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Female Genital Mutilation: Islamic Roots or Culture Conflated?

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TRINITY COLLEGE

Senior Thesis

Female Genital Mutilation: Islamic Roots or Culture
Conflated?

submitted by

Mazin Khalil, 2015

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

Advisor: Prof. Mareike Koertner

Second Reader: Prof. Leslie Desmangles

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	4
What is FGM?.....	6
Theories About Motives For FGM	13
Preservation of Chastity, Fertility and Femininity	13
Birth Control.....	22
Male Pleasure	23
Power and Social Standing.....	24
Village Economy.....	28
Hygiene.....	29
Ayaan Hirsi Ali's Account of Islam & FGM	32
Engendered Islamophobia	40
Bibliography	52

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Introduction

Female circumcision is not a new phenomenon. It has been present in ancient communities, dating as far back as the ancient Egyptians.¹ Jane Schneider, who is a professor of anthropology at the CUNY Graduate Center, has attributed the practice to the Neolithic era.² Other researchers such as Paul Ghalioungui, a professor of medicine at Ain Shams University, reported that the process was present and found in ancient Egyptians.³ Browne contests this point and explains through Widstrand that it was not infibulation that was found in ancient Egyptians, but that only certain individuals were infibulated, particularly slaves.⁴ Ancient Egyptians partook in clitoridectomy, which was again reserved for particular individuals, female relatives.⁵ Levy states that the practice of infibulation was also found in some pre-Islamic tribes in the Arabian Peninsula.⁶ Barclay and Seligman hypothesize that the practice of infibulation in Sudan is a culturally

¹ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 621.

² Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 621.

³ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 621.

⁴ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 621.

⁵ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 621.

⁶ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 621.

indigenous one.⁷ Despite the fact that circumcision can be traced to various pre-Islamic societies, female genital mutilation is commonly associated with Islam. This thesis investigates female genital mutilation in Sudan. In the first part, I investigate the reasons for female genital mutilation in Sudan and the reasons for its continued occurrence. In the second part, I analyze the narrative of Ayaan Hirsi Ali and her personal account as it relates to female genital mutilation. Finally in the third part, I examine the role that the discourse of female genital mutilation has in Islamophobic rhetoric.

⁷ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 621.

What is FGM?

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is defined as “cutting away most external female genitalia and almost completely closing off the vaginal opening.”⁸ According to the Population Reference Bureau, “more than 1 million girls, the majority [of whom] are in Sub-Saharan Africa,” are at risk of undergoing the procedure every year. Of the top 10 countries in the world, Sudan ranks in at number 7 with approximately 20,455 females at risk of undergoing the procedure.⁹ In 2013, a study found that of all of the women/girls at risk of the procedure, girls under the age of 18 formed one-third of population.¹⁰ There are 4 different categories and types of circumcision: circumcision, excision, infibulation, and intermediate. Circumcision is the cutting of the skin surrounding the clitoris, whereas excision is “the cutting of the clitoris and [either] all or parts of the labia minora.”¹¹ Infibulation is defined as “the cutting of the clitoris, the labia minora, and at least parts of the labia majora.”¹² Intermediate is “the removal of the clitoris and [either] some parts of

⁸ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 617.

⁹ Mather, Mark and Charlotte Feldman-Jacobs. Women and Girls At Risk of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in the United States.
<www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2015/us-fgmc.aspx>.

¹⁰ Mather, Mark and Charlotte Feldman-Jacobs. Women and Girls At Risk of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in the United States.
<www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2015/us-fgmc.aspx>.

¹¹ Dorkenoo, Efua and Scilla Elworthy.
<<http://history.hyde.wikispaces.net/file/view/1011+HIS12+U1+CM10+Handout+Female+Genital+Mutilation+by+Dorkenoo+and+Elworthy.pdf>>.

¹² Dorkenoo, Efua and Scilla Elworthy.
<<http://history.hyde.wikispaces.net/file/view/1011+HIS12+U1+CM10+Handout+Female+Genital+Mutilation+by+Dorkenoo+and+Elworthy.pdf>>.

the labia minora or all of it.”¹³ It is found in African countries, with a prevalence rate of 5-99%.⁷ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), female genital mutilation is present mostly in the Horn of Africa, which is composed of Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Djibouti. Moreover, the WHO also states that the southern part of Egypt and the northern portion of Sudan is the most severely affected region by this act; with the WHO estimating that 15% of women who live in the region have experienced either one or more of the types of circumcisions previously mentioned. The fact that the majority of African countries in which FGM is practiced are predominantly Muslim could lead to the conclusion that FGM is in fact a Muslim practice. Mather and Feldman-Jacobs have indeed included religion as a motive for FGM, whereas the practice is believed to be “religious, cultural or other non-medical reasons.”¹⁴

M. Mazharul Islam, a professor of statistics at the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh, and M. Mosleh Uddin, who is a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) representative in Iran, conducted field research in Sudan with the help of the Sudanese Central Bureau of Statistics. In their research, Islam and Uddin sought to analyze Sudanese women’s reasons for the supporting of female genital mutilation. Their research also evaluated whether particular social and demographic features were associated with the support of female genital mutilation. The final part of their process examined methods by which female genital mutilation could be dispensed. Islam and Uddin have used the

¹³ Dorkenoo, Efua and Scilla Elworthy.

<<http://history.hyde.wikispaces.net/file/view/1011+HIS12+U1+CM10+Handout+Female+Genital+Mutilation+by+Dorkenoo+and+Elworthy.pdf>>.

¹⁴ Mather, Mark and Charlotte Feldman-Jacobs. Women and Girls At Risk of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in the United States.

<www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2015/us-fgmc.aspx>. However, there exist Muslim countries that do not practice female circumcision, with prime examples being Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran.

definition of female genital mutilation provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), with however only three subcategories: clitoridectomy, intermediate, and infibulation.¹⁵ According to Dareer, the three types having varying names in Sudan, with clitoridectomy being called Sunna, intermediate uses the Arabic word translation, Matwasat, and infibulation being referred to as Pharaonic.¹⁶

In conducting this research, Islam and Uddin selected at random “approximately 1,000 ever-married women” from three different areas of Sudan, Haj-Yousif, Shendi, and Juba. The areas were chosen due to their respective demographics in order to establish a potential correlation between religion and active FGM practices. For their study, Islam and Uddin relied mainly on surveys. The women who were surveyed were asked if they had been circumcised and if they were, which type of circumcision they had undergone. In addition, the women were asked their opinions on the practice, and if it should be continued. Those who answered yes to the question asking about the continuance of the practice, were asked for their reasoning and which type of circumcision they preferred; while those who are opposed to the practice were asked for the reasoning behind their opposition, the reason for why they think the process continues and the best strategy for stopping the continuance of the procedure. Data was also collected about the perception of each woman’s husband toward the procedure. The purpose of studying these particular areas in Sudan is because Haj-Yousif and Shendi are located in the north, which is typically predominantly Muslim, whereas Juba is located in the predominantly Christian south. According to the 1890-1990 Sudan Demographic and Health Survey

¹⁵ Islam, Mazharul M. and Mosleh M. Uddin. "Female Circumcision in Sudan: Future Prospects and Strategies for Eradication." University of Dhaka, n.d. 71.

¹⁶ World Health Organization (WHO), *Female Genital Mutilation*, report of a WHO Technical Working Group, Geneva: WHO, 1996.

