a few minutes. Moreover, Zainab was told that she would be receiving many gifts and money and making a feast. Definitely, as a nine years old child, she was excited. Unfortunately, nobody told her the truth. On the procedure day, Zainab woke up early; she was happy and excited, wearing a colorful dress, and waiting to go to the Grandfather's house. She reached the house, waited for 15 minutes for the midwife to come, and when she arrived, went to one of the

rooms on the house's second floor, with two of her Aunties. They asked her to lay in bed; suddenly, one of her aunts held her hands tightly, and the other one opened her legs. Zainab was getting scared; the midwife was getting closer to her and telling her, "I will give an injection. It will hurt a bit". While Zainab was lying in bed, suddenly she felt a sharp, sudden pain which was unforgettable; she was screaming and crying and saying, "Please stop it, I will die. I can't bear this pain, please." As if they were deaf, they started to hold her tighter. She fainted because of the severe pain she was passing through. When she woke up, she found herself in another room, her mother sitting by her side and her little sister playing around her. She could not move, was feeling hurt, but didn't know what was exactly hurting her. Her legs were tied, and she asked her mother to take her to the restroom. She wanted to urinate, and when she stood up, she saw her colorful dress full of blood. She started shaking and screaming, "Please don't do it again, please." Her mom assured her that she is fine now and helped her to go to the restroom. Urination was so painful, and seeing blood coming out from her private area was too much for a 9-year-old girl to handle.

The day after the procedure, Zainab started developing a fever and getting weaker; she was taken to the doctor, who screamed at her parents and said: "Shame on you, what a clueless primitive behavior. She is a child; are you trying to kill her?" The doctor puts Zainab on IV antibiotics for two weeks. Zainab describes it as the worst experience in her life. She says, "The physical pain is unforgettable, the anger from the tradition will always be there, and being betrayed by the people I trusted made me speechless." Two years later, Zainab's little sister experienced the genital cut. Zainab's heart was broken to one million pieces as she couldn't stop this from happening to her little sister. Zainab asked her mother, "Why are you doing this? This

is unfair. Please stop it." Her mom answered, "It is a tradition, and I will be put to shame if my daughters didn't undergo the genital cut."

Zainab grew up with the fear of FGC. She always felt that she is an incomplete woman, that something is missing. Today, she is scared of sexual intercourse because she hears from other Sudanese women that it is painful for girls who underwent the genital cut. The pain Zainab faced during her childhood still exists inside her heart and soul.

The FGC Behind The Injustice

Over the long run, the idea of womanhood has determined its importance and quintessence to a great extent inside the system of sexuality. Even though this might be man-centric at the start and sexist practically speaking, women themselves must mentally capitulate to the patriarchal programming and join the man-centric specialists and sustain the thought that the woman is a sexual item or, better communicated, a sexual stake; that her body is there to offer delight to the man (adapted from Nawal Al Saadawi)[1]

Female Genital Cutting (FGC) is a complex global issue with large, ongoing debates. It is an agonizing process practiced by the Sudanese community on young girls to begin molding them into women, and it falls under the umbrella of custom. The practice is done to make women mentally and physically compliant under male-centric control.[2] The community indoctrinates people with the belief that women who have significantly molded their bodies with the genital cut are better than women who don't undergo the genital cut, as their odds for marriage are higher and their virginity is held.[2]

A woman with a mutilated body puts her daughter under similar torment to ensure that she is formed according to the community principles.

Consequently, the daughter is "perfect."[2] A mother forgets the fact that she will be betraying her daughter, the same way she has been betrayed by her family, as a little girl will

never imagine that the people whom she loves and trusts can put her under any painful process. Sadly, what the mother experienced earlier in life, the daughter will experience, too.[2]

Hypothesis/Research Statement

My own experience has driven my hypothesis that this practice is deeply internalized by women and men even when they are outside of Sudan and serves to maintain patriarchy. To test this hypothesis, I interviewed Sudanese people living in Massachusetts to understand their views on the practice of FGC and understand the role of women in this diasporic community.

Chapter II
Background

FGC Overview

As a Sudanese woman who has lived abroad, I understand Sudanese culture and noticed that this practice is mainly done in Sudan for the sake of pleasing men. The community assumes that FGC has a positive effect on women's health it does not. It is purely done to uphold patriarchy, heighten men's sexual satisfaction, and assure their bride is pure (to have never experienced pre-marital sex and reserve the female virginity).[1] Denying that FGC is a violation of women and children's rights presents a real criminal assault.

It has been theorized that FGC began in antiquated Meroe (modern-day Sudan) as FGC was practiced for paternal confidence in their daughter's chastity.[3] FGC in Sudan may be a way to emphasize female ripeness and at the same time limit Sudanese female sexuality.[3] It is noteworthy that the Sudanese society is penetrated by sexual disparity, and FGC fortifies this disparity by making Sudanese women less than men, both physically and culturally, as per the anthropologist Bettina Shell.[3]

Some men think that uncircumcised women are not virgins and will be unfaithful partners in marriage, which can be a solid drive for women to experience FGC.[3] All these points can demonstrate my contention that FGC in Sudan is taking place for male sexual fulfillment and to maintain patriarchy. In a few African nations like Kenya women must experience FGC without anesthetic and experience the horrifying torment of clitoridectomy so that they are prepared to endure childbirth pain. It is said that this strengthens them and affirms their development as women.[3] On the other hand, the benefit to women's strength is a less likely use of these violent practices than the political-economy of men controlling women's. bodies According to Shell, it is noteworthy that some social norms can advantage a few while hurting others: FGC is dangerous norm for women but establishes male control over women's bodies thus control of the economy.[3]

FGC is also practiced among various African refugee and immigrant communities worldwide, including in the US.[4] In 2012, 513,000 women and girls in the USA were at risk of FGC.[4,5] This was significantly more than the 1990 estimate.[4]The explanation of this was the immigration to the USA of women who lived in countries that practice FGC. There have been several reports of a gap in legal frameworks against the practice of FGC in some states within the USA. The state of Massachusetts is one of 12 states that does not have legislation against FGC.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948 announced that everyone has universally recognized dignity, education, and the right of freedom, regardless of their backgrounds and cultures. Women are granted these rights, and FGC was considered sexual violence against women under the declaration and had to be eliminated. Following the declaration, the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was written to support it. It is an international bill of rights looking after gender

equality and women's protection from harmful practices like FGC, according to the anthropologist Ellen Gruenbaum.[6]

Female children can't choose if they want to undergo the procedure. All that a girl knows is that her family would never hurt her; then, she faces the truth when she gets cut.[2] Before the procedure, all the young girls may feel happy as this coming-of-age ritual maybe associated with their families giving money or gold, making a banquet, or buying them a new dress.

In Sudan, it is hard for older women to acknowledge the pain that their little girls and granddaughters will face going under FGC. Instead, they focus on the fact that a girl without undergoing FGC is considered a disgrace for them, particularly if the girl is getting married. The bride can be considered not a virgin if she hasn't undergone FGC, and this is a major worry in the Sudanese culture, as the female needs to remain a virgin until the day of marriage.[1]Virginity implies the presence of an intact hymen. The female Arab mother instructs her little girls with respect to the significance of being a virgin. She keeps placing mental dread in her daughter with respect to the non-intact hymen prior to marriage. She cautions her daughter from riding a bike and promotes using the pervasive water hose found in restrooms all over the Arab world washrooms to wash the private regions with water after defecating and urinating, as is prescribed by Islamic custom. The female virginity among the Arab world is an indication that this female is respectful. Additionally, when the Muslim female reaches puberty, she needs to begin putting hijab (a head covering worn publicly by some Muslim ladies). Moreover, her social contact with men must be restricted, and she will not be permitted to play with them as she was prior to puberty. Indeed, some families send their daughters to schools only attended by females.

FGC not only serves to ensure female virginity but gives the female a snugness that can give delight to her better half during sex. This joy is an approach to keep the spouse appended to

her, making her a perfect match for a man. Most of the women who undergo FGC earlier in life repeat the FGC process after each birth to assure the tightness of the area for better male pleasure during sexual intercourse. Ellen Gruenburg mentions in her book "The Female Circumcision Controversy"[3] that FGC is taking place to satisfy the male ego. This is simply demonstrating my argument that FGC is occurring in Sudan for male fulfillment.

In addition, Janice Boddy, in her book "Civilizing Women," discusses that Sudanese women, accustom to this practice, perceive an altered vulva as self –beauty and think that a woman who has undergone FGC will be more feminine.[7]

Also, Bettina Shell-Duncan (a female anthropologist) indicated that Sudanese ladies accept that FGC is a declaration of a mother's adoration for her daughter in a world created by men; FGC is a custom to ensure female virginity and expands her odds of marriage.

Types of FGC

FGC is a tradition that has become a practice against human rights. The exact history behind this practice is unknown. Roqaiya Abu Sharaf, a Sudanese anthropologist, mentioned different names for FGC in her book: "Bolokoli, khifad, tahara, tahoor, qodiin, irua, hondo, kuruna, negekorsigin, and kene-kene."[8] As per the UNICEF, FGC is defined as "all procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or another injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons."[8] According to World Health Organization (WHO), there are four types of FGC.[9]

- **Type I.** Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans
- **Type II**. Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and the labia minora (the inner folds of the vulva)

- **Type III.** (Often referred to as **infibulation).** Narrowing of the vaginal opening with the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora or labia majora.
- **Type IV.** All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, for example, pricking, piercing, incising, scraping, and cauterization.
- **Deinfibulation** refers to the practice of cutting open the sealed vaginal opening of a woman who has been infibulated (Type III). This is often done to allow sexual intercourse or facilitate childbirth and is often necessary to improve the woman's health and well-being.

According to the WHO, health complications of FGC include, "Immediate Complications: shock if local analgesia is not given, hemorrhage, injury to adjacent structures (urethra, bladder, anal canal, and vagina), infection like tetanus, retention of urine due to the fear of scalding the wound, late complications (infertility, implantation, dermoid and fistula)[10], menorrhagia (heavy menstrual bleeding), dysmenorrhea (sever menstrual pain), keloid scar formation, marital and psychological complications."[10]

In Sudan, FGC is referred to as "Pharaonic" for infibulation and "Sunna" circumcision for everything else. Sunna type is a simple excision of the clitoris with or without parts of labia minora.[8] Sunnah refers to the tradition of Prophet Mohamed, and it is practiced widely in Sudan.

History of FGC In Sudan

North Sudan is an African country with a population of 40 million people. It is noteworthy that the Arabic tribes' settlement in the North Sudan instilled the Islamic religion in the area and the Northern part of Sudan came to be dominated by Muslim people.[11]

Ever since Sudan independence from Britain in 1956[12], the government and political power has been directed by Muslim people. Muslim authority created clashes with South Sudan, which is inhabited by Christians predominantly. The reason why South Sudan is predominant by Christianity is because South Sudanese were influenced by the Catholic and Anglican churches.[13] Also, a small group of the southern Sudanese follow indigenous animist beliefs.[13] The difference of religion between the North and South resulted in an independent South Sudan. However, Sudan's (Northern Sudan) aspiration toward modernity and democracy has not opposed the harmful cultural practices since the nation was founded, and one of these practices in Sudan is FGC.

