13

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/ CUTTING AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL RELATIVISM

*Farnoosh Milde**

Abstract

In the context of global human rights debates, female genital cutting – the act of physically removing (intact) female genitals – has been subject to intense controversies. As this practice is regionally and culturally confined to certain parts of the world, in particular Eastern Africa, cultural relativism has for a long time been one of the most widely used ethical principles. It has indeed become a major controversial issue in global human rights debates. In the context of these discussions, the concept has been criticised for its failure to help prevent traditional practices from becoming harmful to communities, especially women. This chapter examines the complex relationship between cultural relativism, which can be evaluated based on its universal application as a means to secure the autonomy of non-Western societies, and female genital cutting, which is regarded as a challenge to cultural relativism. By highlighting these complexities, the chapter aims to provide clarity on how these debates shape and are shaped by broader social, cultural, and ethical considerations.

1 Introduction

Social science scholars reach a certain point at which they become 'trapped' within a space that is bounded, on the one hand, by the seemingly unquestioned authority of science and, on the other, by personal feelings and opinions, which are shaped by one's background

* PhD Student, University of Leipzig, Global and European Studies Institute; farnoosh.milde@uni-leipzig.de.

and patterns of behaviour. As social scientists argue, a researcher's emotional inclinations are unavoidable and indisputably evident in their research. In terms of intellectual as well as emotional 'chaos', cultural relativism is known to trigger such reactions. As a meaning or method of interpreting and explaining other cultures, cultural relativism is based on the belief that each culture has its values and practices that should be respected and valued within the framework set forth by that culture, that is customs and traditions should be viewed in the light of a society's response to problems and opportunities.[1]

A theoretical and methodological premise of anthropology has been cultural relativism as a means for developing knowledge and understanding of foreign cultures. Rather than relying on a value-oriented conception of culture, anthropologists use a phenomenological notion of culture to gain a deeper insight into foreign cultures. As contrasted with the descriptive concept, which refers to culture as a way of life and a system of meaning, the value-based concept of culture assumes a value standpoint. Both the descriptive culture concept and the value-oriented culture concept are associated with two different approaches to foreign culture, namely, the cultural-relative and the ethnocentric approach.

Consider female circumcision and female genital cutting (FGC). Both these traditional concepts are associated with two different roles: the role of the researcher and the role of the missionary. Traditionally, it has been believed that anthropologists put aside their own ideological biases and approach foreign cultures with the greatest degree of unbiased and unprejudiced approach. This is to gain new insights and knowledge. They must provide information on all relevant aspects of the subject, including those that are unpleasant and those that challenge their perceptions. A cultural relativist approach aims to develop understanding, rather than legitimise all religious practices, traditions, and rituals regardless of whether they are in sync with individual beliefs. In social science research, cultural relativism has become a critical instrument and guiding principle. In addition to guarding the scientist against accusations of ethnocentrism or any other form of imperialism, it is also of paramount importance to the object of study. This is because it acknowledges and preserves its autonomy. The concept was

1 R Scupin *Cultural anthropology: A global perspective* (2012) 48.

developed by German-American anthropologist Franz Boas and became wildly popular during this decade. It did not take long, however, for human rights activists to criticise the concept. In an era of irresistible globalisation, some question whether the concept covers violations of human rights. This led to a change in views about the concept.

The story, however, does not end here. Instead, with an amendment of policy and an alteration of the method, it is transformed into a completely different story and offered to the audience from an entirely distinct perspective. In contrast, the idea was developed as a relief for liberal-minded scholars who were not in agreement with the racist and barbaric treatment of indigenous people during the period of its constitution.

The issue of FGC has become increasingly prominent in discussions concerning human rights and cultural relativism. FGC is the practice of removing (intact) female genitalia for cultural or medical reasons. The primary motive behind this practice, and motivation shared by most communities pursuing FGC, is the belief that 'it has always been done this way'. In the context of this subject, it is difficult to establish a discussion respectful of all disciplines and approaches since it is such an emotionally charged issue.