(SDHS), 89% of all women have been genitally cut, with the number ranging from 65% in Darfur to 99% in the North.¹⁷ Islam and Uddin found that in “the practice is almost universal in Shendi and affects almost nine in 10 women in Haj-Yousif.”¹⁸ In Juba however, a minute 7% of women had undergone the procedure. The team was able to identify a pattern, which indicated that younger women, particularly those less than 25 were less likely to have undergone the procedure than the older women. The data also indicated that in both Juba and Haj-Yousif, women who were educated tended to be circumcised more than women who were uneducated. Moreover, in addition to women who are educated being more likely to be circumcised than women who are not, “a positive relationship” between economic status and circumcision is shown.¹⁹ The team also found that particularly in Haj-Yousif, “the odds of being circumcised rise significantly with each year of education and with each increase in the household possessions score,” which is a measure of wealth.²⁰

They have also found that female genital mutilation is often done by lay (uneducated) practitioners, which Boddy, Hayes, Barclay and Nordenstam have pointed out are midwives. Much like the previous studies, Islam and Uddin have also found that the condition under which the procedure occurs are extremely unhygienic; often involving unsterile equipment and without the use of anesthesia.

¹⁷ Department of Statistics, *Sudan Demographic and Health Survey 1989/1990*, Khartoum, Sudan: Department of Statistics; and Columbia, MD, USA: Institute of Resource Development/Macro International, 1991.

¹⁸ Islam, Mazharul M. and Mosleh M. Uddin. "Female Circumcision in Sudan: Future Prospects and Strategies for Eradication." University of Dhaka, n.d. 73.

¹⁹ Islam, Mazharul M. and Mosleh M. Uddin. "Female Circumcision in Sudan: Future Prospects and Strategies for Eradication." University of Dhaka, n.d. 73.

²⁰ Islam, Mazharul M. and Mosleh M. Uddin. "Female Circumcision in Sudan: Future Prospects and Strategies for Eradication." University of Dhaka, n.d. 73.

Islam and Uddin discovered that in Haj-Yousif and Shendi, 69% and 75% of the women respectively stated they would want the practice to continue because it is customary. Despite not being an overwhelming majority, 26% stated that they supported the continuance of female circumcision because of cleanliness. The remaining respondents stated, 10-20% of women stated that they believed female circumcision is a religious edict or stated that it was a beneficial tradition. The women of Juba who stated they favored the continuation of the procedure did so because of “better marriage prospect” and sanitary reasons.²¹

Conversely, of the women who thought the practice should be discontinued from Haj-Yousif and Shendi, 63% and 88% stated their reasoning was as a result of medical complications. Of these women, 29% from Haj-Yousif stated that a painful experience has deterred them, while 28% agree from Shendi. Moreover, 28% of the women from Haj-Yousif who wanted the procedure discontinued cited religious prohibition, while 32% echoed the same sentiment from Shendi. In Juba however, this number skyrockets to 65%, while only 31% state that medical complications gave way to their opinion. The remainder of the women in Juba who wanted the procedure disavowed, 23% stated that the practice “is against women’s dignity.”²²

According to their data, Islam and Uddin have found that there is no apparent decline in the practice in the northern region. They believe that this is attested to the deep-rootedness of the tradition and its cultural acceptance. Islam and Uddin have hypothesized that a legal approach will not eradicate the practice, as do Boddy, Hayes,

²¹ Islam, Mazharul M. and Mosleh M. Uddin. "Female Circumcision in Sudan: Future Prospects and Strategies for Eradication." University of Dhaka, n.d. 74.

²² Islam, Mazharul M. and Mosleh M. Uddin. "Female Circumcision in Sudan: Future Prospects and Strategies for Eradication." University of Dhaka, n.d. 75.

Barclay, as the practice has been deemed illegal for decades. The legal approach is counterintuitive as well because as was seen in 1946 when the British tried to ban the practice, a spike occurred in the number of girls being circumcised because the practice was going to be outlawed. In addition, protests broke out when midwives were targeted and imprisoned. Similar reactions and sentiments have been seen as Western feminists and organizations have raised a call to arms against the practice. Much like Hayes and Boddy's assessment of Sudanese society, Islam and Uddin have deduced that a significant change in the practice will only come about as a result of the improvement of women's social and societal status. This was supported by data that demonstrated that as education and economic status rose, so did the desire to continue female genital mutilation. Another proposal that Islam and Uddin have devised to curtail the practice is a mass media campaign along with educational information informing people of the health risks of the practice.

Islam and Uddin, much like Boddy, Hayes, Nordenstam, and Barclay, have found that the high levels of circumcision are due to social pressures, "which [are] believed to promote chastity among women."²³ Moreover, like the aforementioned ethnographic works, Islam and Uddin have found that uncircumcised women are "viewed as impure and thus unmarriageable."²⁴ As such, Islam and Uddin could not produce conclusive

²³ Badri AE and Dolib TE, *Baseline Survey on Harmful Traditional Practices in Umbadda Area: The Case of Female Genital Mutilation*, unpublished report to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Khartoum, Sudan: Ahfad University for Women, 1996

²⁴ Dareer, AE, *Woman, Why Do You Weep? Circumcision and Its Consequences*, London: Zed Press, 1982; and Kheir HM, Kumar S and Cross AR, Female circumcision: attitudes and practices in Sudan, in: *Proceedings of the Demographic and Health Surveys World Conference, Washington, DC, Aug. 5-7, 1991*, Columbia, MD, USA: IRD/Macros International, 1991, pp. 1697-1717.

evidence that FGM was a religious practice.

Theories About Motives for FGM

Preservation of Chastity, Fertility and Femininity

Jeanice Boddy of the University of Toronto, Rose Oldfield Hayes, of State University of New York, Buffalo, and Tore Nordenstam of Sweden have concluded that the manifest function of female genital mutilation is the controlling of sexuality, preservation of chastity and protection from rape. Boddy explains “[o]f all the explanations for Pharaonic circumcision, those referring to the preservation of chastity and the curbing of sexual desire seem most persuasive, given that in Sudan, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, a family’s dignity and honor are vested in the conduct of its womenfolk.”²⁵ In explaining this point, Boddy states that the circumcision ensures three functions: 1) a girl’s virginity, 2) a means to control sexuality, and 3) curb extramarital affairs. A girl’s virginity is ensured as a result of sexual intercourse being painful due to the narrowing of the orifice. In stating that a girl’s virginity is ensured, Boddy makes it evident that virginity in this particular condition can be created and as such, is not a physiological thing as it is understood in the West. The insurance of virginity that she refers to is thus not physiological, but is a social status. Thus, by being circumcised, girls attain a status of “virgin,” which elevates them in social ranking. Due to the pain, however, the act is discouraged; which also poses a problem after marriage because orifice must be enlarged to engage in sex once the girl is married. Through the narrowing of the orifice and the pain that is caused, sexuality is also controlled. This controlling of

²⁵ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." American Ethnologist (1982): 686.

sexuality is similar to the creation of virginity. She states that women are seen as more feminine and less masculine when they are circumcised and hence, a controlling of their sexuality. Boddy states that the male genitalia and the female genitalia are clear and distinctive because of the circumcision process that they undergo, with the male's skin being peeled away, while the women's is closed shut. In regards to a woman's genitalia being closed shut, she states that markers of beauty are small and narrow orifices, thus, large orifices are not pleasing. In similar fashion, Boddy observes that certain folk medicine include the idea of closure. She remarks specifically that for headaches, which are believed to be due to the opening and coming apart of something, bandaging and clothing are tied, which close shut what was open. This she states is analogous to the closing of orifices "[t]he associations of heat, of fusing together, of closing and of the aesthetic preference for small body orifices once again call to mind the practice of infibulation."²⁶

Boddy realizes that as a result of having a woman's sexual orifices shut, she is able to draw an analogy comparing the womb to an egg. She believes that her argument for female circumcision being a cultural entity is strengthened through the concept of fertility that is present in Hofriyat. While in the village, Boddy notices that women keep out of the public light and stay hidden in verandas or indoors, surrounded by other women. In observing this, she also notices that many of the houses have decorated ostrich eggs within each room; signifying fertility. This discovery is astounding to her because she is able to make the connection between the stitching of the labia minor closed which is the access way to the womb and the ostrich eggs having a small opening. Through this,

²⁶ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." *American Ethnologist* (1982): 694.