Discussing FGC in Sudan means exploring the history of Sudan, which played a significant role in FGC establishment. In 1070 BC, Sudan was known as the Kingdom of Kush. In this kingdom, they accepted that FGC is a route for affirming womanliness, as the affirmation will be accomplished by adjusting the female body and eliminating the clitoris; subsequently, the manly appearance (of a protuberant clitoris) will be gone. The Empire of Kush was one of the earliest most prominent Sub-Saharan civilizations, and its strength made it a major opponent of Egypt (which was under the pharaohs' leadership).[14]

Egyptian pharaohs conquered Kush in 1540–1075 BC.[14] The Sudanese community firmly accepts that the pharaohs, not the Kush, created the more extensive practice FGC, infibulation. This argument is built on various stories related to Pharaoh Moses who lived in the 14th century BCE[15]and he was cruel to Prophet Moses, the Hebrew prophet. Some of the scholars are convinced that Pharaoh Moses was Ramses II and others believed he was Sati I.[15] In one story, "Pharaoh Moses had a bizarre dream and requested his advisors to clarify it." The advisors said, "A Jewish child will be conceived and will take the leadership of Egypt." Pharaoh Moses felt

threatened and ordered drowning all Hebrew newborns in the Nile river. Hence, to keep track of the newborn Hebrew boys, a midwife proposed female circumcision so no woman would be skilled enough to give birth without a midwife's help." For this reason, the most restricted FGC is known as the Pharaonic type. With the discovery of circumcised Egyptian mummies from 400 BC[16], the Sudanese community's beliefs were further solidified, and this discovery also made researchers speculate that Ancient Egypt (current-day Sudan and Egypt) is the FGC site of origin.

The other major point influencing the implementation of FGC in Sudan was Arabization. In the 12th century, Arabic clans noticed the rich land owned by a peaceful nation in Nubba's. They seized the chance and built tranquil business focal points among them and the Nubians (in today's Sudan).[16] Many Arabic clans were shifting to the Nubian area and settling there. This shift caused the existence of Arabization in the area. It is worth noting that many of the Arabic clans were practicing FGC and their shifting to the Nubian area assumed a major function in expanding the spread of FGC in Sudan.[14]

Between 1821-85, Sudan was under the Turku-Egyptian administration; at this time, the slavery exchange reached its peak.[14] Slave dealers practiced the FGC on slave girls, perhaps to maintain a strategic distance from them getting pregnant or to increase their cost in the market.[11] This also played a role in spreading the FGC practice in Sudan. After the Turku-Egyptian administration, the Mahdiyahh dominated in Sudan, and he was vanquished by the British powers in 1890.[14] The British worked on bringing Sudan under their influence and arrangements.[14] They were shocked by the FGC practice and, in 1946, attempted to prohibit infibulation, though not the clitoridectomy techniques, by passing laws against the practice.

1946 was a significant year in Sudan, a revolution in Rufa took place in February 1946.[17] Rufa is found 120 kilometers south of Khartoum (Sudan's capital city). The spark of the Rufa revolution was that a Sudanese woman violated the British law that prohibited the infibulation practice, by putting her daughter under infibulation. Therefore, she was incarcerated.[17] The revolution occurred, in part, because of the imposition of this colonial law on a woman in the community who was practicing a cultural tradition.

Sudanese chief Mahmoud Mohamed Taha[17], a brave Sudanese leader, revolted against colonialism, not against the prohibition of FGC *per se.* Even though Mahmoud Mohamed Taha was against the FGC practice, yet, modernists see him as somebody who restricted a generous pioneer culture obstruction to protect women from harmful social practices like FGC.[17] Mahmoud Mohamed Taha was executed in 1986 by president Nemeri because of his opposition to Islamic religious laws.[17]

FGC and Islam

There is an incorrect concept that Islam supports FGC, as many Muslims believe that FGC makes the girls unadulterated and pure. It is crucial to mention that the FGC has no reference in the Quran. Muslims have been putting their girls under the cut or wanting to do so should comprehend that FGC has nothing to do with Islam.[18] Still, nations like Guinea-Bissau, if the girl is not cut, she is not pure; thus, she cannot pray[3], in light of the fact that praying is the center of Islam this is a severe punishment. They related this to tales about prophet Mohamed and his spouses.[3]Similarly, in Sudan, a prominent Islamic nation, FGC is practiced to keep the girl pure. Sudanese insist that it adds cleanliness to the woman, especially by preventing adultery and saving the girl's virginity. Sudanese people accept that prophet Mohamed suggested FGC in

a few Hadith (is an Arabic term for quotes mentioned by Prophet Mohamed), which is why many of them proceed with the practice.

Al-Azhar University, a very notable Islamic association situated in Egypt, stated that numerous articulations approving the FGC practice are dishonestly credited to prophet Mohamed; consequently, Al-Azhar University in February 2020 re-announced that FGC is an unsuitable practice.[18]

Islam expresses that we ought not to damage ourselves or others, and FGC is an act of damage, changing what God made in its best shape. Islam gave the woman incredible value, which has been disregarded by the communities under the flag of culture.[18] The FGC has been performed sometime before Islam and in nations that Islam did not reach. Numerous Muslim nations don't rehearse FGC (e.g., Yemen, Tunis, Turkey, Hedja). In addition, the infibulation type (Pharaonic type) was more commonly practiced in Sudan; not the sunna type[10]thought to be suggested by Islam.[10]

Chapter III
Social Theory and Feminism prospective

Social Theory

I introduce here a variety of social theories I will use to analyze the beliefs and opinions of those I interview. Talking about FGC means talking about a pervasive method created by the patriarchal system under the name of tradition to restrict a woman's sexuality.[2]Besides the psychological and physical harm caused by FGC, this practice allows a community to look at the female body and assign it a value according to the sexual pleasure that it can provide to a male. This ignores the fact that this female is an individual who has the right to bodily autonomy and sexual satisfaction.[2] This method placates the community by putting the daughters of women

with mutilated genitals through the same experience, assuring the practice's continuity.[2] It is also done for the interest of keeping the male sexual cravings fulfilled, reproduction well controlled, and female bodies under surveillance.[2] Controlling and harming female bodies for the benefit of male-centric control is best explained under "Bio-power" and "Bio-politics" Theories.[2]

The great philosopher Michel Foucault sees that sexuality plays a great role in implementing Bio-power among communities, as sexuality keeps humans under each other's surveillance. At the same time, it is connected to the natural cycles of the population because of the role it plays in reproduction.[2] Hence, sexuality controls individuals and populations.[2] Bio-politics describes any technique that puts an individual under control, regardless of whether this technique causes harm or not. Leaders use Bio-politics to fulfill their goals among the communities, according to Foucault and Kasper Simo Kristenson.[2]

By practicing FGC, female sexuality will be controlled because it puts the female in physical and psychological harm; hence controlling female behavior will be easy. FGC makes the female submissive and surveillant; therefore, she will be under the male-centric control[2], and the aim of Bio-politics is reached.

Feminism prospective:

Black African feminists like Awa Thiam explores FGC from the perspective of someone who really understands the African culture and looks at the FGC from a cultural perspective that the Western feminist is not experiencing. Awa Thiam is able to explain the struggles African women do face. She can understand the experiences of colonization, slavery, and living in tough circumstances that African communities face on a daily basis to sustain their living.[19]

Awa Thiam writes that FGC as a way to maintain a patriarchal system in communities, and this male-centric system is supported by religion and politics. FGC is a way of controlling women's sexuality and keeping them submissive to male domination. Giving males sexual pleasure is an important role woman have to play, regardless of the harm they may experience. Thiam also outlines that women see their roles are different from men in the community. They see themselves as mothers, wives and having children is their reward.[19] Women's submissive socialization is part of their culture, and the FGC ritual prepares women for this attitude since their childhood. At the same time, FGC gives the African women praise among their communities, as they will be honored by reserving their virginity and will be giving sexual pleasure to their husbands.[19] The community expectations are what pushes the families to put their daughters under the cut, making them ignoring the physical and psychological harm that can be caused by the FGC.[19]

Chapter IV
Socioeconomic and Political Context

Women in different states of Sudan

FGC is practiced in all regions in Sudan despite economic and educational differences. Below I will highlight some of the contexts in 4 out of 18 states to demonstrate the diversity of experience even as FGC is a practice in all. The struggles of each state played a large role in putting the Sudanese women in their present state. To give more context about women's experiences living in Sudan, this work explores four states: Blue Nile Region, East Sudan, Darfur, and North Sudan.

Blue Nile Region

The continuous civil wars crushed the Blue Nile region since the Blue Nile region and the North Kurdufan state was the jungle gym of the common battle between North and South Sudan. Many women from this region lost their husbands, fathers, siblings, and children because of war. The zone was left with a monstrous requirement for compassionate assistance.[20] Exploring education at the Blue Nile, the Blue Nile has the third-lowest school enlistment rate among Sudanese states.[21] The percentage of girls attending school is 45% compared to 54% for boys.[21] Noteworthy, one significant challenge in the Blue Nile is underage marriage as 62% of girls in the Blue Nile region wed before the age of 18, and one of every five girls weds before the age of 15.[21] Abusive behavior at home is common.[21] In the Blue Nile region, there are great agricultural lands, and people make their livelihoods by farming the verdant lands. In Sudan, there are a few regions where women can't own land, and only men can be a landowner.[22] The Blue Nile region, where agriculture is the main source of individual income, is one where such a law exists. A woman's capabilities are limited economically unless she is married. This is among the factors that keep women in the Blue Nile in a submissive and subservient state.

Kassala, Gadarif, and the Red Sea States

Kassala, Gadarif, and Red Sea (states in East Sudan) have engaged in violent clashes since 1995 until 2006.[21] Luckily, the clashes are now over, and the region was free from civil war. Yet, constant battles between the farmers and ranchers are provoked by of floods and droughts, and have limited rebuilding.[21] People of the territory are experiencing extreme destitution and poverty, which has pushed them to move to different states in Sudan, looking for a superior life. East Sudan follows a very conservative culture and laws that put women in the household and do not allow them to be involved in any decision-making. For example, not only

are women in East Sudan required to wear the hijab (head cover), they are also not allowed to be seen in public; this is noteworthy as the majority of the Eastern population are women.[21] The restrictive culture took away the girl's right to education, trapped them at home, and made them ideal for underage marriage. In business, the community is almost exclusively men. Eastern women are not allowed to own any lands.[22]Women here can work only in handcrafts, food preparation (e.g., substances like oil), and agricultural cultivation.[21] Sadly, Eastern women cannot participate in legislative issues and have no voice among politically.[21]

Darfur

When we talk about Darfur, we cannot overlook the civil war between the renegades and the government. This war assaulted the region and brought enormous harm. Presently, Darfur is attempting to recuperate; the public authority and worldwide associations are pulling up Darfur. Simultaneously, the territory remains at risk because of the continuous dry seasons and ancestral clashes.[16]

Since in our culture and tradition, women are responsible for the household, to get water, women have to walk around 5hrs each way to collect and carrying water to the house for cooking, cleaning, and washing.[21]Due to the lack of school facilities, young girls in Darfur are limited to housework, and their school participation is low. Among girls between 15-17, just 58% are going to elementary school or higher.[21]

Women in Darfur are known for their trustworthy character and strong physical appearance. I believe that they can be pioneers if the climate and resources were favorable. They overcame great obstacles under the dictatorial leadership under Omar Al Bashir under whose forces Darfurian women were frequently raped as a part of the conflict. The Al Bashir regime

proclaimed that the women and girls from Darfur should be proud of being raped by a man from the North. Their newborns and young children were killed in front of them. Yet, despite this political pressure and sexual violence, many persevered.