According to Macklin, feminist anthropologists must confront the dilemma of FGC. In the first instance, anthropologists must maintain a value-free position when describing and writing about different cultures. They must be committed to maintaining 'respect for the traditions' of the people they study by the professional ethics of their field. Alternatively, as feminists, they believe there is something wrong with a practice that not only deprives millions of women of sexual pleasure but induces well-documented physical harms, some of which are lifelong, in a substantial portion of those women.[2]

While this chapter is devoted to the examination of the problematic relationship between cultural relativism and FGC, its focus is not limited to this issue. The interdisciplinarity of this chapter, in contrast to many research studies conducted from an anthropological or medical perspective, has the advantage of providing a range of perspectives. This facilitates a broader framework and, therefore, enriches the discussion

2 R Macklin *Against relativism: Cultural diversity and the search for ethical universals in medicine* (1999) 68.

by incorporating various disciplinary perspectives that may assist in identifying new potential questions. Because of this, the chapter paper will also touch on some key theoretical and ethical issues modern anthropologists must confront. These include the role of the researcher and the interaction of professional and personal ethics.

1.1 Relativism emerges

In 1888 German-American anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942) founded the first anthropological school in the United States at Clark University, which laid the groundwork for a rethinking of modern anthropolgy in the United States.[3] It was neither claimed nor coined by Boas that he was a proponent of 'cultural relativism'. A rather simple course of action of his was to introduce more innovative ways of studying anthropological subjects. These ways were later synthesised into the term 'cultural relativity' coined in 1924 by the philosopher and social theorist Alain Locke. During the twentieth century, Boas developed the idea specifically to oppose ethnocentrism, which had dominated theories of anthropology throughout the previous century, while also offering an alternative to the so-called unilineal evolutionary theory, which he had harshly criticised for seeking to define universal phases of development through which all societies must pass. He also criticised the way in which the data was arranged to fit the theory as well as the methodology in which it was done. The theory according to Boas does not stand up to closer examination, as there is insufficient empirical evidence for it to be valid.[4] Among Boas's contributions to sociology and anthropology was the evolutionary theory known as historical particularism. This theory taught that every society is a product of its history and, therefore, must be understood as such in its own right. To combat the anthropologist's view of the Other as a primitive and early stage in the evolution of humanity, he formulated ideas and beliefs meant to change this perspective.

People were viewed as cultural objects at the 1904 St Louis World's Fair, similar to those found in museums, rather than merely as living beings. Boas' historical anthropology was rife with racist assumptions at

3 C Lindholm *Culture and identity. The history, theory, and practice of psychological anthropology* (2007) 95.
4 Scupin (n 1) 114.

the time. One of the most infamous examples of the fair was Ota Benga, one of the most notorious cannibals. Despite that, the organisers of the fair were not content with just indigenous participation. To portray everyday life in different cultures, performers and actors were required by the fair organisers. The pygmies, who originate from Central Africa, like Ota Benga, were given machetes to 'behead' one another in their regions with impunity.[5] As a result of the influx of immigrants to the United States, the racist ideologies of those days developed.

Boas's importance lies not just in the purpose of de-ideologising cultural anthropology, but also in his efforts to change a whole worldview at a time when anthropology as a discipline was just coming into existence. Outside of this racist climate that persisted in a period when anthropology only became a discipline, it is pertinent to acknowledge that Boas's importance extends beyond the quest to de-ideologise cultural anthropology. Essentially, his entire professional career emphasised sensitising the collective consciousness and establishing anthropology as a more scientific discipline by repudiating racist ideologies within the field.[6]

The term 'female genital cutting' is used to describe a variety of different surgical procedures that are designed to modify a woman's anatomy following cultural expectations. There is a challenge that comes with analysing FGC, both inside and outside of the academic world, involving philosophical and ethical questions.

It is widely acknowledged that female genital cutting has consistently challenged the anthropological ideal of cultural relativism over the last few decades.[7] A key issue has been distinguishing the concept of cultural relativism as a measurement and analytical method. There has been a distinction made between cultural relativism as a moral and political principle. To put it another way, if a practice is legally acceptable based on the legal basis for its legitimacy, what are the ethical ramifications of that practice? Due to the prevalence of cultural relativism, which is fundamental to anthropological research, the world views FGC as infringing upon human rights.

5 Scupin (n 1) 410.
6 P Fettner 'Rationality and the origins of cultural relativism' (2002) 15 *Knowledge, Technology and Policy* 198.
7 A Lewnes *Innocenti digest. Changing a harmful social convention: Female genital mutilation/cutting* (2008).