she is able to deduce that the operations that the young girls endure are so that their fertility can also be kept intact. Boddy is able to deduce this by the use of colloquial language that the people of Hofriyat use. She explains that objects are often personified and objects are given anatomical names, despite being nonanatomical, and a house's door being called its mouth. She states that the entrance to a womb is called the "door to the house of birth" and thus like a veranda is enclosed off, which is ritually swept daily and kept clean, the womb is purified through the closure of the orifice to it. This argument then ties into the idea of virginity and sexuality in which a woman who can be more feminine and a virgin is likely to be seen as one who is more fertile and able to be childbearing. She states that because the ostrich eggs are white, they are linked with purity and is able to make the connection herself that the concept of virginity, which is linked to the operation, is therefore linked to purity as well. This idea, Boddy argues is strengthened as she notices that the villagers of Hofriyat are "very conscience of skin color."²⁷ The people of Hofriyat believe that white skin is clean, a mark of beauty and is a sign of holiness. This further strengthens Boddy's argument and her argument that pharaonic circumcision is therefore used as a means of beautification for women. To strengthen her argument, Boddy explains that the traditional wedding preparation, which includes a smoke bath intended to help shed old skin and thereby giving a lighter skin complexion. Boddy states that "[a]fter such treatment, performed for the first time when she becomes a bride, and henceforth whenever she wants to attract the sexual attentions

²⁷ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." American Ethnologist (1982): 690.

of her husband, a woman's body shares several qualities with the ostrich egg fertility object: both are smooth, both are clean and "white," and both are pure."²⁸

Other scholars' research has corroborated Boddy's conclusion. In her ethnography *Female Genital Mutilation, fertility control, women's role, and the patrilineage in Modern Sudan: a functional analysis*, Rose Oldfield Hayes, of the State University of New York, Buffalo, has found that the purpose of FGM is the same in the northern Nile valley as Boddy concluded from her research in Hofriyat, namely to protect chastity; in doing so a family's honor "[t]he stated reason for the operation is to ensure a girl's chastity, thereby safeguarding the dignity and honor of her own and her future husband's patrilineages."²⁹ Like Boddy, she acknowledges that the origins of pharaonic circumcision are debated and therefore uncertain. She is able to demonstrate the confusion behind the origin of the term via multiple researchers who attribute the procedure to not only differing places, but also vastly varying time period. Hayes states that one researcher, has found that unlike in other places however, infibulation does not fit the category of rite of passage because the girls infibulated are often too young. Hayes begins to build off of the framework that infibulation (pharaonic circumcision) is defined as the "cutting away most external female genitalia and almost completely closing off the vaginal opening."³⁰ In explaining the manifest functions of female genital mutilation, Hayes delves into what scholars have coined the "modesty code." The "modesty code" is

²⁸ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." *American Ethnologist* (1982): 691.

²⁹ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 617.

³⁰ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 617.

defined as “several traits and institutions related to women’s sexuality and family honor in Arab Muslim societies throughout the Near East.”³¹ The modesty code includes several things such as “female seclusion, veiling in public, child betrothal, the virginity test, genital mutilation, definitive transfer of sexual and genetical rights at marriage term marriage and early remarriage of divorcees and widows.”³² The modesty is upheld because family honor is solely defined by the sexual purity of women. The code serves to “regulate, safeguard and preserve female sexual purity and, hence, family honor.”³³ The code is crucial to Hayes research of female genital mutilation in Sudan because the traits aforementioned comprise the edicts of honor in Sudan.

Tore Nordenstam, a Swedish philosopher who also conducted ethnographic studies in Sudan, deduced that the concepts of dignity and of personal family honor “seem to concern mainly the sexual comportment of the group’s women.”³⁴ More importantly, “women can damage the family’s *sharaf* and *karama* through loss of their own *ird* (‘sexual decency’).”³⁵ Nordenstam states that the *ird* is so important to Sudanese society, that its loss can have fatal consequences. He states that an informant explained that her male relatives could kill a woman accused of adultery. Nordenstam further

³¹ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 622.

³² Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 622.

³³ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 622.

³⁴ Nordenstam, Tore. "Sudanese Ethics." *Journal of Modern African Studies* (1968): 92.

³⁵ Nordenstam, Tore. "Sudanese Ethics." *Journal of Modern African Studies* (1968): 92.

explains that a lack of virginity could be legitimate grounds for a divorce. To further demonstrate how important the concepts of dignity and family honor are, Nordenstam explains that if they are lost due to usually indecent behavior of a woman, they can not be “regained without stringent corrective measures” and “without sharaf and karama a family is no longer respected.”³⁶ These concepts are so important that a family may have to move from their home villages to avoid disgrace if lost. Hayes explains that a family’s social status is thus directly tied to and correlates with the “virginal” status of its women.³⁷

The concept of virginity is another interesting aspect in which Hayes corroborates Boddy’s account. Hayes states “in Sudan, virgins are made, not born.”³⁸ Much like Boddy, Hayes concludes that in Sudan, virginity is a social category, irrespective of physical condition and can be physiologically manifested and, more importantly, controlled. She explains that infibulation can make a woman who is not a virgin (physiologically) a Sudanese virgin.³⁹ Hayes notes that the term “virgin” in the Sudanese context is a social category, which can be renewed as a physical condition and has

³⁶ Nordenstam, Tore. "Sudanese Ethics." Journal of Modern African Studies (1968): 94.

³⁷ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 622.

³⁸ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 622.

³⁹ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 622.

specific and “complex behavior[al] patterns associated with it”.⁴⁰ This pattern and category must be kept at all costs, going so far as to being upheld when marital sexual intercourse is involved. As Hayes has come to find that a woman in Sudanese society must be “either a physical or a symbolic virgin, by virtue of her continuing ird and either the condition of more usual pre-coital virginity or of renewed “virginity” produced by infibulation.”⁴¹ Furthermore, the manifest function of infibulation is to protect the woman from her own sexual desires as well as any possible sexual aggression from others. The status of the woman can then positively or adversely affect the family’s social standing. The reason for the status of women being able to impact a family’s standing in such an influential way is because of the modesty code, as Hayes states, “[un]infibulated women are generally considered to be prostitutes in Sudanese society.”⁴² Some informants that Hayes spoke to stated explicitly that women are hypersexual beings and by nature are promiscuous; therefore, infibulation serves to protect them from promiscuity. In further explaining the manifest functions of infibulation, Hayes states that the purpose of infibulation according to her informants is always that of preventing women from adulterous sex, “whether willfully or against their will.”⁴³ As is explained by Hayes, female sexuality is extremely baleful in regards to family honor and modesty. Thus,

⁴⁰ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 623.

⁴¹ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 623.

⁴² Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 624.

⁴³ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 627.

women are “socialized to believe that infibulation offers a physiological and social sanctuary from the threat inherent in their sexuality.”⁴⁴ In advancing this idea, Hayes explains that both male and female informants explicitly state that infibulation offers protection for women. The protection that infibulation affords however is two-fold. The first kind of protection is the one consistently iterated, which is that of sexual assault or promiscuity. This was corroborated by various other ethnographic studies conducted by Barclay, Nordenstam and MacDonald.

Hayes explains that the “second form of protection was what it [infibulation] provided against social condemnation.”⁴⁵ She reiterates that infibulation is important because of the projected social status that virgins have. In protecting the women and their honor, “the honor of the social group is safeguarded.”⁴⁶ This then prompts women to be the biggest advocates for the procedure and the ones who are responsible for its continuance; in order to protect themselves and their family honor. Hayes elucidates that family honor and patrilineage is important to women because it provides them with “source of identity and security” in what they believe is an inimical world.⁴⁷ Hayes explains that infibulation serves as a physical, tangible proof of an intangible trait, virginity, which is essential to the social livelihood of a family. Hayes summarizes

⁴⁴ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 624.

⁴⁵ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 627.

⁴⁶ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 627.

⁴⁷ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 624.