North Sudan

In Sudan, the highest individual salary per capita is in the North, and the state is showing improvement and progress; likewise, it is the most secure state in Sudan, yet at the same time, it has a weak foundation.[21] The public authority here is emphatically dedicated to education. The public authority is enhancing educational quality and access. Here there is a smaller gender gap, and the percentage of girls attending school is 52%, and boys attending school percentage is 43%.[21]

Yet, in the Northern state the practice of FGC is extensive, 84% of the Northern women have gone through FGC, which makes the state have the highest FGC percentage among Sudan. Women in the North completely understand the risk of FGC including infections, fistulas, and hemorrhages. Still, they are putting their daughters under FGC[21] because they know that it will build their daughters' odds of marriage, which is very important in the Sudanese culture.[21]The Northern women may be accomplished, employed and educated but remain connected this harmful cultural practice. Further, they have a strong character and are solid political competitors. Yet, we haven't seen a Sudanese woman as a president because Sudan is a male-driven country, and Sudanese favor a man to lead the country because of the belief in patriarchal power. Hence, it will take many years to see a Sudanese female president.

Sudan’s Women Pioneers

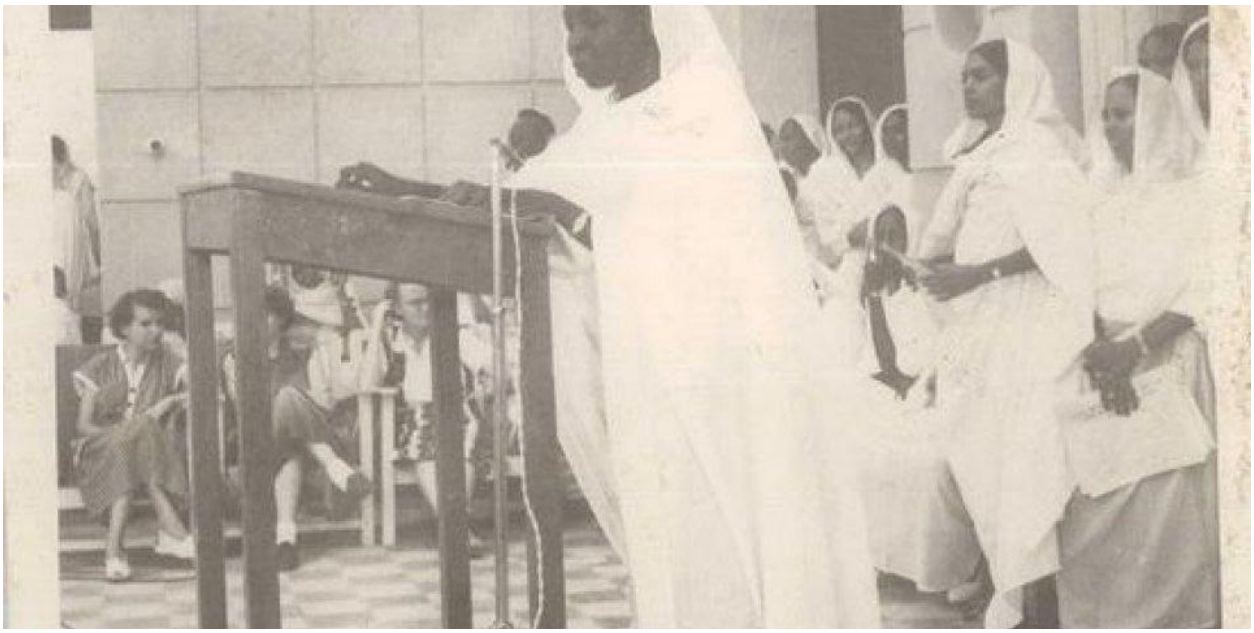

Figure 1: A picture showing Fatima talib the first headmistress for the Omdurman Girls High School wearing the white toub23

Despite the seemingly low status of women across a variety of regions, women have been in leadership positions throughout the history of the country. When Sudan was known as the kingdom of Kush, it was made famous by their brave queens like Amanirenas (the one-eyed queen).[24]Queen Amanirenas spent all her life battling as a daring champion against the Roman invaders, and she lost one of her eyes during a battle with the Romans.[24]For example, she ordered the removal of the head of Caesar Augustus from one of the statues and placed it under the passageway of her castle, so everybody could step on the head of the Roman ruler Caesar Augustus.[24]

Sudanese women played a major role in the Sudanese uprising against British colonization. A great example of a Sudanese woman leader during that time period was Alaza Mohamed Abdella, who joined the uprising against the British colonization.[14] Alaza was the wife of the famous Sudanese leader, Ali Abd al-Latif, and she was the only woman who joined the uprising against the British in 1924.[19]

Gradually after Sudan gained its independence on the 1st of January 1956, Sudanese women were looked upon as equal to men. Step by step, they forced their way into different schools, universities and obtained the right tools and attitude to be part of the new Sudan. The belief that we are equal and capable was somehow embedded in the culture. Sudanese women were not only looked at as housewives anymore or that their only contribution in society was to feed, clean, and maintain a good home environment for their husbands and children.

The Sudanese woman was a pioneer in many fields, not only in Sudan but also in Africa and the Arab world. From the ’60s to the early ’80s, thousands of women wore the white Sudanese toub, the attire of working women (as per the above picture), to signal their growing financial independence and equality to men. Sudanese people noticed that women in the streets were going to work alongside men.

In 1965 Sudan appointed the first-ever female judge, Ihsan Mohammed Fakhry[25], in Africa and in the Arab nations, and she was the first female judge in Sudan’s history and also the first woman to join Khartoum University to study law in 1956. She gradually worked her way to become Sudan’s first Supreme court female judge in 1970. Ihsan paved the way for many more Sudanese women to join the judicial department, and she was honored by the UN in 1980 as the first female Sudanese judge.[25] Another example of women advancing politically in Sudan is Asma Abdullah who was one of the first three women appointed to the Sudanese Foreign Ministry in the seventies.[26] She also served as an ambassador of Sudan.

Yet, despite this progress in Sudan, the regimen of Omar Al Bashir set the country back many decades. Today, when it comes to women’s equality and rights, many different African and Arab nations are currently miles ahead of Sudan. These countries backed women’s rights with a constitution that serves the women and gives them power. For example, Tunisia has one

of the best (if not the best) constitution that saves woman's right and helps in equality amongst genders.[27]This constitution was amended on March 10, 2011, after the Arab spring (began in 2010) and it was adapted on January 27, 2014.[28]

Unfortunately, due to Omar Al Bashir's rise to power in 1989, undid many of the gains of Sudanese women. For example, he dismissed Asma Abdullah because of her gender and lack of affiliation with Bashir's inner circle.[26]She chose to live in exile in Morocco, and she worked as a consultant to international organizations. After almost 30 years in exile, after the revolution ended in 2018, the Sudanese transitional government recognized Asma Abdullah's history and capabilities and appointed her as Sudan's first-ever female Minister of Foreign Affairs.[26]

Basically, prior to the Omar Al Bashir government's rise to power in Sudan, the country was a pioneer in female equality and rights. Despite the fact that the Sudanese culture is so embedded in patriarchal norms in the community and that full equality for women was never there, Sudan was on the right track. Women in Sudan were proving their worth and were leading the way towards the goal while enjoying the journey. However, due to the political approach by the Omar Al Bashir government, the Sudanese woman's role started fading away slowly. Their legitimately obtained rights through years and years of fighting were slowly taken away. It was very hard for a woman to take a productive role in the community during Omar Al Bashir's era of leadership, women were so oppressed and depressed that they couldn't even work independently, not only because they were not allowed to, but because all the country capital was controlled by the government.

A Comparison--the status of Rwandan Women vs. Women in Sudan

Rwanda is one of the smallest African countries. Kigali is its capital city. In talking about Rwanda, we can't ignore the genocide that occurred in 1994. It was one of the most heinous human crimes. When 800,000 Tutsis were butchered by the Hutu militia over the course of about 100 days. The genocide drastically changed the balance in Rwandan culture—many men and women were killed and women who survived were often victims of assault and sexual torment. The country had experienced multiple genocides and mass killings in 1959, 1972 and 1994. The Rwandan Patriotic Front who ended the genocide and gained power espoused gender equity as a key pillar to assure stability.[29]

Rwanda perfectly presents the political congruence theory. The congruence theory looks to comprehend the exchange among culture and establishments inside the world of politics.[30] Rwanda succeeded in achieving gender equality without using the force of mainstream dissent (or demands from women for equal status). Rather, political decisions, made by the government in pursuit of reconciliation, resulted in huge participation of women in Parliament in Rwanda and improvements in the status of women in the Rwandan community. Prior to 1994, Rwanda and Sudan, shared similar cultures, as both countries didn't allow women to speak loudly and women were assumed to be under the guard of the father or husband. But the political congruence of the idea of women's leadership and stability has put Rwanda ahead of Sudan. Since Rwanda signed the CEDAW agreement in 2003[31], thereby protecting women from sexual violence, as well as securing women's rights to participate in the political system, generate their own business and run for political office. Currently, 24 out of 80 seats (61.3%) in Rwanda's parliament are occupied by women.[32] Out of the top twenty countries with high proportions of women occupying parliament seats, Rwanda is number six.[32] Many Rwandan women are occupying

decision-making posts. Moreover, Rwanda is also a member of the World Values Survey (WVS).[33] One of the advantages of the WVS is that it helps understand the determinants of convictions about women's roles in public and their relationships with the general set of laws and changes.[34]

In Sudan, women activists are pushing the government to sign the CEDAW; also, Sudan is not a WVS member. It is worth mentioning that the Sudanese parliament has 481 seats, and Sudanese women occupy 133 seats (27.7%).[32] Simply, there is a big gender gap in Sudan.