The issue of FGC in Europe began to gain traction around the year 2000. This was a result of an increase in immigrants from countries where female circumcision is a common practice. The German Federal Republic, along with many other nations within the European Union (EU) and elsewhere, has set the goal of outlawing this practice. Although legislation and procedures are in place to protect women and girls against women's genital cutting, the practice persists, and many women and girls are at risk of circumcision. Legislation alone would not be enough to put an end to the practice. Female genital cutting, in my opinion, is a socially-sensitive issue that requires an integrated approach that builds confidence, trust, and understanding between all stakeholders. At present, however, the existing approach is at odds with the need for greater understanding.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes female genital cutting FGC as a deeply ingrained historical, cultural and religious practice that has been the subject of much discussion. Recently, stories concerning FGC have been spreading around the world, and this topic has received considerable attention. This practice, which is traditionally included in predominantly African cultural ceremonies known as female circumcision, has been routinely portrayed as violence against girls and women by the WHO.

1.2 Human rights

There are many examples of destructive and maladaptive social behaviours, which frequently violate fundamental human rights, such as child marriage, female genital cutting, honour killing, and child labour. There are several women and girls involved in these behaviours and, therefore, one common solution is to enhance their access to education, health care, and employment.[8]

Because social scientific research is the foundation of social activity, anthropology cannot remain silent and abstain from any moral or ethical responsibilities. There is a responsibility inherent in the discipline of anthropology that, after articulating a concept such as cultural relativism, opens up a wide range of opportunities for discussion, but at the end of the discussion distances herself from the discussion by saying it is not

8 N Toubia & S Izett *Female genital mutilation: An overview* (1998).

up to her to pose such questions. In this way, Jean-Klein and Riles view anthropology and its knowledge as instruments for human rights practice and dissemination through discussions related to anthropological participation in human rights bureaucracies.[9] Moreover, they indicate:[10]

> As with our discipline, human rights organisations become active by showing an orientation toward humanitarian ethics and neoliberal ideology; by conducting research; collecting ethnographic data, or at the very least narratives and stories; and even by engaging in 'critical views' of themselves.

However, what is the situation concerning human rights? Can we address the issue of FGC in a way that is consistent with any position that all individuals have some fundamental rights? Generally, criticism directed toward the use of the supposed universality of human rights theory as a valid argument is based solely upon the assumption that there are vast differences among cultural and religious practices that cannot be adequately accounted for in the limited definition of Western human rights theory.

While James recognises three main international human rights protections that FGC may violate, namely, the right to health; the right to the child; and the right to ownership, integrity, and a sense of belonging,[11] Macklin criticises the general misuse of the term 'human rights', observing that its use is disconnected from its narrow, yet correct meaning which refers to international laws and instruments under the sponsorship of the United Nations (UN).[12] According to Macklin, the term 'human rights' refers principally to the rights outlined in documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) (Universal Declaration), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) (ICESCR), as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) (CEDAW). In addition, Andrews pursues the idea that the mobilisation of anti-FGC arguments that took off in the 1990s backfired as critics of

9 J-K Iris & A Riles 'Introducing discipline: Anthropology and human rights administrations' (2005) 28 *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 173.
10 Iris & Riles (n 9) 181.
11 S James 'Reconciling international human rights and cultural relativism: The case of female circumcision' (1994) 8 *Bioethics* 12.
12 Macklin (n 2) 193.

the practice were branded as paternalistic and neo-colonial.[13] According to Jean-Klein and Riles, many anthropologists note that it is impossible to discuss human rights without engaging with lawyers, legal scholars, and politicians – disciplines and actors anthropologists regard as powerful, thus contributing to the discussion of human rights.[14]

To emulate the procedural practices of human rights organisations, bureaucracies, and administrations and temper his or her militancy in favour of a more objective, bureaucratic tone. In this way, anthropologists perform what they so often describe: an age of decentralised politics where anyone including the anthropologist can adopt the logic of protest and participate.

Shah warns about two possible challenges when it comes to the universality of human rights in her work on international human rights law and the Koran. According to her, two of the key categories that challenge the presumed universality of human rights are feminism and cultural relativism. In addition, the anthropologist must examine both feminist and relativist arguments against the universality of human rights, although this chapter will only briefly highlight the basic gender problem with human rights as it is more interested in cultural relativism than universality. This perspective opens up new discussions that cannot be adequately addressed in a confined space such as this. The fundamental feminist argument against the human rights system is based on the premise that its universality is unfounded because it ignores issues relevant exclusively to women. Further, the human rights system is restricted to the public sphere, which is dominated by men and oriented toward them. Last but not least, feminists believe that the priority given to civil and political rights at the expense of economic and social rights is misplaced.[15]

In the context of cultural relativism, what conclusions can be drawn from different perspectives and approaches to human rights? According to Shah, there are very few options available. Alternatively, one could reject human rights completely as incompatible with the rest of the

13 ZT Androus 'Critiquing circumcision: In search of a new paradigm for conceptualising genital modification' (2013) 3 *Global Discourse* 38.