“[p]reservation of *ird*, *karama* and *sharaf* is necessary if her patrilineage is to maintain its social status, broaden its kinship ties and enhance its patrimony.”⁴⁸

Birth Control

Another argument that is consistently made for the continuation of female genital mutilation is that the practice serves as a form of birth control. Hayes states that infibulation becomes a source of population control as well. She states “[p]erhaps the most crucial latent function of infibulation, from the social scientist’s point of view, is its effect on population growth.”⁴⁹ The reasoning behind infibulation leading to population and birth control is that infibulation “decreases premarital, extramarital, and marital coitus; it increases infections, resulting in sterility and female deaths; and it increases neonatal mortality due to scarification and malformation of the vaginal canal.”⁵⁰ According to Widstrand, the procedure results in a variety of maladies including but not limited to “excessive hemorrhaging, destruction of the vesica or the rectum at defibulation, mycetoma, obstruction of the vagina or the urethra with subsequent severe complications, haematocolpos, and prolapses and fistulas between the bladder and the vagina, as well as gangrene.”⁵¹ All of these side effects decrease fertility rates and thus,

⁴⁸ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 623.

⁴⁹ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 628.

⁵⁰ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 628.

⁵¹ Widstrand, Carl Gosta. "Female Infibulation." Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia (1965): 95-124.

act as a form of population control.

Male Pleasure

In addition, another argument made for the continuation of female genital mutilation is that the procedure increases male pleasure. Boddy states that men have access to brothels, which contain uncircumcised women. These brothels are extremely successful and as a result of their success, despite containing uncircumcised women, Boddy is able to dent the argument of male pleasure. She also states that because the process of circumcision has been re-innovated, the argument for pleasure weakens. In trying to prove this point, Boddy states that the operation was transformed in 1969. The reason why the pleasure argument is weak according to Boddy is because there have been women who have been circumcised pre-1969 and have not married and there are also women who have married post 1969 and are married.⁵² Thus, the argument she poses is that male pleasure is not the case, but that males favor “women who have been less severely mutilated.”⁵³ In her research, Hayes has found that much like Boddy found in her ethnography of Hofriyat, women are often re-infibulated and require surgery prior to sexual intercourse, and again later on prior to and after birth “midwife surgery is required before marital sexual intercourse is possible, and more surgery is again required during labor before she can give birth.”⁵⁴

⁵² Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." *American Ethnologist* (1982): 685.

⁵³ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." *American Ethnologist* (1982): 685.

⁵⁴ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 617.

Power and Social Standing

An interesting hypothesis for the continuation of female genital mutilation as practice is that of status and power afforded to the women who have endured the process. This hypothesis seems plausible and is likely the reason for its continuance in other places and transnationally as well. Boddy explains in her piece that the strongest advocates for the procedure are *habobat*, usually translated as grandmothers, but can be applicable to any older woman, whether a relative or not. She states “[b]y insisting on circumcision, women insert their social indispensability, an importance that is not as the sexual partners of their husbands, nor, in this highly segregated, male-authoritative society, as their servants, sexual or otherwise, but as the mothers of men.”⁵⁵ Thus, female circumcision is advocated for by the older women because they see it as a way to exert their social relevancy “The ultimate social goal of a woman is to become, with her husband, the cofounder of a lineage section.”⁵⁶ Unlike Western society, women do not aspire to be like men, but receive social acknowledgement and recognition by “becoming less like men physically, sexually and socially.”⁵⁷ Elaborating more on this point, the socialization of young boys and girls is thus accomplished by the removal of “physical

⁵⁵ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." American Ethnologist (1982): 687.

⁵⁶ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." American Ethnologist (1982): 687.

⁵⁷ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." American Ethnologist (1982): 687.

characteristics,”⁵⁸ meaning the genitalia. Consequently, after their procedure, young girls are expected to assume greater responsibility whether in the household or domestically as well, and grow to associate more only with women. Because of the association to only women, a leader is required, and accordingly, the habobats oversee the women, “in everyday affairs, women are more strictly governed by habobats.”⁵⁹

Hayes also draws the same conclusion that Boddy is able to draw about grandmothers continuing the practice of female genital mutilation. She states that males hold most if not all positions of authority, whereas “the role of the grandmother is perhaps the single exception.”⁶⁰ She explains that there are a few specialist roles that traditional women could fill, such as midwifery and seamstresses. One of these particular roles is that of the midwife, who works to towards the preservation of women’s social status. Hayes explains that midwifery is one of few distinguished positions for village women, and as such, it affords those who are midwives a special rank in society. Because midwives are the ones performing the operations and procedures, they are also the ones bestowing the “virginal” status upon women, and thus “she [the midwife] wields influence among village women.”⁶¹ This is because the operations are exclusively an identifier of midwifery as it is “performed by midwives, undone by midwives, and redone

⁵⁸ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." *American Ethnologist* (1982): 688.

⁵⁹ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." *American Ethnologist* (1982): 688.

⁶⁰ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 623.

⁶¹ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 628.

by midwives.”⁶² Hayes further asserts that if infibulation as practice were to become disencumbered, the position of midwife would be completely subverted. The subversion of the midwife role would have vast and far reaching effects because there would no longer be anyone who could provide status to women, and thus dishonor would fall upon families. Hayes clarifies that these roles are distinct because most roles are “defined in terms of their relationship to men (i.e., the patrilineage).”⁶³ Hayes expounds that young girls are able to “move freely in public until they are about seven years old.”⁶⁴ After seven, they begin wearing a hijab (head covering) and their shoulders in public and are “seen outside less frequently.”⁶⁵ She then states that girls who reach puberty must wear a *tobe*, a traditional cloth wrapped around the body. At this stage, they become young adult women and are restricted from “participation in spheres outside of the household whenever possible.”⁶⁶ This is because the public appearance of a woman in Arab Muslim society is considered inappropriate and has “shameful connotation.”⁶⁷ She explains that other than the specialist roles, the most preferred for women is that of a housewife, and of

⁶² Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 628.

⁶³ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 623.

⁶⁴ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 623.

⁶⁵ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 623.

⁶⁶ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 623.

⁶⁷ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 623.

the role of the housewife, a woman who becomes a grandmother is “very fortunate.”⁶⁸

The woman who becomes a grandmother is considered fortunate because, as is common in many cultures and societies, “the older women achieve a status more closely resembling that of men.”⁶⁹ This is because women are the homemakers and as such, tend to have closer bonds and ties to their sons. As such, women who become grandmothers are respected as equally as the patriarch in the family, and their input is much more highly regarded. Because of this status, grandmothers often have the most sway in infibulation ceremonies and are “the initiators of the infibulation ceremonies for their granddaughters and that they must be considered the chief perpetrators of the practice.”⁷⁰ As a result of their social position and the respect afforded to them, which is equated to that of a male’s, a grandmother’s input is almost never denied and as such; this results in her becoming one of the main perpetrators of female genital mutilation. As Hayes states, and is corroborated by Michael Langley in “*A Woman’s Country: Travels in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*”, that the grandmother’s social rank is synonymous with that of a males in regards to decision-making:

The old midwife is still sent for when [the] grandmother thinks that one of the younger daughters is ready. The strangest consequence of this custom is that it gives the grandmother pride of place in the Sudanese family. Released from years of stress and anxiety and frustration, the old woman at length asserts herself. The men of the house respect her word, and she rules it with a rod of iron snatched

⁶⁸ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 623.

⁶⁹ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 624.