Complexity of power in Sudan & injustice against women in Sudan

Al Bashir was able to consolidate political power by aligning with religious conservatives.[35] This shift in political power resulted in the propagation of a type of Islamic teaching that enforces the idea that males are the sole leaders and only individuals capable of making decisions, both in family and political life.[35] This political patriarchy has served to marginalize women not only in the political sphere but also throughout different levels of society.[35]

The government teaches that Islam states that the male is the leader of everything, which makes the female a follower only; one who should not be involved in any decision making. This, in fact, is not right: Islam teaches equality among genders, and women's rights are very highly respected in Islam.[36] Such practices by the government are inhumane and cruel, which is not aligning with the definition of humanity and human rights more generally. Islam in Sudan is used by the government to control the public, which is a clear violation of international human rights law. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) articles 19 &18[37], nobody has to practice or believe something that they don't want. It is worth mentioning that

many officials are corrupt and only consider rules that benefit them and keep them in power as long as possible. Many of the Sudanese are aware that how Islam is presented to them is not correct, but they are afraid to oppose the government for their safety and wellbeing. The government is the only authority in the country that makes rules and regulations, but the rules were not made fairly to cover the rights of citizens equally, as it forces women to follow the male's rule and not to oppose whatsoever, which is unfair in my opinion. In this case, when injustice becomes the law, resistance becomes the duty of every citizen to advocate towards change.

Sudan has over 600 different ethnic groups and many religions.[38]While many Sudanese people are Muslim, others are Christian, Jewish, nonbelievers, and some of them follow animistic beliefs.[38]This is a clear signal that religion should not be used as a guide to ruling a country, and that is because all these ethnic groups are the citizens of Sudan, and they should be protected by a constitution which should be independent and not linked to any religion. Therefore, the constitution must be formed fairly; it should not be formed under any religious rules. This is to make sure that every citizen is fully protected by the constitution and has access to resources in the country. So, it is important for the government to separate the use of religion as guidance to rule the country; despite the fact that Sudan is a country with a Muslim majority, the constitution must be written for all Sudanese citizens. If not, it will lead to more harm to human rights.

During the Al Bashir era most of the financial resources have been controlled by men taking advantage of Islamic laws to created Radical Islam, which limits women to the household and makes the man the primary financial family supporter.

An example of a Sudanese leader created and supported by Al Bashir is Hemedti. Al Bashir Appointed Hemedti in 2003, he is the leader of Rapid Support Force (RSF), which is known as Janjaweed. The term Janjaweed means "devil on horseback," which is an Arabic tribe that frequently dislocates from place to place. Yet Hemedti is not a nomad, the general is a major industrialist. He controls the gold mines in Darfur and some other parts of the country, which are major country resources.[39]All his laborers are men. He and his brothers and the rest of his close family are the ones who run the companies financing, selling and exporting outside the country.[39] Even though he has close family members who are females, they are not given any decision-making positions because of their gender. Additionally, numerous other entrepreneurs' organizations in Sudan, are more in favor of male workers than females following the Radical Islamic rules created strictly by the government.

Unsurprisingly, the only successful woman in Sudan was Widad Babikr Omar[40], the second wife of president Omar Al Bashir. She obtained much wealth through real estate and many different lines of work. The fact that Widad (as called in Sudan) was allowed this much power shows that the government is not against women, but women's power outside of the elite circle of Bashir's family and friends. It proves that the government's approach is to depress women as part of a bigger scheme: the ratio of females to males in Sudan is 99.94 to 100[41], so almost 50% of Sudan's population are females. If the government can deny that 50% of their rights, life will be much easier for them because they will only worry about the remaining 50% (males) of the population.[41]

With this power scheme in mind, the Bashir government started slowly denying women of their rights, and in thirty years of depression, the working Sudanese female started fading away, robbed of her rights, turning into a housewife again, whose sole responsibility is to take

care of her husband and children. She is kept occupied by daily life routines, which in the last 30 years reverted to the way they used to be in the previous century. Despite the fact that most Sudanese female's ambition is to study and finish college, the culture and government make them believe that the ultimate goal and ambition is to be a housewife, losing all their rights and equality in this process.[35]The fact that normal human ambition has become contrary to the expectations within Sudanese female culture will require time to be changed. Those women or mothers that were raised in such a way that their ultimate achievement is to be a good housewife and mother will teach their daughters to think the same way. The fact that the government was applying this depression for 30 years means Sudanese women will need to work hard for more generations for a brighter future.

Despite the fact that Sudanese women were pioneers in different things in the past compared to their compatriots in different African and Arab nations, the previous regime managed to send us (Sudanese Women) years back. The rate of FGC has decreased for many years – from 96% in 1979 to 86% in 1989.[42] However, under Al Bashir's leadership, the pervasiveness of women who went through FGC from 1990 until 2006 stayed at a consistently high rate of 90%.[42] We are back to the days that consider FGC a must to save our daughters. We are back to the culture and traditions that believe that a woman's place is at home, serving her husband—a sister is always wrong just because her brother is a man. We are back to a time in which women are not even second, but third in the ranks after men and males' kids. In the period when the laws of the country are formed under Radical Islamic rules, and the public is mentally enslaved to religion, the women are victims of a patriarchal system that uses religion as a justification for second-class status of women.

Sudanese Women's Union (SWU)

Sudanese Women's Union (SWU) was established in 1952.[43] It has branches all over Sudan, and this has helped in reaching women in various towns inside their family units. As soon as the union was established, the union constructed decent contact with NGOs, media, and singers. The vocalists made melodies about the women's union, which helped the association's publicity.[43] The Union contains particular panels focusing on issues of the working women, schooling, and culture. They succeeded in being a member of the Pan-African Women's Federation and the International Women's Democratic Federation. The Union fought for women's rights, applied pressure on the government to give the women the right to vote, and waived all the laws and policies that suppress women's growth among the community.[43] One smart step done by the union was creating a magazine called "Voice Magazine" to explain the aims of the union and how to achieve gender equality in Sudan.[43] Gender equality doesn't mean that women have to imitate men; it implies that women have similar rights as men, and they ought to be decision-makers as well, and not to be duplicates of Western women. Sudanese women will still be connected to the nation; however, they must be taught, work, and get out from the hole of being dependent on men.[43]

However, different Sudanese leaders used their power and stopped the union. For example, two years after Sudan gained independence in 1958, America offered financial aid to the potential Sudanese military government[43], to expand the country's education, economic, and transportation sectors.[44] Due to the conditions that came with the American aid, it was not accepted by all ideological groups[43], trade organizations, and SWU. However, when the military government under Abud came to control Sudan, it accepted the American aid.[43]During this

transition the Abud government dissolved the ideological groups, worker's organizations, and the SWU.[43]

At the point when president Numeiri became Sudan's president in 1969, he guaranteed to support the SWU.[43] President Numeiri asked Fatima Ibrahim (the SWU pioneer) to be the Minister of Women and Social Affairs. However, she rejected the offer because the political ideology of the appointed government did not match her views. In under a year, Numeiri betrayed his promises to support the union, workers or women.[43]Subsequently, the Union stopped supporting the government and the government prohibited SWU activities in 1971, and the SWU went underground for the subsequent time.[43]

In 1985, an uprising against Numeiri occurred. Led by Omar Al-Bashir the country shifted to radical Islamic law. This administration restricted every single political group, trade unions, the SWU, and all other women's associations but kept the Muslim sister's association and the General Sudanese Women's Union.[43]

Important to mention that in 1993 the United Nations (UN) awarded the Sudanese Women Union the UN Human Rights Prize. This prize turned the SWU into the first women's NGO to be granted this honor due to the union's effort in educating the female prisoners, helping them seek health treatment and better quality of food during their prison time in 1976. This had occurred when a group of the SWU was sent to prison by president Numeiri.[43]

FGC and Human rights

FGC is a practice that abuses fundamental freedoms; the United Nations (UN) strives to eliminate the practice and accomplish gender equality. The UN moved its concentration from considering FGC as a cruel practice to social wellbeing to a practice that causes gender

inequality and a type of brutality against women, according to anthropologists Ellen Chesler, Wendy Chavkin.[45] In the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVW), they look at FGC as a hurtful practice with different physical, mental, and negative social impacts for women; hence, FGC is considered sexual violence.

In Sudan, because FGC is carried out by women and trusted family members on young children, it may result in women and girls being unaware of their rights as humans.[2]To decrease this harmful practice, women in Sudan must be educated—not only about the harms of FGC and their human rights but as a means to independence. They ought to have monetary access and be significantly included in politics.[45] All women in Sudan ought to comprehend the importance of common liberties; Sudanese women need to figure out how to empower themselves, not be agreeable constantly and accept that they reserve the option to be kept unadulterated without getting cut, the same way God made them. Human rights for women include both women and girls, and the rubric of children's rights additionally secures more protection for children and definitely takes FGC into consideration.[45]Organizations supporting human rights have worked to expand their influence in Africa, mainly South Africa and Uganda, to limit the violence against women and gender inequality in different fields (economy, politics, and education).[45] The United Nations is trying to eliminate gender inequality and empower women through implementing Sustainable Development Goal number 5, and FGC is one of the targeted harmful cultural practices the UN is trying to eliminate.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CEDAW is an international guide for women's rights that was adopted by the UN in 1979.[46]CEDAW documents present the meaning of gender equality and how it can be achieved;

CEDAW assumes a significant position in bringing the female portion of humankind into the focal point of basic liberties. The Convention builds up not just a worldwide list of rights for women but also plans the countries' activities to ensure the implementation of these rights.[47]

The Convention includes 30 articles; out of the 30 articles, fourteen articles determined gender equality plans. It also covers different elements of the circumstances of women. Social equality and the legitimate status of women are managed in extraordinary detail. The Convention is not like other basic human rights deals, and it is additionally worried about the component of reproduction, as well as the effect of cultural elements on gender relations. The CEDAW will never allow the continuity of the FGC practice.[47] It is worth mentioning that 189 countries ratified CEDAW; unfortunately, Sudan, Iran, Somalia, Palau, and Tonga didn't yet sign the CEDAW agreement.[46]

Many Sudanese female activists are fully aware of how important it is to sign the convention, as it assures the implementation of women's rights in Sudan. Sudanese women activists have been working to ratify the convention for many years, and as I have explained earlier, the previous leader Omar Al Bashir was against gender equality and built a country system under Islamic laws that give superiority to males. The Islamist is against any law that gives women equal rights to men.[48] For example, article number 16 of the convention puts a clear point on giving the woman complete right to choose her future husband and to marry when she wants. Hence, article 16 of the convention will not allow forced underage marriage, and Islamist are against this.[46] In general, the Convention can work against the established patriarchal system in Sudan, as it ensures gender equality.[46]

In 2019, 60 Sudanese women's organizations demanded that the new transitional government sign the CEDAW. It is vital to take into consideration that at this stage, Sudan is in a

total mess because the previous government destroyed the country's economy, health, and education and created multiple civil wars. Hence, Sudan must gain stability at different levels, especially economically, and afterward, the transitional government must sign the Convention to prove its support and respect to all Sudanese women. Not signing the Convention under the previous leaderships assured that the Sudanese women were kept in their submissive and surveilled status. This transitional government believes in gender equality, so we are expecting the signing of the convention under its leadership.