14 I Jean-Klein & A Riles 'Introducing discipline: Anthropology and human rights administrations' (2005) 28 *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 180.

15 NA Shah *Women, the Koran and international human rights law: The experience of Pakistan* (2006) 199.

world, which is not Western or does not follow the Western philosophy of human rights, or one could reject certain rights or views of human rights.[16] Both these viewpoints, however, seem to be extreme positions that make it difficult to conclude regarding cultural relativism and human rights issues. Bringing together the universal and the particular would be an ideal solution.[17] In closing, Shah mentions An-Na'im:[18]

> All nations representing various cultures should be taken on board and everyone must have an equal footing in reaching a consensus on standards acceptable to all. The relativists must be careful to differentiate Western concepts such as an overemphasis on work at the expense of family from universal ones such as human dignity, in their process of finding common ground and standards acceptable to all.

2 Different disciplines regarding female genital cutting

To effectively develop an argument that does not leave any dangerous gaps unclosed, it is imperative to select the appropriate standpoint from which to approach this emotionally charged topic. As it is a matter of culture, body, health, perception, economics, and human rights (not just women's or children's), the term 'disciplining' does not indicate finding the most suitable discipline from which to approach the subject, but rather a general outlook that will form the framework, noting that FGC is a matter of culture, body, health, perception, economics, and human rights (particularly the rights of women and children).

As this chapter will demonstrate, before we delve deeper into the realms of relativism, and focus more on the complexities of genital cutting, we need to take a step back to demystify all of the possible viewpoints so that we can locate the appropriate arguments. Macklin concludes:[19]

> If female genital mutilation is not only physically harmful but also a violation of a fundamental human right, then it cannot be defended as a traditional ritual immune to criticism by outsiders of the cultures where it is practiced. If, on the other hand, as defenders argue, female genital mutilation is accepted and sought by women themselves in the cultures where it is prominent, then it is arguably not so different from American women choosing to have breast implants and other forms of cosmetic surgery to appear more feminine.

16 Shah (n 15) 207.
17 Shah (n 15) 210.
18 As above.
19 Macklin (n 2) 68.

Academics in the social sciences are prone to feeling trapped at times, especially when they are studying a particular area. In this area, there is no room for doubt, since the unequivocal authority of science is on the one hand, and the personal feeling and opinion that is conditioned by a person's cultural background and behavioural patterns is on the other hand. Research is profoundly influenced by personal opinions and viewpoints, and these influences can be felt throughout the research process. It has been well known that cultural relativism has a provoking effect on both the emotions involved as well as the intellect.

The concept of cultural relativism is a way to define and interpret other people's cultures. It maintains the position that each culture has its unique values and practices that should be respected and valued within the boundaries of the culture in question. Cultural relativism is one of the major perspectives of the contemporary world that recognises ethnic traditions as reflecting a society's response to problems and opportunities.[20] Thus, it legitimises the presence and validity of all different aspects of any religious practice, traditions, or rituals. This is regardless of whether or not they correspond to the beliefs of an individual. In any social scientific investigation, cultural relativism has become an essential instrument and guide.

By preventing the scientist to be accused of cultural or any other form of imperialism or bias, this compromise not only shields the scientist from these accusations but is also of significant importance for the object of interest, since it acknowledges its autonomy and helps preserve it.

After its conception by German-American anthropologist Franz Boas at the beginning of the twentieth century, the concept met with much positive feedback and became popular, but it did not take long to provoke displeasure among human rights activists. In truth, though ironic, the proposal came up as a relief for liberal-minded scholars who preferred not to be associated with what was perceived as racist and barbaric treatment of indigenous people at the time of the constitution. It is indeed true that at the core of the idea lies a completely neutral idea intended to facilitate understanding of a culture on its terms.[21]

20 Scupin (n 1) 48.

21 R CassmanR 'Fighting to make the cut: Female genital cutting studied within the context of cultural relativism' (2008) 6 *Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights* 8.