⁷⁰ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 618.

from the embers. Thus the only emancipation that Sudanese women have ever known comes with their change of life.⁷¹

Village Economy

Another argument posed for the continuation of female genital mutilation is that it serves several social functions including preserving a village's economy. Hayes declares that the infibulation latently boosts village economy. This assertion is made because the midwife who performs the initial operation is given a payment, and an even larger stipend is given for her help in preparing a bride "surgically for sexual intercourse."⁷² Hayes states that "[e]conomic anthropologists of the substantivist school would insist, rightly, that the practice of infibulation could not be completely understood without reference to the part it plays in the village economy."⁷³ Hayes explicitly demonstrates the social utility of female genital mutilation. She states that during an investigation in 1970, she was invited to a ceremony and was told by her informant that the ceremony was supposed to be a cause for festivities.⁷⁴ She explains that during the ceremony, countless women gathered around accompanied by small children, and were "clapping, singing,

⁷¹ Langley, Michael. A Woman's Country: Travels in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. London: Jarrolds, 1950. 19.

⁷² Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 628.

⁷³ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 628.

⁷⁴ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 619.

crying, drumming” in order to drown out the girl’s screaming.⁷⁵ This is supposed to be a happy occasion, but is found to serve a social purpose, which allows women to gather together.

Hygiene

The final argument posed for the reasoning behind the continuation of female genital mutilation is one of female hygiene. She affirms that this is not the case because the people of the region are no longer nomadic, and as such, have access to water. She further states the obvious in stating, “the sanitation argument does not explain why the custom should persist under improved conditions.”⁷⁶ To press this point further, Boddy states that it is customary to bathe at least once a day and since the purported intention of this practice was for hygienic reasons, then it should have desisted because issues with urinary tract infections as well as micturition and menstrual bleeding are present.⁷⁷ Through this, Boddy is able to eliminate the argument that the practice of Pharaonic circumcision continues today for hygienic purposes.

Despite all attempts to curb the practice of female genital mutilation, it continues to persist. Efforts to curb the procedure include outlawing the procedure as Boddy states this practice is not Islamic and has been one that is hard fought by the government in stating “I became determined to find out why this severe form of circumcision is

⁷⁵ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." American Ethnologist (n.d.): 619.

⁷⁶ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." American Ethnologist (1982): 685.

⁷⁷ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." American Ethnologist (1982): 685.

practiced; why, in the face of orthodox Islamic disapproval and the contravening legislation of at least two modern Sudanese regimes, it persists.”⁷⁸ It is important to highlight that Boddy states “modern Sudanese regimes,” because it illustrates that this is not something that is distant in the past, and that because this practice has been outlawed in several places, Sudan is trying to follow the trend. Hayes echoes similar sentiment and states that the practice is banned and that religious authorities have condemned the act, “It has been outlawed since 1945, and government and religious authorities have preached against the practice for decades, with little success.”⁷⁹

Through their work, scholars such as Hayes have deduced that the practice of female genital mutilation is not part of Islam. Hayes concludes that infibulation is a sociocultural feature of African society and that particularly in Sudan it exists neither as a passage rite nor a means of survival. Hayes demonstrates that it instead is a “vital and integrated part of the contemporary sociocultural system.”⁸⁰ Hayes’ analysis depicts the manifest function of infibulation as one which is meant to “regulate female sexuality in order to safeguard virginity” and in doing so, the preservation of family honor.⁸¹ Her ethnography also acknowledges the latent functions of infibulation, which she deduces are economical gain for midwives, status and roles for women, and finally as a means of

⁷⁸ Boddy, Jeanice. "Womb As Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision In Rural Northern Sudan." *American Ethnologist* (1982): 684.

⁷⁹ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 617.

⁸⁰ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 630.

⁸¹ Hayes, Rose Oldfield. "Female Genital Mutilation, Fertility Control, Women's Roles, and the Patrilineage in Modern Sudan: A Functional Analysis." *American Ethnologist* (n.d.): 630.

population control. Thus, as Hayes has demonstrated, infibulation is not a purely Islamic or Muslim feature, despite its prevalence in predominantly Muslim countries.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's Account of Islam & FGM

In order to understand Islam in the global west, the opinions and “expert analysis” of many people is taken into consideration. One such case is that of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali-born American activist known for her critical views of female genital mutilation and Islam. Ali collaborated with Theo Von Gogh on a controversial short film “Submission” about the perceived abuse that Muslim women endure, which also resulted in his assassination. Ali is known for her lobbying against FGM while a member of the Dutch Parliament. She is however most renown for her publicizing her views through several autobiographical series, including “Infidel: My Life”, which includes her account of her own FGM procedure. The book was widely read in the West after its publication in English in 2008. This chapter examines her views toward FGM and Islam.

The book begins with a lengthy prologue in which Ali proceeds to state that it is not the rest of the world who needs to adapt to the changing times, but Islam and Muslims that must adapt

if Muslims want to immigrate to open and developed societies in order to better themselves, then it is *they* who must expect to do the adapting. We no longer allow Jews to run separate Orthodox Courts in their communities, or permit Mormons to practice polygamy or racial discrimination or child marriage. That is the price of "inclusion" and a very reasonable one. ⁸²

⁸² Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. Infidel: My Life. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): Xvi Foreword.

Ali further states in her foreword that “[t]he cause of backwardness and misery in the Muslim world is not Western oppression but Islam itself; a faith that promulgates contempt for Enlightenment and secular values.”⁸³

She begins her first chapter recounting tales of her grandmother teaching her the names of her ancestors, as her grandmother explains that bloodline is important. Her grandmother states that bloodline and knowledge of one’s clan is important because it bestows certain privileges upon individuals, such as protection and honor. Early on in her book, Ali explains that the mindset with which young girls are raised is that of always being the one at fault, as she recounts being told that if a girl wandered off and was captured by a stranger it was her fault. She states “[t]o be raped would be far worse than dying, because it would tarnish the honor of everyone in their family.”⁸⁴ Ali equates this perception with religious views by stating “[i]t [Islam] teaches hatred to children, promises a grotesque version of the afterlife, elevates the cult of "martyrdom", flirts with the mad idea of forced conversion of the non-Islamic world, and deprives societies of the talents and energies of 50 percent of their members: the female half.”⁸⁵ In order to retain sexual purity, Ali recounts in graphic detail the FGM procedure performed on her and her younger sister, Hewaya, at her grandmother’s behest. Her foreword about this states “...this cult makes the lives of women a misery, either by depriving them of a sex life altogether or by forcing them into expedients (painful anal penetration, the resealing of the hymen) that are dangerous as well as unpleasant and degrading.”⁸⁶

Ali continues to recount her early life, in which she states that she was constantly

⁸³ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): Xix Foreword.

⁸⁴ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 9.

⁸⁵ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): Xvi Foreword.

⁸⁶ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): Xiv Foreword.

inculcated with the definition of a good wife, a *baari*, as one who maintains the house, is dutiful to her husband, does not complain, and remains loyal to him regardless of the circumstances. She states “[o]f course, my mother had no right to a divorce under Muslim law. The only way she could have claimed one was if her husband had been impotent or left her completely indigent.”⁸⁷ In regards to divorce, Ali explains that if her mother were to divorce, her mother would be the equivalent of used goods, and thus unmarryable.⁸⁸ Moreover, Ali equates a *baari*, to being a “pious slave.”⁸⁹ The reason for this she explains is because the *baari*, protects her husband’s family honor, does not complain regardless of the situation and states that “[s]he is a devoted, welcoming, well-trained work animal.”⁹⁰ Ali also states that often times being a *baari* comes with feeling grief, humiliation and a sense of exploitation. She states that even in these times you must pray to Allah for comfort.

She then explains that her family was forced to relocate due to her father being a popular rebel leader. Her family initially considers moving to Ethiopia, but that option was deemed inappropriate and inconceivable because Ali’s mother stated that Ethiopia was a Christian country and that she would not allow her children to be raised there. The family moves to Saudi Arabia without Ali’s father.

Her time in Saudi Arabia begins another chapter of her book. She explains that Saudi Arabia was chosen because her mother believed that law in Saudi Arabia was God’s law. This also begins her dissent of Islam as she is confronted with gender separation and mistreatment due to her darker hue. Ali explains that life was difficult in

⁸⁷ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 12.

⁸⁸ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 12.

⁸⁹ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 12.

⁹⁰ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 12.