Chapter V
Structural Inequities Analysis

Family Foundation in Sudan

The country has 600 ethnic groups[38]; though some variations exist in social class, some tribes are more elite than others. Elitism leads to jostling between tribes, each seeking more prestige than others. Nepotism hampers cross marriages, maintaining the divide between tribes. Despite thin cooperation and social ties, the customs of the different tribes are similar. The more conservative groups are prone to deep traditional and religious practices, a common example being child-rearing. Some kids are raised following strict Islamic principles.[49] Sudan is a patriarchal society. The male unilaterally bears family responsibility and is the sole decision-maker. Family relationships are highly valued in Sudanese culture. The family unit consists of the mother, father, wife, children, brothers, sisters, grandparents, nephews, nieces, cousins, in-laws, and godparents.[49] As head of the home, the father is responsible for all financial matters; he is the family decision-maker and sometimes chooses to seek counsel from his brothers, brothers-in-law, or other male family members. In cases of divorce, the kids are taken by the father or his family.

Every parent seeks to raise their child according to customs, traditions, and respect for elders. In Sudan, children are often born to defined gender roles. The male is considered the heir destined to continue the family name, while the female is raised to lower her tone, be submissive, and master homecare.[49] The system is also concerned with protecting the female from socially rejected behavior that could bring her family to public disrepute. Sexual issues are not discussed openly in the Sudanese culture, but Sudanese women can talk freely about their reproductive health with their healthcare provider. Pre-marital sex is not accepted among the Sudanese community, and early-aged marriage for girls in Sudan is common; hence, adolescent pregnancy is an ongoing issue in Sudan.[49]At wedding ceremonies, the visitors usually wish the new couples to have a boy infant as a first child, and after marriage[43], the inequality between men and women gets clearer as the best unit of the household will be for the man and his visitors.[43] Men ordinarily are given the best food, and women generally eat after men; you can say they will eat the remainder of the men's food. Young women's sexuality is constrained by early female circumcision, and their privilege of picking their future partners is denied. The man has the option to wed four women and divorce whenever.[43] Sadly, if the woman leaves her husband's house for any reason as a result of an argument or fights with the husband, the submission law forces the woman to return to her husband in the event that he wants her back.[43]

Underage Marriage in Sudan

We cannot overlook the issue of underage marriage, as it is widely spread in Sudan.[50] In Sudan the large portion of the girls who go through FGC, are at a higher danger of the underage marriage.[51] It is imperative to specify that there is no base period of marriage in Sudan. A girl can wed once she reaches adolescence, and sometimes the girl can get married by the age of 10, with the authorization of an adjudicator.[51] Sudan is nation number 16 in having the highest

number of underage marriages, as girls can get married before reaching 18 years of age. 34% of the girls get married before the age of 18, and 12% get married before the age of 15.[51] East Darfur, Blue Nile, and Gadarif are having the highest rates of underage marriage.[51]Need, convention, and the dread of girls committing adultery (pre-marital sex), are some of the purposes for underage marriage in Sudan.[51]

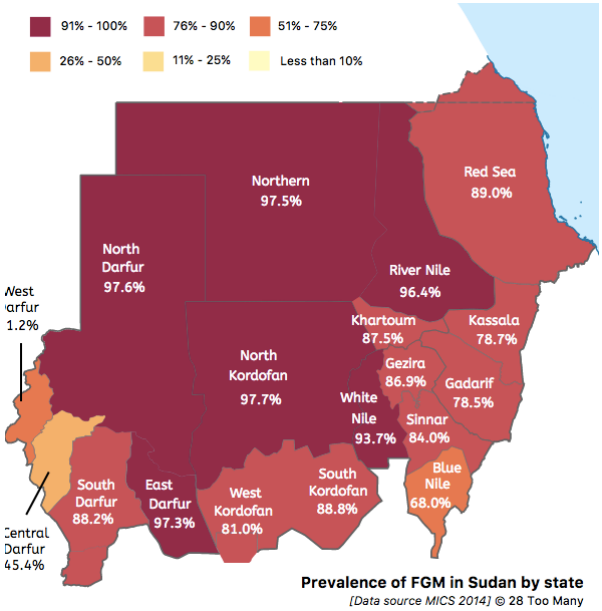

Figure 2: Percentage of circumcised women among different states of Sudan 52

Chapter VI
Experience of Women from Sudan in the US

Immigration and FGC

Many African women have the experience of leaving their comfort zone and traveling to European or western countries. These countries believe in the empowerment of women, and they were ignorant regarding the FGC practices; the immigration of African women made western countries familiar with the FGC procedure and curious to learn more about it.[3]Much research has been conducted among immigrant populations. It is important to mention that immigrant women who have undergone FGC, especially Infibulation, know the high possibility of suffering during

and after giving birth. Infibulated women need a team who is well-trained and know how to deal with de-infibulation and assisting with childbirth.[53] It is noteworthy that infibulated women can go through all the dangers of the FGC procedure and future gynecological problems such as vesicovaginal fistula if re-infibulation is done after childbirth.[53] It is common for women to request re-infibulation as they fear being sexually rejected by the partner because de-infibulation makes sexual intercourse less joyful for the man and decreases the beauty of the area. In some communities, the husband buys gold for his wife if she undergoes re-infibulation after childbirth.[53]

Some obstetricians like Dr. Nawal Nour[54] (Director of the Ambulatory Obstetrics Practice at the Harvard-affiliated Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, MA) realize the fear and the obstetrical complications that women who undergo FGC (especially the infibulation type) face. Hence, she established the African Women's Health Center in Boston.[54,55] This center works in improving the health of refugee and immigrant women who have undergone FGC. Moreover, Nawal Nour likewise composed a great convention for clinical management of FGC and created strategies for the careful inversion of infibulation.[56]

When African women immigrate from countries practicing harmful cultural practices, like FGC, they will immigrate with their cultural beliefs. At the same time, they will be exposed to "Acculturation."[19] "Acculturation is defined by scholars as "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members." Acculturation is a way of adapting new behaviors as a result of immigration or colonization.

Acculturation includes four tactics that immigrants may adopt to live among the new society that is not practicing their cultural behaviors like FGC. The strategies are "*integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization.*"[19]

Integration: Here, the African immigrants are trying to adapt to the host culture. In a country like the USA, practices like FGC are not accepted. Immigrants from countries practicing FGC may face sadness and fear because of this. The African immigrant's adaptation to the new culture depends on how much they interact with United States communities, and this interaction can help change their mindset regarding the FGC practice. Religious practices keep the Sudanese immigrants away from American culture; moreover, their strong unity isolates them from other cultures.[57] Even if they decide to quit a practice like FGC, they may feel sad because they may think that they are moving away from their culture.

Assimilation: This happens after the African immigrants decide to adapt to American culture, and with the passage of time, they might give up on harmful practices like FGC. However, one thing that makes it hard for Sudanese to reside outside of their community is the attachment to their cultural unity.[57] If they decide to move away from their culture, they can be marginalized or judged by other Sudanese. Sudanese immigrants could eliminate FGC by integrating with American culture. as their ideas regarding harmful cultural practices can be changed.

Separation: This occurs when the African immigrants choose not to adapt to the American culture and decide to keep their cultural behavior. In the process of separation, they will be keen on continuing the FGC practice, and they might undergo a vacation cut (taking the child to the home country and putting her under FGC). There are immigrant women who put their daughters under the vacation cut to keep their tradition. This can be an excellent example of the separation process.

Marginalization: Researchers have not explored marginalization enough, and we lack research in this area. In general, the African immigrants in this condition are not attached to their cultural beliefs, and at the same time, they face discrimination from the country they have moved to. To explain marginalization, I am picking the Somali American community because they practice FGC in their country, like the Sudanese. The Somali community is still attached to their culture.[58] Although they're in the US, they dress the same way as they do in their home country.[58] This can lead to them not being accepted in their American community, and they can be marginalized.[58] Practicing FGC in a country like the US can marginalize the African community.

Efforts to Eliminate the FGC Practice

Since 1860, the effort of eradicating FGC has taken place through the Anti-Circumcision movement of the khalawi (religious centers). In 1934, Sayed Abdel Rahman El Mahadi and Sayed Ali El Mirghany (religious and political leaders) applied an effort to abandon FGC. Although British colonizers forbade infibulation (but not clitoridectomy) in 1946, many Sudanese families continued with the practice.[17]In 1952, SWU collaborated with *Women Magazine* to educate regarding the medical complications of the practice, and since 1980 many national agencies and non-governmental organizations are working hard to eliminate FGC.[43] In 2013 a wonderful campaign called Saleema took place.

What is Saleema?

In 2008 the National Council of Child Welfare (NCCW) and UNICEF launched the Saleema campaign to protect girls from FGC.[59] The word Saleema means "being whole, healthy in body and mind, unharmed, intact, pristine, and untouched, in a God-given condition."[59] The

Saleema campaign depended on using posters to discourage the FGC practice. The initial aim of the campaign was to see the effect of the Saleema posters in discouraging the FGC practice among the Sudanese community,[59] and the second campaign aim is to understand more about participant's information and future campaign suggestions.[59] The Saleema campaign took place among 72 States[59] in Sudan and succeeded in convincing the families regarding the harmful effect of the FGC practice in 18 states.[59] From my point of view, Saleema was a very successful campaign because it was able to reach many villages and different Sudanese local states, which included a wide range of community youth.[59] They were able to engage smoothly with the Sudanese community and educate them well.

Different posters have been used, which played a big role in making some areas in Sudan think seriously about the harm of the FGC practice.[59]I strongly believe that many Sudanese women have reached a very high level of education and self-orientation, which makes them able to value themselves more and understand that FGC should not take place and their virginity should not be doubted. These women were born healthy in body and mind, unharmed, intact, pristine, and untouched, in a God-given condition, and a Sudanese husband or any man has to accept them the way God created them. And if they had the FGC experience, they should work hard to avoid putting their daughters under the tough experience of the FGC.

Current Laws in the USA and Sudan Regarding FGC:

Local and international non-governmental organizations have been campaigning against FGC in Sudan. Earlier this year, the sovereign council and the council of ministers in Sudan amended the criminal law to include FGC as a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment.[60] It is expected that this historic intervention on the part of the Sudanese government will protect the rights and freedoms of women and girls in Sudan. However, evidence has shown that the passage

of laws alone is not sufficient to eliminate the practice. FGC has become an entrenched cultural and traditional practice. Changing the behavior and attitudes of families regarding FGC is a long-term effort that requires many years to be achieved. For example, in Egypt, FGC was banned in 2008, and in 2016 the law was passed to criminalize this practice, with prison sentences of up to 7 years. Unfortunately, the implementation of this law still remains a challenge, as 70% of Egyptian women continued to suffer this harmful practice.[61]

In 2007, the Red Sea state in Sudan passed a law in parliament criminalizing all forms of FGC. However, after this law was adopted, the tribal leaders protested against it.[60] They contended that the new law was against the preservation of their traditional norms and cultural values. Despite the law, this practice continues until today. In 2009, the local media in the Red Sea state reported the death of a 40-day-old girl after undergoing FGC.[60] Although the case was reported to the police, the girl's family refused to cooperate in the investigation.[60]

Despite the positive steps taken by the government and international partners, FGC is still a common practice among Sudanese families because they see it as part of their tradition and culture. Most Sudanese still believe that FGC plays a major role in proving a girl's purity, and it is the best way to protect female virginity. It is noteworthy that Hamduk, the current Sudanese leader, praised the Sudanese women and stated clearly that previous laws were "an instrument of exploration, humiliation, violation, and aggression on the rights of citizens."