With heightened attention being focused on human rights following World War II, cultural relativism became a double-edged sword due to its increased importance. Although this argument was understood, it did not preclude the concept of cultural relativism from becoming the crucial framework for anthropological examination through history. This framework mentions any aspect of human rights and even attempts to establish a position concerning the complex interactions between anthropology and human rights. Even though anthropology is a humanistic science, it could have played a key role in the derivation of the Universal Declaration, as one of the leading humanistic sciences. *American anthropology*, the main journal of anthropology, published a statement on human rights in 1947 in contrast to these assumptions. Anthropologists' views regarding universals and particular societies conflicted with the view of an autonomous human being that claimed certain rights, as outlined in the Universal Declaration. By promoting the idea that man must live according to the definitions of freedom that his society has given him,[22] this statement denied the value and credibility of a statement that prevails in a world where free speech has been denied to many and is fundamentally unsustainable.[23]

In the main, people are willing to live and let live, exhibiting tolerance for the behaviour of another group different from their own. In the subsistence field, especially where there is no conflict, there was a point of view whose consequences have been catastrophic for mankind. That point of view emerged from the history of Western Europe and America. In these two places, economic expansion, control of armaments, and an evangelical religious tradition have translated the recognition of cultural differences into a summons to action. This summons to action has been emphasised by philosophical systems that have stressed absolutes in the realm of values and ends. Definitions of freedom, concepts of the nature of human rights, and the like, have thus been narrowly drawn. The history of the expansion of the Western world has been marked by the demoralisation of human personality and the disintegration of human rights among the peoples over whom hegemony has been established (statement on human rights as quoted in Washburn).

22 Herskovits in WE Washburn 'Cultural relativism, human rights, and the AAA' (1987) 89 *American Anthropologist* 940.

23 Washburn (n 22) 939.

This statement has led to the reintroduction of anthropology as the field of study for determining the most appropriate approach to studying humanity, a fight that up to this point has been led by anthropologists versus non-anthropologists. The main difference between these two opposing views is that they divide their participants into two groups: the anti-relativists and the relativists. As with any form of relativism, a cultural relativism assessment is often followed (and, sometimes, triggered, but not always implied) by inquiries about another form of relativist thought that is founded on the same principles. According to this form of relativism, referred to as ethical relativism, we cannot impose the moral principles or ideals of one community upon another.[24]

A belief in ethical relativism legitimises the morally dubious character of traditional practices, rituals, and religious practices simply because anthropologists have failed to unravel universal values and norms. Therefore, one should respect and admire the values, systems, and conditions of other societies. The discussion of ethical relativism has also been noted by many scholars, including anthropologists and philosophers, who note that it is quite contradictory in its premise, which assumes a particular moral position or moral theory that encourages people to be tolerant of all cultural values, norms, and practices.[25]

The fact that context is the primary instrument for shaping a belief does not imply that there is no other foundation. Furthermore, it is significant to note that many moral principles transcend the cultures in which they originate.[26] Therefore, advocating tolerance as a universal value has the status of a *de facto* global principle.[27]

The concept of ethical relativism, in contrast to cultural relativism, was abandoned by most scholars after the events of World War II. Essentially, the reason for this revulsion is the previously cited argument that the Nazi regime's morality in Germany during World War II cannot be condemned because, according to the theory of ethical relativity, it should be treated as any other civilisation.[28] Although the concept of

24 Scupin (n 1) 410.
25 EM Zechenter 'In the name of culture: Cultural relativism and the abuse of the individual' (1997) 53 *Journal of Anthropological Research* 319.
26 MH Salmon 'Ethical considerations in anthropology and archaeology, or relativism and justice for all' (1997) 53 *Journal of Anthropological Research* 48.
27 Zechenter (n 25) 332.
28 Scupin (n 1) 410.

'cultural relativism' is frequently portrayed in a rather black-and-white fashion, with relativism often seen as a notion that opposes universalism, there are three subtleties embedded within the notion. Among the different kinds of relativism on this scale, descriptive relativism (also referred to as weak relativism) is the lowest intensity one, followed by normative relativism (or strong relativism), and finally epistemic relativism.

Despite the rejection of the notion of ethical relativism, it must be acknowledged that it involves significant concerns. To understand moral relativism, it is necessary to recognise how moral opinions vary from country to country and how society heavily influences our beliefs. In addition, it encourages us to explore the reasons for alternative opinions, while forcing us to examine the reasons for our own beliefs and values.