Saudi Arabia for her family and in particular, her mother. This difficulty she attributes solely to gender as she explains that it is customary in Saudi Arabia for women to travel with male guardians, whom her family did not have as her father was forced to return to Somali, “[t]his was Saudi Arabia, where Islam originated, governed strictly according to the scriptures and example of the Prophet Muhammad. And by law, all women in Saudi Arabia must be in the care of a man.”⁹¹ She recounts several examples of these difficulties, such as not being able to enter a taxi alone, or her mother not being allowed to go to the market by herself. During this time period, Ali’s perception of Islam begins to change and the two components that cause this to occur are: 1) her mother’s belief that Saudi Arabian law stemmed directly from the Qur’an, and 2), her experiences in Saudi Arabia. The first point is essential because it shapes Ali’s view as an adolescent thereby permanently altering her view as adopts her mother’s view of equating Saudi Arabian laws with verbatim rules from the Qur’an and – by extension – considering Saudi laws and customs representative of Islam. The second point is far more important because Ali states

[e]verything in Saudi Arabia was about sin. You weren't naughty, you were sinful. You weren't clean; you were pure. The word *haram*, forbidden, was something we heard every day. Taking a bus with men was *haram*. Boys and girls playing together was *haram*. When we played with the other girls in the courtyard of the Quran school, if our white headscarves shook loose, that was haram, too, even if there were no boys around.⁹²

Her quote explains the perception with which she believes “Qur’anic” law demanded of people, and that regardless, everything they did was “*haram*.” Ali’s experiences with Saudi Arabia continued to form her perception of Islam and this is more

⁹¹ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 39.

⁹² Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 42.

apparent as she states “[i]n the late 1970s, Saudi Arabia was booming, but though the price of oil was tugging the country's economy into the modern world, its society seemed fixed in the Middle Ages.”⁹³ She states that “[n]one of the Saudi women we knew went out in the street alone. They couldn't: their husbands locked their front doors when they left their houses. All the neighborhood women pitied my mother, having to walk on her own. It was humiliating, it was low,”⁹⁴ with firm belief that this is an inherently Qur’anic derived, divinely initiated, God-ordained law. Her experiences were further traumatic as she states that due to her darker complexion, she was constantly called “*abda sawda*,” meaning “black slave.” She explains that this was part of the reason why she hated Saudi Arabia, as a result of the racial prejudice. In addition to racial prejudice, Ali explains that she often heard of women being beaten “[s]ome of the Saudi women in our neighborhood were regularly beaten by their husbands. You could hear them at night. Their screams resounded across the courtyard. “No! Please! By Allah!””⁹⁵ She sums her Saudi Arabian experience by stating that “[I]slamic law in Saudi Arabia treated half its citizens like animals, with no rights or recourse, disposing of women without regard.”⁹⁶

Following her experiences in Saudi Arabia, her family travels to Kenya. During her time in Kenya, Ali is again placed in a *madrassa*, an Islamic school and experiences similar experiences to her Saudi Arabian days. In Kenya, Ali begins to deviate from traditional Islamic teachings by refusing to obey her mother, refusing to go to school, and engaging in extramarital affairs, and her experiences in Saudi Arabia, coupled with her “rebellious” nature, are the result of this as she states. She is taught in school by her

⁹³ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 43.

⁹⁴ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 48.

⁹⁵ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 47.

⁹⁶ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 60.

school teachers that “[t]he Quran said "Men rule over women". In the eyes of the law and in every detail of daily life, we were clearly worth less than men.”⁹⁷ In Kenya, she refuses to return to school after being beaten by a teacher. She hears from a prominent preacher, Boqol Sawm that women owed their husbands absolute obedience and as such, could be beaten if they disobeyed and had to also be sexually available for their husbands.⁹⁸

Following this, Ali purchases her own copy of the Qur’an and “I found that everything Boqol Sawm had said was in there. Women should obey their husbands. Women were worth half a man. Infidels should be killed.”⁹⁹ After this, Ali is again told by one of her teachers that she was not allowed to adapt the words of the Qur’an to the modern era, “The Quran had been written by God, not by men. “The Quran is the word of Allah and it is forbidden to refute it,” Sister Aziza told me.”¹⁰⁰ She then becomes romantically involved with a young man named Kevin. At this point, Ali leaves her family and travels to the Netherlands under the pretense of escaping from an arranged marriage. Dutch officials approve her visa and she is allowed to enter the country. When her family, particularly her father and a man claiming to be her husband come looking for her at her place of employment, she calls the police and at this point, she explains that she realized she had rights which had not previously been afforded to her. Ali begins her rise to prominence in the Dutch Parliament and eventually wins a seat as a senator. Following this, a party member unveils that Ali’s claim of initially traveling to the Netherlands to avoid a marriage was false and tries to revoke her citizenship. This ploy fails and instead results in the party member losing their position as the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

⁹⁷ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 102.

⁹⁸ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 103.

⁹⁹ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 103.

¹⁰⁰ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 105.

Ali again travels at this point, but to the United States. There she decides to attend the Kennedy School of Public Policy at Harvard University, where she rises to prominence again due her story and experiences.

In Ali's first chapter, her grandmother states that knowledge of one's lineage is important because it bestows certain privileges upon individuals, such as protection and honor, much like the explanation given by Boddy, Hayes and Nordenstam. Ali's experience with female genital mutilation, however, is not an Islamic concept, nor is it within the Muslim tradition, it does however demonstrate the role of the grandmother and the authority that is afforded to her, as a result of trying to retain sexual purity. This concept is found in the works of Boddy, Hayes and Nordenstam, and in particular in Nordenstam's analysis of the "modesty code." As Hayes and Nordenstam demonstrated with their explanation of the "modesty codes," which are found across various Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Even by her own account Ali has demonstrated that Islam is not the main agent in the treatment of women. As her story is told, she blatantly highlights cultural factors and has not incorporated Islam nor religion at any point. Her point of the *baari* is also extremely important as it demonstrates her inability to distinguish and differentiate between culture and religion. A "*baari*," is not an inherently Islamic concept, nor is the word even an Arabic one.

Even in explaining the issues that she has experienced in Saudi Arabia, Ali is not able to distinguish between cultural and religious practices. The foundation for the inability to make this distinction is rooted in her mother's belief that anything and everything Saudi Arabian is inherently Muslim, which is a fallacy. Her statements however have no basis as the laws are not based in religion, but are of cultural origin.

Despite Ali's lack of formal training in Islam, she is often called upon to speak about the oppression that "plagues" the Muslim women of the world. Granted her experiences were indeed traumatic, however, her inability to distinguish between culture and religion, as well as the conflation of the two is the basis of her book. Her experiences were not religious and as is shown by the works of Boddy, Hayes, and Nordenstam, Ali experiences the negative aspects of culture masked behind a belief that religion is the motivator of much of the cultural practices.

Engendered Islamophobia

In the post 9/11 era, views of became considerably unfavorable. Media personalities, groups and politicians began to use anti-Islamic rhetoric and were thus labeled anti-Islamists. Their rhetoric became important due to American foreign policy and the “War On Terror.” Prominent anti-Islamic speakers such as Hirsi Ali, Daniel Pipes, Robert Maher, Bill O’Reilly, Pamela Geller, Phyllis Chesler and several others received unprecedented national coverage. In particular, the rhetoric of saving Muslim women from the hold of Islam that several of the aforementioned speakers, particularly Hirsi Ali and Pamela Geller, and the fight for the rights of women became the war cry. In this portion of my thesis, I examine the means by which accounts such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s and the trope of saving Muslim women from the grips of Islam contributes to anti-Islamic rhetoric.

Kambiz GhaneaBassiri in “Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States” argues that Islamophobia exists as a result of the media and Juliane Hammer in “Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women” further elaborates GhanaeaBassiri’s point of the media’s obsession with women and explains that Muslim women are viewed as “objects of Islamophobia discourse” and “as producers of Islamophobic discourse.”