The USA considers FGC as sexual violence, except in 15 states, and Massachusetts was one of these states.[62,63]In Worcester, it was found that the practice was taking place through "vacation cutting"—taking the child to her home country and putting her under FGC.[63] Massachusetts is a state that respects reproductive rights and equality issues.[63] It is one of the 17 states nationwide

with public funding for abortion, forbidding discrimination based on sexual orientation.[63] It is vital to mention that on August 6, 2020, Massachusetts did ban the FGC practice.[64]

Chapter VII
Conclusion:

The term Kandaka means “queen mother,” and it comes from the Ancient Kush empire. Along with the Kush language and history, this term faded away, but due to the strong involvement of the Sudanese women in the 2018 uprising, the word Kandaka widely resurfaced again. The Sudanese women started regaining their independence. As her role among the Sudanese community grew, she was called Kandaka by all her male fellow citizens.

Definitely, these women are going to fight against the existence of harmful cultural practices like FGC. The strong advocacy of women in Sudan can play a major role in eliminating the FGC practice from the Sudanese culture. As I mentioned above, it is clear for the readers that Sudan is facing many struggles. Most of the Sudanese immigrants in the USA came there to seek a better life and more opportunities. The strict laws prohibiting FGC and the American views regarding FGC practice played a role in making Sudanese immigrants fearful of putting their daughters under the FGC practice. To achieve gender justice and the elimination of harmful cultural practices, like FGC and underage marriage, Sudan’s stability must be achieved first.

It has to be taken into consideration that Sudanese women were victimized by many dehumanizing acts, but they are still standing. The new transitional government in Sudan must work hard to gain the nation's trust by opening up the country to innovations in different fields and fixing the vital issues the country is facing. After achieving these points, educating strategies regarding unfair practices like FGC can be fruitful, as justice cannot occur among a broken system.

This paper hypothesized that FGC practice is deeply internalized by Sudanese women and men, even when they are outside of Sudan, because FGC is linked to patriarchal satisfaction. Based on the research subsequently carried out in part one of this thesis, my hypothesis is correct, and part two of my thesis investigates that phenomenon further through interview-based research with Sudanese people living in Massachusetts.

The reasons behind the existence of the practice are that the community has remained highly influenced by patriarchal power, Sudanese leaders have used the Islamic religion to justify FGC practices, and the Sudanese women in Massachusetts came from a country led by Islamic politicians who were all male who subjugated women by forcing them to be dependent on men. This women's subjugation has created multiple challenges for Sudanese women even after they arrived in Massachusetts.

Part II

Introduction

Female genital cutting (FGC) is defined as a harmful practice that causes injuries to female genitals without any medical indication.[42] The practice of FGC can be found in 28 African countries[65], and is a widespread practice across Sudan.[52,66]In an effort to stop this harmful practice, regional conferences on FGC were hosted in Sudan in 1970 and 1980;[42] these conferences brought together religious leaders, health professionals, and academics to develop appropriate actions for limiting the practice.[42] Rates of FGC dropped in the decades that followed – from 96% in 1979 to 86% in 1989.[42]However, the prevalence of women who underwent FGC from 1990 to 2006 remained at the steadily high rate of 90% .[42]During this time, the Sudanese president Omar Al Basheer used an Islamist framework to govern.[35]During his tenure, political will for halting the practiced diminished, and debates around FGC were limited to whether or not the practice could be considered a religious requirement .[42]

As individuals from Sudan have moved and resettled in other countries, the practice of FGC has entered a transnational context[67], and immigrant families are faced with having to make choices about FGC in a context where social expectations are often quite different.[67]Many immigrants living in Massachusetts grew up in Basheer's Islamist society[35], yet currently reside in a state with strong laws in place that promote reproductive rights and prohibit discrimination.[63] The greater Boston area is home to the African Women's Health Center, which has emerged as a leading force in the promotion of health for refugee and immigrant women who have undergone FGC.[55]Their work has resulted in the development of key strategies for inversion of infibulation, and has led to new conventions for the clinical management of FGC.[55,56]

Through strong, local advocacy the state of Massachusetts formally designated FGC as a form of sexual violence on August 6, 2020.[64] This formal declaration followed on the heels of a new law banning FGC in the Sudan, which was issued on April 22, 2020.[68] The ban represented the culmination of decades of advocacy on the part of women's rights groups across Sudan. While bans set the legal groundwork for changes to the practice of FGC, it is important to understand more about the context in which decisions about FGC are made. To understand the factors that shape choices related to FGC, this qualitative study captures the lived experiences and voices of mothers, young women and fathers of Sudanese origin living in Massachusetts.

Methods

Study Design

We conducted a qualitative study using in-depth interviews in order to understand thoughts and ideas of the Sudanese community residing in Boston toward putting their daughters under the practice of FGC. In-depth, semi-structured interviews permitted us to gain rich, descriptive information about their overall views of the practice, as well as the various forces that shape their plans for their own families.

Study site

The study took place in communities in Massachusetts, which has a population of 6.89 million, and an African American population of 522,357 (7.63%).[69]

Sudanese communities residing in Massachusetts are considered to be African American. They live in tight-knit clusters and most are actively involved in the community, either through religious organizations or other formal or informal community groups. A significant number of Sudanese female immigrants living in Massachusetts have undergone FGC prior to their arrival

in the USA. The African American Women's Health Center was founded in Boston in order to provide the specialized gynecological care required to care for women who have undergone FGC.[55]

Sampling and Recruitment

We used purposive sampling to select participants for this qualitative study. To ensure information richness and variation[70]with regards to viewpoints on FGC, we purposefully sampled for both mothers and fathers with daughters between the ages of 12-25, and young women between the ages of 18 and 30 who were born or brought up in the United States. We ensured geographic variation by sampling from multiple Sudanese communities across the Commonwealth – including Boston, Cambridge, Brockton, Newton, Somerville, Quincy, Framingham, and Worcester. This ensured that a range of perspectives from across Massachusetts' many Sudanese communities were included. Participants who met these criteria were identified by a well-known member of the Sudanese community and referred for participation.

Data Collection

Single, individual interviews were conducted with members of the Sudanese community (N=25), including 15 mothers, 5 fathers and 5 young women. Individual interviews were semi-structured to ensure a systematic and flexible approach to data collection. Separate interview guides were tailored for each population and covered the following main topics: (1) personal and familial experiences of FGC, (2) advantages and disadvantages of FGC, (3) gender roles and

decision-making norms in the community, (4) the role of FGC in marriage, (5) views on the FGC ban, and (6) views and plans related to FGC for their daughter or self.

The interviews were conducted "remotely" using the Harvard Zoom platform. The first author, a Sudanese woman currently living in Massachusetts, conducted the interviews. She conducted the remote interviews in a private space without anyone else present. The interviews were conducted with the video feature off, and were audio recorded with the participants' permission. The majority of interviews were conducted in Arabic, and a few were conducted in English, as per the interviewee's request. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes in duration.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a thematic content analytic approach.[71] Individual interviews were transcribed and directly translated into English by the researcher. Transcripts were continuously reviewed against the audio recording in order to ensure accuracy. A subset of interviews was open coded, resulting in an initial codebook that consisted of key themes that were labelled, described, and supported with quotes from the transcripts. This codebook was reviewed and revised with other members of the study team, then piloted and further revised. Dedoose version 4.12 qualitative data management software was used to code the entire dataset using the resultant codebook. The coded data were inductively examined to derive a set of initial themes that represented participants' views on FGC practice. Initial themes were named and elaborated in order to develop a draft set of descriptive categories. These themes were reviewed with the research team and revised using an iterative process. This resulted in a final set of five descriptive categories which were described and illustrated using excerpts from the data.

Ethical Statement

Approval to carry out the qualitative research was obtained from the Human Subjects Division of Harvard University. Participants provided consent for the qualitative interviews for this study. Consent was re-confirmed verbally as part of recruitment for the qualitative study.

Results

Characteristics of Participants

Our sample included primarily women – daughters with a mean age of 21 years, and mothers with a mean age of 40 years. Men were slightly older with a mean age of 47 years. The mean number of years that our participants had been living in the US is 17 for men and 11 for women (see Table 1). Our sample represented a diverse range of tribes which primarily are from North Sudan. Notably exceptions include the Mema which from West Sudan and Hemari from central Sudan (see Table 2).

Table 1: Descriptive characteristics of Participants

Gender (n=25)	
Category	**Number (%)**
Women	20 (83.3%)
Men	5 (16.7%)
Age (years)	
Group	**Mean (Range)**
Daughters	21 (06)
Women	40 (20)
Men	47 (18)
Years in the U.S.A. (years)	
Group	**Mean (Range)**
Mothers	11 (17)
Fathers	17 (31)

Table 2: List participant tribes

Participant Tribes	
Group	**Tribes**
Mothers	Masalamia, Hamary, Rubatab, Shaygia, Jamoeiya, Jaaliya, Hassaniya, Barber, Jawamma, Mema, Mahas
Fathers	Dongola, Bederiya Dahmashi, Jaaliya, Shaygia
Young women	Mahas, Jaaliya, Shayigia, Hamari

Overview

Nearly all participants (23 out of 25) across the three study populations expressed reservations about the practice of FGC. Despite clear reservations, participants felt intensely conflicted about whether to maintain the practice of FGC and put their daughters under the genital cut or whether to abandon FGC practice for their daughters. Results A-D explain the reasons behind this confusion, and highlight that Sudanese communities in Massachusetts are living at a crossroads between Sudan and the U.S., which creates significant uncertainty regarding FGC practice. Result E describes participants' views on Sudan's ban on FGC practice, and suggests areas for future intervention.

A. FGC and identity: 'belonging' to the Sudanese Community

Sudanese Bonds in Boston

Most of the interviewees in our sample lived in close-knit communities with other Sudanese in Boston. They decided to live in clusters to ensure that they could hold on to elements of their traditional Sudanese culture. Participants explained that fellow members of the Sudanese community could act a source of comfort, and offer support and a sense of home.

Participants did not want to lose their Sudanese identity, and they explained that it was important for them to raise their children according to Sudanese values.