Kambiz GhaneaBassiri’s article begins with the history of anti-Islamic sentiment, coined Islamophobia. Juliane Hammer, defines Islamophobia as “fear of Islam,” and explains that it is “an ideological construct produced and reproduced at the nexus of a

number of political and intellectual currents that need to be taken into consideration.”¹⁰¹

GhaneaBassiri demonstrates that – while it is difficult to find a survey of views toward Muslims before 2001, surveys indicate that the American perception of Muslims changed recently. In a few rare surveys, GhaneaBassiri finds that 62% of the public felt that they were either “not sure” or “had not heard enough” about Islam to form an opinion.¹⁰² As the survey progresses, it asks questions about what comes to mind when Islam is mentioned, and again, the majority of respondents, at 36% stated “nothing” while 21% responded with “Middle East” or “Arabs.”¹⁰³ The final portion of the survey asks for any other keywords that come to mind when Islam is mentioned and GhaneaBassiri states, “the overwhelming majority (80 percent) failed to mention anything.”¹⁰⁴ In another poll conducted after 9/11, 47% of Americans had favorable views of Islam, whereas 39% had unfavorable views and 13% of Americans remained indifferent. Oddly enough, of the respondents, 65% stated that they still knew little about Islam, while 87% concurred that terrorist actions do not represent mainstream Islam.¹⁰⁵ GhaneaBassiri interprets these

101

Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 108.

¹⁰² GhaneaBassiri, Kambiz. "Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York, 53.

¹⁰³ GhaneaBassiri, Kambiz. "Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York, 53.

¹⁰⁴ GhaneaBassiri, Kambiz. "Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York, 54.

¹⁰⁵ GhaneaBassiri, Kambiz. "Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York, 54.

numbers as artificial and only the resultant of the want for national unity, as supported by anti-Muslim sentiment highlighted by the “Ground Zero Mosque” in 2010.¹⁰⁶ Another survey conducted in August of that year found that only 37% of Americans had favorable views of Islam and Muslims as compared to the original 47% following 9/11 and 47% had unfavorable views of Islam, while 13% remained indifferent.¹⁰⁷ This drop in favorability despite a “polarized nation” which only has a “5-10 margin in terms of opinion towards Muslims” is attested to “current events and media reports,” which only portray Muslims in terms of violence to the American public.¹⁰⁸ GhanaeaBassiri states that anti-Islamic attitudes and sentiments are on the rise and as a result of the environment post 9/11, and are politically significant. His overall argument is thus that media reports have stronger impact on public perception than political events, including 9/11.

GhanaeaBassiri’s background research is imperative and important because it becomes the basis of his argument that Islamophobia is so prevalent because Islam is seen only in the light of violence and for political agendas. He proposes that the answer to the question of why American society has associated Islam with violence is due to the

¹⁰⁶ GhanaeaBassiri, Kambiz. "Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York, 54.

¹⁰⁷ GhanaeaBassiri, Kambiz. "Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York, 54.

¹⁰⁸ GhanaeaBassiri, Kambiz. "Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York, 54.

constant reinforcement of violent images of Islam by “the media and political elites.”¹⁰⁹ GhanaeaBassiri states that in the American media market, “violence is newsworthy” and that it “attracts an audience” which turns to the media for answers in regards to violence. He states that in regards to whether “Muslim terrorism” is explained by Islam is neither relevant nor profitable to the media or to political agendas.¹¹⁰ Concerning Islam only being understood violently and thus benefiting the political elite, GhanaeaBassiri provides the example of Republican Congressman Peter King, whose hearings of “radicalization of American Muslims” were used as fuel for the media and in turn used as reasons for decreasing civilian rights and increasing “the state’s control over its citizens.” GhanaeaBassiri concludes his background research and analysis by stating

While the media has very little incentive to challenge religious explanations of events like 9/11, the state has a definite interest in perpetuating them because this association provides a rational for the expansion of the state’s authority and control with the majority attack.¹¹¹

GhanaeaBassiri’s findings are thus relevant because they portray the strength of the media’s influence, which he can impact public perception more than political events such as 9/11.

Much like GhanaeaBassiri, Juliane Hammer delves into the roots of Islamophobia and finds that women have become both the objects and progenitors of Islamophobic

¹⁰⁹ GhanaeaBassiri, Kambiz. "Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York, 57.

¹¹⁰ GhanaeaBassiri, Kambiz. "Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York, 57.

¹¹¹ GhanaeaBassiri, Kambiz. "Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York, 58.

discourse. Hammer explains that Islamophobia is engendered because the images of Muslims being oppressed only conjures images of females. She states that this image is not fair because everything that is studied is in fact gendered, i.e. is “ “marked by constructed categories of gender; socially and historically constructed and negotiated gender roles; and gendered positionality of researchers, journalists and writers.”¹¹² She explains that genderedness of Islamophobia is as a result of the violence that is stereotypically believed to be inflicted upon Muslim women by Muslim men. This depiction is entwined with the media’s affinity for violence and thus allows the media to portray Muslim men as violent, henceforth propagating Islamophobia, and Muslim women as the victims of that violence. Furthermore, the stereotype is that due to the violence of Muslim men, the men themselves oppress Muslim women, by means of religion, and Muslim culture.¹¹³

GhaneaBassiri and Hammer both agree that Islamophobia also develops from the division caused by an “us and them” mentality, which they say is often at the heart of Islamophobia. GhaneaBassiri uses the term “American nativism” for this ostracization of people as developed by John Higham in his study, *Strangers in the Land*. American nativism is defined as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American’) connections.”¹¹⁴ GhaneaBassiri explains that during times

¹¹² Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 108.

¹¹³ Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 109.

¹¹⁴ GhaneaBassiri, Kambiz. "Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York, 59.

of crises and social change, and mistrust in national institutions, this nativism and divisive mentality flourishes. This rhetoric according to Hammer is capitalized in regards to Muslim women by the media and politicians by expressing the difference between gender and sexuality, and more so “Muslim attitudes to sexuality are used to define Muslims as other and foreign to the United States.”¹¹⁵

In particular, Higham’s American nativism as is mentioned in GhanaeaBassiri’s article is comparable to Hammer’s mentioning of the orientalist concept. Orientalism is defined by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* as “...the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny and so on.”¹¹⁶ Both orientalism and American nativism create an “out” group, which is distinguished from the rest of society and as such, is deemed foreign. This foreignness becomes the basis for discrimination and pejorative rhetoric. In the case of Muslim women, GhanaeaBassiri and Hammer both agree that the discourse of women’s rights, and Islamophobic discourse is used as leverage for the agendas of the political elite and national unity. Apropos examples of Islamophobic discourse, particularly in the case of women being used for a political agenda, Hammer highlights two specific cases; the case of Texas Congressman Louie Gohmert and South Carolina Republican Senator Lindsey Graham. Gohmert argued that Muslim women were being brought to the United States to

¹¹⁵ Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 109.

¹¹⁶ Dismantling Arab Stereotypes. <<http://www.arabstereotypes.org/why-stereotypes/what-orientalism>>.

have what he dubbed “terror babies.”¹¹⁷ Graham stated similar sentiment when she alleged that the 14th Amendment, which governed the power of citizenship and its limitations, was being abused by illegal immigrants to have American born babies, and thus citizens.¹¹⁸ This rhetoric exemplifies Hammer’s statement of Muslim women being the objects of Islamophobic discourse as well as being the producers of it. With respect to foreign policy and war, Hammer proclaims that Muslim women are again the object of Islamophobic discourse and the creators of it via the example of talk show host Jay Leno’s wife, Mavis Leno’s sudden interest in the rights of Afghan women under the rule of the Taliban. Hammer states “the oppression of Muslim women in Afghanistan overnight became a cause of concern for celebrities, politicians and public opinion.”¹¹⁹ The resurrection of the women’s rights trope allowed for the justification of the invasion of Afghanistan, as was illustrated by First Lady, Laura Bush’s address stating “[c]ivilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror --- not only because our hearts break for the women and children of Afghanistan, but also because in Afghanistan, we see the world the terrorist would impose on the rest of us.”¹²⁰ Bush’s comments and the ploy of Feminist Major, a group “campaigning for the rights” of Afghan women were responded to by the RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan)

¹¹⁷ Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 119.

¹¹⁸ Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 119.

¹¹⁹ Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 124.

¹²⁰ Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 125.

stating “[w]aging war does not lead to the liberation of women anywhere...to think that women’s rights can be won with bullets and bloodshed is a position dangerous in its naiveté.”¹²¹ Hammer concludes by stating “[m]uch of the discourse on the oppression of Muslim women abroad is primarily utilized in order to justify war and military intervention.”¹²²

As previously stated, Hammer contests that women are not only objects but can also become producers of Islamophobic discourse. She states that “[b]eyond displaying famed American gender equality, I want to argue that the contributions of women to Islamophobic discourse is rather a characteristic of gendered Islamophobia.”¹²³ In explaining this, Hammer asserts that women’s empathy for other women is unequivocal and is a power tool that fascinates females and males alike. Two of the women that Hammer highlights are Pamela Geller and Phyllis Chesler. In regards to Geller, she states her rise to prominence came in 2010 as a result of Geller’s campaign against the Park51 community center, often referred to as the “Ground Zero Mosque,” which was actually not located at Ground Zero. Geller’s influence as a result of the Park51 incident is believed to have even impacted the October 2010 elections. Moreover, Geller has published a book, *Stop the Islamization of America: A Practical Guide to the Resistance*, as well as co-authored books with several renowned Islamophobes. The motif of distrust

¹²¹ Kolhatkar, Sonali and Mariam Rawi. [Why Is a Leading Feminist Organization Lending Its Name to Support Escalation in Afghanistan?](http://www.rawa.org/rawa/2009/07/08/why-is-a-leading-feminist-organization-lending-its-name-to-support-escalation-in-afghanistan.html) 2012 September 2012 <www.rawa.org/rawa/2009/07/08/why-is-a-leading-feminist-organization-lending-its-name-to-support-escalation-in-afghanistan.html>.

¹²² Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. [Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance](#). New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 125.

¹²³ Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. [Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance](#). New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 126.

is found often in Geller's rhetoric as she has lambasted President Obama for "appointing Muslims into government positions without concern of their ties to Muslim extremism or their ability to undermine the United States."¹²⁴ Geller also exclaims that Obama is indifferent to the rights of Muslim women internationally. She is also known for using circular logic and anyone who does not share similar sentiments is either labeled as a hypocrite or someone who sympathizes with Islam by her.

Chesler, who shares similar sentiments as Geller, however, is more educated and thus able to articulate her ideas more eloquently and better. Unlike Geller, Chesler's production of Islamophobic discourse is via her own experiences, thus emulating Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Chesler's rhetoric expounds from her marriage to a Muslim Afghan man, with whom she went to live in Afghanistan for 10 years. Hammer explains that Chesler, much like Geller and Ali, is also an example of Islamophobic rhetoric that associates Islam and Muslims to "homophobia and hatred of Israel."¹²⁵ This association of Islam and Muslims with homophobia and hatred of Israel creates a circular argument in which a person who rejects Islamophobia is therefore also homophobic thus against gay rights, against Israel's existence, and more importantly, "a danger to American security and patriotism."¹²⁶ Hammer explains that this discourse allows for rhetoric that can be used for many purposes such as Islamophobia, pro-Israel rhetoric, and pro-war rhetoric.

¹²⁴ Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 127.

¹²⁵ Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 128.

¹²⁶ Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 128.

Furthermore, Hammer argues that an essential element of Islamophobic discourse as produced by women, is the concept of the “native informant.” She explains that a native informant in regards to Islamophobic discourse is one who is “laying claim to their Muslim identity and thus speaking on behalf and/or against fellow Muslims, as well as a number of former Muslims who have renounced their affiliation with Islam but claim intimate knowledge of the religion, its practices, and its cultures.”¹²⁷ This is evident in Hirsi Ali’s introduction in *Infidel: My Life*, in which she states Islam is in need of a reformation and that Muslims must adapt to changing times, and that it is not the West that must adapt. In explaining the usage of knowledge by a native informant, Hammer quotes Saba Mahmoud who explains that the concept is used to strengthen the orientalist trope. Post 9/11, Ali was embraced as an expert in all things Islam, despite not having any degree or formal education to endorse the unwarranted honor. Her views became much more important as the United States and the West began their “War On Terror,” and often using her rhetoric of freeing enslaved women from the hold that Islam had over them. She states “In Islam, you are Allah's slave: you submit, and thus, ideally, you are devoid of personal will. You are not a free individual. You behave well because you fear Hell; you have no personal ethic.”¹²⁸ Ali also explains that Muslims are taught in school that there is no such thing as a concept of human rights

Muslim schools reject the values of universal human rights. All humans are not equal in a Muslim school. Moreover, there can be no freedom of expression or conscience. These schools fail to develop creativity – art, drama, music – and they suppress the critical faculties that can lead children to question their beliefs. They neglect subjects

¹²⁷ Hammer, Juliane. "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women." Ernst, Carl. *Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 129.

¹²⁸ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 281.

that conflict with Islamic teachings, such as evolution and sexuality. They teach by rote, not question, and they instill subservience in girls. They also fail to socialize children to the wider community¹²⁹

Based on an analysis of “Infidel: My Life,” it is apparent that Ali conflates religious practices with local social and cultural customs, which she then collectively attributes to Islam. Native informants such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Irshad Manji, Azar Nafisi and Nonie Darwish are often embraced by those sharing similar sentiment because it is believed their stories are able to move people more. Hammer explains that Chesler has embraced native informants and described them as “grave, elegant, impish and fiery spirits.”¹³⁰ The problem with native informants however, as Hammer explains it, is that women with Muslim backgrounds “have been coopted into the machinery of Islamophobia” and additionally stating that it is difficult to draw the line between those who engaged in Islamophobic discourse for political gains, money, scholarly work, activism, journalism and those who “seem to feed into the Islamophobic discourse by buying into its premises or by supplying the “machinery” with additional arguments and material.”¹³¹ According to Hammer, these women are also more difficult to describe as racist and Islamophobes because they are not linked with a majority group and as such, it is easier for them to use such rhetoric without being accused of such things.¹³² Moreover, “native informants” are seen as much more knowledgeable, and Islamic experts despite not having any formal training, i.e. Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

¹²⁹ Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel: My Life*. Atria Books, 2008. (n.d.): 280.

¹³⁰ Chesler, Phyllis. “No More Harems,” 2011.

¹³¹ Hammer, Juliane. “Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women.” Ernst, Carl. *Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 130.

¹³² Hammer, Juliane. “Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women.” Ernst, Carl. *Islamophobia In America: The Anatomy of Intolerance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013. 129.

Inexorably, through the first portion of this thesis, I examined the discourse of female genital mutilation and investigated the claim that FGM was an inherently Islamic element. Through the works of Jeanice Boddy, Rose Oldfield Hayes, and Tore Nordenstam, it is evident that female genital mutilation is not a component of Islamic tradition, but rather a social and customary one. I then examined Ayaan Hirsi Ali's FGM experience in the context of Islam and deduced that Ali was mistaken in her view that FGM was an Islamic concept due to her conflation of religious-sociocultural practices and norms. In the final portion of this work, I examined FGM in the broader scheme of Islamophobic discourse and concluded that the concept of FGM as an inherently Islamic tradition was in fact a form of Islamophobic rhetoric linked back to medieval tropes. Furthermore, I was able to conclude that the rhetoric of saving women from the grips of Islam which is portrayed as violent and abusive towards them by Western media was also a tactic of Islamophobic rhetoric used to gain political and social support in the post 9/11 era.

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