> *Life is difficult here in the USA, especially in a way to keep your tradition. Here you have to work up to 15 hours in a day, which is difficult when you have kids and need to take care of them. Having good bonds with the Sudanese community here in Boston makes it easier. By connecting with them you feel as if you are 'at home,' and the kids can be more familiar with our traditions when we are together as a Sudanese community."* - Participant, Age 45, father

Keeping children connected to the Sudanese tradition

Many in our sample ensured that their children remained connected to Sudanese culture through practices such as learning deference to elders, preparing and eating traditional foods and selecting language and dress that was considered appropriate. Some mothers in our sample believed that FGC was an important way to ensure that their daughters remained connected to their Sudanese identity. For these mothers, FGC was considered to be a "fact of life," and FGC was part of what they believed made a woman "Sudanese."

> *I have two daughters who were born here in the USA. I took both of them to Sudan and put them under the FGC experience. FGC is part of the Sudanese woman's identity. It is what makes her a Sudanese woman. I wanted my daughters to have this identity. Also, I wanted to ensure that my daughters are linked to our Sudanese tradition. I really like our tradition.* -Participant, Age 55, mother

Like Mother, Like Daughter

Other members of the community—especially mothers who have been in the U.S. for more than ten years—largely regarded FGC as a harmful tradition. These mothers played a major role in shaping the views of their American-born/raised daughters. As a result of this influence, young women in our sample who were under 30 years of age came out overwhelmingly against the procedure. Daughters adopted their mothers' views that FGC is a practice without any benefit; it only caused harm. The younger generation of women in our sample were convinced that there is no reason to put a girl under the FGC practice.

> *There is a strong connection between the Sudanese women and* tahoor *[female circumcision]. But if you ask specifically about my connection with* tahoor *as a Sudanese woman, I will say, "I don't have a connection with it." It is a wrong, harmful tradition. It was implanted inside the Sudanese woman's head, and she was raised with this concept That's why Sudanese women still do the practice of* tahoor, *and they see it as normal.* -Participant, Age 56, mother

> *I spoke to my mom regarding this issue [of FGC], and she explained that it happens among the Sudanese community, and she doesn't agree with it. It is done to young girls to make them unable to have pre-marital sex, and I think this is ridiculous because you can be protective in a different way. You can educate your child. I don't blame those who do the practice because I think they are not fully aware of its harm. In America, they teach us about ethics, anatomy, health, and benefits. In Sudan, they keep doing it because they think it is not harming anyone, and it is a tradition.* -Participant, Age 19, young female

B-Working to ensure a positive future for your daughter

Creating a "perfect" wife

Mothers who underwent FGC when they were children explained that their parents saw FGC as a way to ensure good marriage prospects for them. This was the way that their parents viewed a good life for a woman. According to the Sudanese tradition, FGC is presumed to ensure that a girl will be able to fulfill the role of an ideal wife. Specifically, our participants noted the presumed association between FGC and preserved virginity, cleanliness, and sexual pleasure for her husband.

> *They believe in keeping the female chaste, and it's [FGC] better for a male... Even after she gives birth some males request that to re-do the process for his own pleasure, although it is painful. Still, the woman will redo it. The key points of the practice are keeping the girl's virginity, increasing male sexual pleasure, and assuring that the girl is clean.* - Participant, Age 55, mother

Implications for the daughter's future

Our participants mentioned that their choices regarding FGC were related to concerns about their daughter's future. They noted that in Sudan, families seek to secure their daughter's future by pursuing FGC. They fear that young women will be harshly judged if they do not undergo FGC, as prior to marriage a mother-in-law can ask for a physical examination. In some tribes in Sudan, uncircumcised young women will not receive a marriage proposal.

> *"There is a woman got married recently and her mother-in-law told her she wants to take her to be examined by a physician to know if she had been touched by a man before or not, because she didn't undergo FGC."*- Participant, Age 47, mother

Our neighbors in Sudan were from the west of Sudan. The woman was my friend, and one day, she asked me a favor: "Tomorrow I will take my daughter to undergo FGC. Will you drive us to the house of the midwife?" I replied, "No. And I might call the police on you if you did." She said, "Let me be clear with you, if my daughter didn't undergo FGC, I would be destroying her future, no man will accept marrying her". -Participant, Age 51, mother

In contrast, many mothers in our study explained that they sought to ensure a positive future for their U.S.-based daughters by not putting them under FGC. These mothers underwent the procedure themselves and now viewed FGC as damaging. These mothers talked about the pain they experienced when giving birth and similarly understood that the first night of marriage (first-time intercourse) was physically painful. These mothers wanted to ensure that their daughters' bodies were not harmed.

"The worst [experience] ever was having sex with my husband for the first time. It was very tough; it took several days until I lost my virginity. I was crying and pushing my husband away from me because the intercourse was very painful. After losing my virginity, I complained of itching and infection, and the area was wounded. I had to wait around three weeks for wound healing. It is a ridiculous experience."-Participant, Age 42, mother

Internal conflict on FGC

Many of the participants still had lingering doubts about their daughters not undergoing FGC. While acknowledging that the practice is harmful to their daughters, they nonetheless

ascribe to concerns of earlier generations/those still in Sudan who equate FGC with marital possibilities. They were afraid that their daughters could someday get emotionally attached to a man who would insist on FGC. One woman in the community who was described as an "activist" working to eliminate FGC as a harmful practice still had it done to her daughters so that she could ensure their marriage prospects.

> *"Never to be done to any girl at anyplace. It has nothing to do with keeping virginity. All you need to do is teach your children and educate them. One of my activist friends put her daughters under FGC as she thinks it will increase their chances of marriage and be more acceptable by the community, and she is here in USA."* -Participant, Age 45, mother

> *"Honestly, I think about it, but I don't want to put my daughters under the FGC practice. I am afraid that….my daughters might have the same scenario as the girl's story I shared earlier. Sometimes, I think I shouldn't care; if the guy wants to leave, let him leave. But I care about my daughter's emotional status, and I am worried she could choose FGC to keep the guy she has chosen to marry by her side."*- Participant, Age 49, mother

C-Family ties and FGC

A choice between FGC and family ties

Social pressures to uphold FGC in the family were differently applied to different members of the family. For example, mothers in the US felt pressure from their mothers in Sudan to put the granddaughters under FGC. If they refused to put their daughters under FGC, they feared they would be cast out of the family. In some cases, mothers in the US have

undertaken this social risk to advocate against FGC for their nieces and other members of the extended family back home in Sudan.

> *"I will not do it to my daughters. I am an outcast because of my decision, but I have the best interest of my daughters in my sight. The US changed me and helped forge my thoughts a lot, while they still think the same way back in Sudan."*- Participant, Age 39, mother

> *"I know someone who faced problems with her period because of FGC, and she ended up having cancer. Unfortunately, the girl passed away. Explaining FGC's harm to the old generations is very hard. My mom allowed my nieces to get circumcised. Even though I explained that this is wrong, my sister-in-law agreed to do it just to be part of the community and not to be an outcast."*-Participant, Age 43, mother

No repercussions for males who reject FGC

In contrast to the social risk posed for women disagreeing with the FGC practice, fathers who oppose the practice for their daughters are able to advocate against the practice without suffering any social repercussions. Fathers in our study witnessed their wives' suffering, and were empowered to tell their wives' families in Sudan their choice of not putting the daughter under the genital cut.

> *"I delivered my kids outside Sudan, and I used to go [to Sudan] only for vacation every two or three years. My mother keeps asking if I will put my daughters under the cut or not. My answer was always ''No.' She was silent. I also mentioned my husband is against the practice, and he mentioned he would not allow anyone to interfere. He even said [if*

they interfere], "I will take them to the police," and no one in the family argued. - Participant, Age 51, mother

All my sisters, except the youngest one [underwent FGC] because my brother was against it. FGC was running in my family because it is our culture. My dad eventually refused it when my brother [a doctor] explained the disadvantages of FGC." Participant, Age 48, father

Despite education, some males support FGC

Our participants also explained that men back in Sudan are often also educated about the risks of the practice. For some men, once educated about FGC's harms they began to reject the act because they did not want their sisters or daughters to be exposed to its risks. Others persisted in seeking out a wife who has undergone the cut despite being educated about the harms of FGC.

"Before, it was more important than now, but it is still important for many men. I was living near to a midwife, and I used to see male physicians bringing their wives to her to undergo FGC, especially after childbirth, and if they are newly married [females who didn't undergo FGC]. I guess they prefer the girl who underwent FGC. The husband will bring his wife because they see that it increases the sexual pleasure."-Participant, Age 54, mother

D. Different perspectives on religious guidance

Debate over FGC's relation to religion

It was important for our participants to follow principles set out through their religious beliefs, yet there were different opinions about whether FGC should be considered a religious practice. Many participants talked about a moment when they began to question FGC as a religious practice: they saw women in their lives suffer (notably wives and sisters) and began to question how something harmful could be part of religious duty. Other male participants in our study firmly attributed the practice of genital cutting (in both men and women) to the teachings of the Prophet Mohamed.

> *"It is a useless act, created by the community. They are relating it to religion, but I doubt that, as it is a harmful practice that only causes suffering, especially during childbirth."* - Participant, Age 40, father

> *"It has no benefits, but in Islam, it does exist. Our prophet said cut a little for the woman, and the same for man; it is good for both the genders' health as it protects from infections."* - Participant, Age 43, father

No place in religious text

Participants pushed back against the notion that there is a clear-cut requirement in Islam that women must undergo FGC. They explained that there is no passage in the Quran or the Hadith sayings that require this practice.

> *"It is just a method of mutilation, not linked to religion not mentioned in the Quran or Hadith, and has no benefits [in women]."*-Participant, Age 50, father

Tradition vs. religious duty

Many participants—notably women—pushed back against the idea that FGC is a religious requirement. Instead, they assert that the pressure to undergo FGC is based on traditional practices, not religious requirements. Participants also mentioned that the community relates FGC to Islam just because there is a type called "Sunnah." Notably, many say that this is an inherited practice that was brought into Sudan from Egypt to make women eligible for marriage.

> "*Some people believe that this is the norm; for example, the Sunni circumcision is done because they believe it's religious, which is not correct. I have not read or heard that it was practiced by our prophet. Firstly, the reasons were for suppressing women's sexual desire. It was not until later that people started understanding the Pharaonic way is bad, and it has nothing to do with religion or medicine. They started to understand that women have been created this way, not like men who need to be circumcised. It is just a tradition. For me personally, it does not make any sense."*-Participant, Age 45, mother

> *"The Sudanese community inherited the practice from the ancient Egyptians. Now it's just a tradition. It doesn't make sense to cut part of the woman to make her eligible for marriage."* - Participant, Age 37, mother

The politics of religion

Participants also mentioned that FGC was part of a political agenda as the fusion between FGC and Islam was used to further strengthen the previous political regime. This political interference eliminated the efforts that previous leaders in Sudan had made to try to abolish the practice of FGC. The previous regime in Sudan used the media as a tool to promote FGC across the country.

"In the last 30 years, Sudan's government ruled the country under the "Islamic Shariaa." They rolled back all the previous rules and efforts of previous governments to eliminate the FGC practice. They made tahoor *a legal practice in Sudan because they were in support of the practice and pushed it forward under the name of Islam. Unfortunately, that widened the practice in Sudan."*-Participant, Age 57, mother

"When we were conducting awareness workshops in rural areas. We were considered 'bad,' and we were often insulted in front of everyone attending. The older women would ask us if we underwent FGC or we were 'Galfa' [an insult for a woman who has not undergone FGC]. As you know, 'Galfa' is a bad word among our community. And they asked if Fatima's prophet Mohamed's daughter was 'Galfa'? This was a kind of insult: Fatima, the prophet Mohamed's daughter, wasn't circumcised, and we were trying to explain this. FGC has no relation to religion. Although the previous government tried to make use of the weak Hadith by Prophet Mohamed to spread the practice,". -Participant, Age 45, mother

E-Education as a tool to supplement the new governmental ban of FGC

Many participants did not know that FGC had been formally banned by the new transitional Sudanese government. Upon learning about the ban, many were skeptical that a ban alone would lead to a decrease in the practice. For our participants, education was a key factor in changing people's minds about the practice, and they emphasized the importance of extending education to both men and women. They also highlighted the importance of focusing education campaigns on rural areas, where FGC was most widely practiced.

"That's great [the ban], but still it won't succeed unless people are educated regarding FGC harm and educate the daughters about how to keep themselves safe. Sons can be educated that a woman doesn't have to undergo FGC to assure that she is virgin." - Participant, Age 37, mother

"It is a very primitive act; it must stop. It has no advantage. We have to educate the community, especially people in the rural areas, to know what are the roots of it [FGC] and eliminate it."- Participant, Age 45, father

"To eliminate the practice, we have to use the same strategy as the previous government used to change the Sudanese mentality and make it [FGC] more attached to tahoor practice. They [old government] had used the media, so we have to use it now to educate the community. Education programs towards the disadvantages of tahoor have to be conducted at schools, universities, radio, television and all social media to stop this harmful practice."-Participant, Age 57, mother

Participants acknowledged that prior educational efforts were not entirely successful at eliminating the practice. Education alone has had limited effectiveness, as even men who were educated about the dangers of FGC sought wives who had undergone the procedure.

"[Men] see how females suffer. For Sudanese males, it is variable; for example, in rural areas and villages, it is part of their behaviors and habits; it is a 'must' that a girl who didn't undergo FGC will not be accepted by the community. Many education campaigns have taken place, but still, they are practicing it. You can find two educated men - one will prefer the FGC and the second will not, it depends on their personal beliefs. - Participant, Age 47, mother

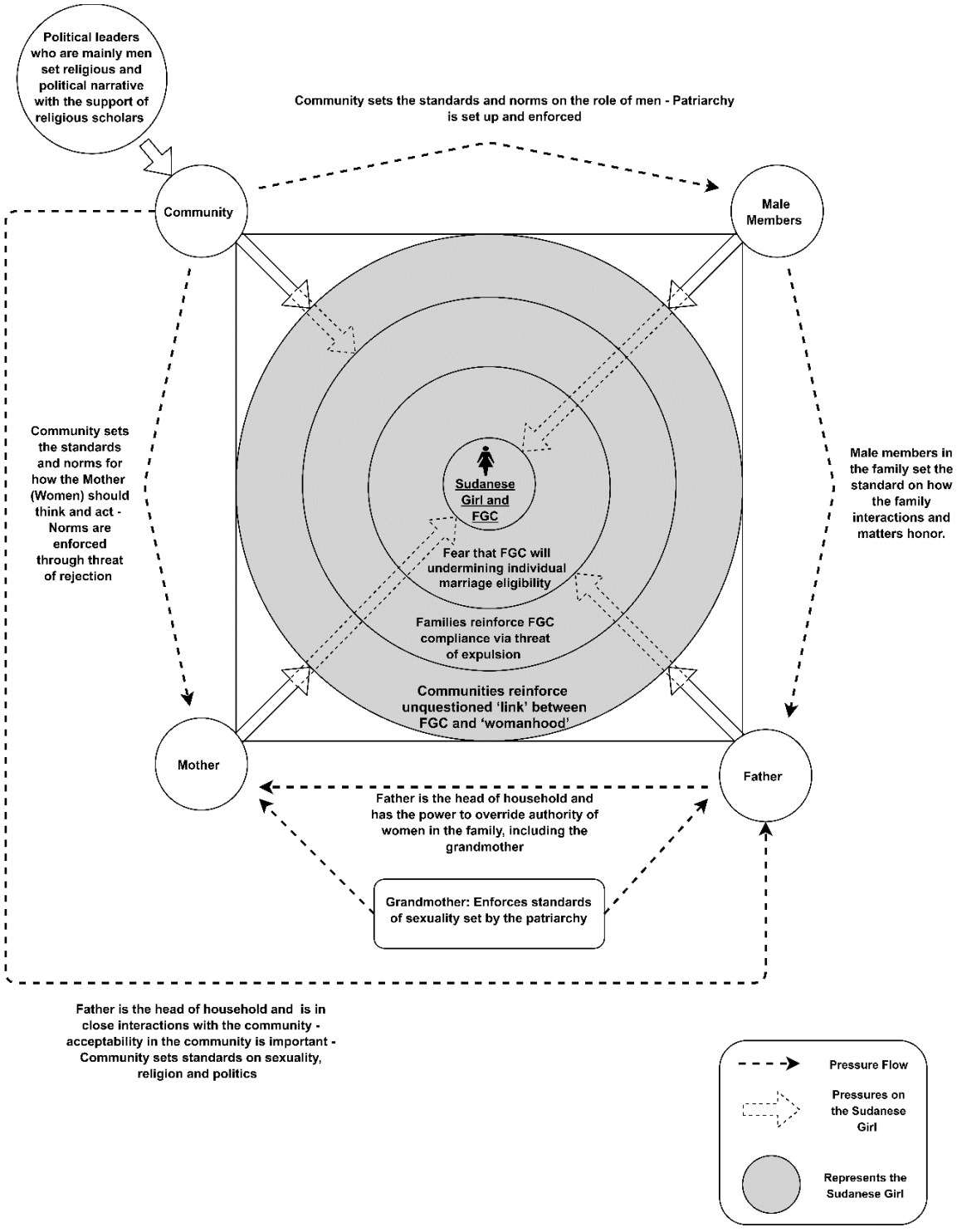

Figure 3: The cycle of social pressures that reproduce FGC

Discussion

FGC is a tradition that has been in existence for many generations in Sudan.[66]For the past several decades, this tradition has been politically supported—by the conflation of politics and religion—and has influenced people not only in Sudan but also among the Sudanese communities in Massachusetts. Our data reflect how this tradition becomes embodied by women and girls and is sustained in Massachusetts through the community's identification with Sudanese traditions and social networks in and outside Sudan. This is consistent with African feminist thinkers such as Awa Thiam and Nawal Al Sadawi, whose work highlight the ways in which structural gender inequalities become embodied by women, and girls, resulting in grave suffering.[1,72]

The Sudanese community residing in Massachusetts came to the U.S. from a country that is controlled by a patriarchal system and led by male politicians. Under this system, male politicians spuriously mix politics with religion to further legitimize the practice of FGC in Sudan. This broader political agenda becomes instilled in social networks that are set and controlled by men at various levels of society, and espoused by older generations of women across Sudan. These forces are replicated and reinforced at various levels of the family, community and the body politic; the effects are of which are enacted on the bodies of young girls via the practice of FGC (see Figure 1). These pressures continued to be keenly felt by our participants, even as they navigated their life in a new society shaped by different social norms, and despite laws prohibiting the practice.

Foucault's notion of biopower highlights the way in which diffuse and disciplinary forms of power are exerted upon the body[73], and is a useful construct for understand the way in which sexuality – in this case the management of women's bodies – is an effective tool employed by

political leaders to maximize power and control and maintain a patriarchal system of rule that benefits men at all levels of society. It is very important to mention that the feminism power is opposing this power. This continuous conflict is reflected in our findings, as within the Sudanese community some members still espouse the tradition of FGC while others reject it outright. Our data has demonstrated that even among those who acknowledge the harm that FGC does to girls, there are strong feelings of internal conflict regarding the practice. These individuals - particularly mothers – may support FGC as a means of securing a marriage proposal for the daughters and simultaneously harbor strong reservations about the practice because they are aware from their own experience how FGC is embodied through their suffering (i.e., painful intercourse, complications surrounding menstruation and birth).[10,17]

Our data adds nuance to the effectiveness of 'education.' It demonstrates that education succeeded in changing the minds of many participants, but has been less effective in changing practice on a broader societal level. To succeed in implementing these recent policy changes, the educational curricula need to be adapted to address the sense of internal conflict identified here, and build on local understandings of the role of continued FGC in Massachusetts. It is important to take into consideration that Sudanese immigrants in Massachusetts arrived from a culture that strongly supports the FGC practice; hence, it is important to start educating new immigrants to the country about the disadvantages of the practice and to create safe spaces where individuals can feel free to speak about their FGC experience.[74] While our data has demonstrated that mothers have an important role to play in shaping their daughters' views on FGC, our study has also highlighted the key role that men plays as leaders in the community and the family. Male heads of household have been able to advocate for the protection of their daughters and other female family members without fear of social repercussions. For this reason, it is important that

education campaigns and other efforts aimed at reducing FGC explicitly include men and acknowledge the role that they have to play in reshaping views of FGC at the level of the community as well as the family.

Strengths and Limitations

We acknowledge that our study has several limitations, as our sample is not a random sample; more than 60% of the women refused to participate because some of them are under asylum process and scared, others their husbands refused their participation. Male participants did not refuse to participate in the research. Another limitation is that we didn't interview young men living in Massachusetts to understand their views regarding marriage and FGC. Also, religious leaders in the U.S weren't interviewed; hence we lack their unique perspective on the practice. A strength of our study was obtaining perspectives of young women, as well as mothers and fathers of young women, regarding the attitude of the Sudanese community living in Massachusetts toward implementing the FGC practice, which had not been previously documented. It is important to mention that this research was conducted during the FGC legislation process in Sudan and Massachusetts.

Conclusion

There should be more support directed toward women's advocacy efforts against FGC. Also, we should encourage Sudanese men residing in Massachusetts who are against the FGC practice to educate their families about the harm of the practice and the importance of stopping it. Religious leaders' approach toward the community can be vital, as the Sudanese community residing in the USA is highly influenced by religious leaders. Viewpoints of mothers, young

women, and young men will also be critical to prevention efforts. To our knowledge, there does not appear to be an educational program in Massachusetts to prevent FGC in accordance with the law. Educational programs need to be grounded in research that illustrates the perspectives of people from the Sudanese community in the U.S. Advocacy is important for developing and disseminating educational programs for the prevention of FGC in Massachusetts and similar settings.

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