The concept of descriptive relativism lies at the heart of the idea. This is based on a common sense observation of cultural diversity. However, normative relativism takes a step further and rejects the possibility of transcultural standards since all standards are products of a certain culture. Described relativism refers to the early stages of relativism, by way of Boas's struggle against ethnocentrism as well as the false sense of progress and growth that we discussed earlier.[29] Although twentieth century anthropologists (Boas, Mead, Benedict) comprehended the general pattern of socio-economic changes (which were gradual) they did not hesitate to impose value judgments on them to deconstruct the popular notion about the superiority of Western civilisation.[30] This led to the development of normative relativists who maintain that individuals in a community are incorporated into moral and cultural conventions (often unknowingly) through involuntary socialisation and enculturation, which leads to the conclusion that transcultural standards are not possible.[31] The most extreme form of relativism rejects any universal validity or objective truth, asserting that human behaviour is shaped by society alone.

It may not seem that strange to draw parallels between scientific proof and witchcraft. This is especially since the ongoing battle between religion and profane culture is one of the most pressing concerns of our

29 Zechenter (n 25) 323.
30 Zechenter (n 25) 324.
31 Zechenter (n 25) 325.

present existence. It must be noted, however, that applying this concept to a practice such as FGC is a far-reaching idea. Science has provided a sufficient degree of evidence that refutes any medical rationale for the practice. Moreover, Salmon asserts that correcting inaccurate facts does not necessarily invalidate the principles that underpin them.[32]

As well, it appears that cultural relativists have further reinforced the justifications for FGC, who firmly believe that culture is static, as opposed to the common belief that culture is rather the opposite, a dynamic organism characterised by internalisation of change, as Nussbaum notes, emphasising the constant contrast between Western and non-Western societies, depicting Western cultures as modern and changing, while non-Western cultures are regarded as static.[33] In addition, cultural relativists fail to recognise that there is evidence that many negative practices have been eliminated in many regions of the world due to natural changes. Zechenter observes that this static view of culture has ramifications that extend beyond the idea of moral relativism. Despite the significance (and presence) of social change, the article fails to acknowledge culture as a historical and institutional phenomenon. In addition, this perspective does not account for the complexity of established traditions and norms, since it assumes absolute adaptability, based on the assumption that culture is not flexible or dependent on specific factors:

In a changing environment, cultural practices routinely outlive their usefulness, and cultural values change either through internal dialogue within the cultural group or through cross-cultural influences. Any contact between cultures is likely to cause at least some modification in the customs of the contacting cultures or at least to induce a reinterpretation of these customs. It is this constant reinterpretation, reinvention, and modification of customs that allow cultures to survive and be viable over time.[34]

Vincent pointed out in his work on human rights and international relations that the concept of cultural relativism implies three factors. First, moral principles differ from place to place. Next, to appreciate its diversity, it must be placed in a cultural context. Third, moral assertions

32 Salmon (n 26) 57.
33 M Nussbaum *Women and human development: The capabilities approach* (2000) 48.
34 Zechenter (n 25) 333.

arise from and are bound up in a cultural context, which constitutes their identity.[35] The point he was trying to make was that there exist many civilisations in the world and that each civilisation has its own set of values. The universal value cannot be defined in such a simple way. Seeing things from this perspective is not subject to debate by cultural relativists. This is a feasible solution to the problem.[36]

In Vincent's simplified doctrine, the source of the problem with cultural relativism is not contained.[37] Especially in today's globalised world, cultural relativism seems relevant and intriguing.[38] However, the problem is in the boundaries set by this concept that presupposes a relativism of all values, social and otherwise.[39] The question is, where exactly do these tolerance limitations exist and, more importantly, do they exist for specific normative systems? In a pre-globalised society, Vincent's answer may have been valid and relevant.[40] However, today's interconnected world presents a more complex battlefield, where culture and economy are competing for all of the earth's resources.

Further, is relativism's adamant rejection of universal values a true statement? Do they believe that there are no universal values? In doing so, questions such as these push the boundaries of anthropology as well as human thought. They are in search of an ontological and philosophical dialogue that cultural relativists frequently dismiss, yet which continues to form the foundation of the notion of universalism.

Universalism is a philosophy that asserts that every person inherently is one with the universe, regardless of socio-cultural background, and should all possess the same fundamental human rights.[41] Zechenter describes a brief history of universalism in which he claims that the concept is rooted in natural law views based on the assumption that all persons possess intrinsic rights conferred by a higher authority (God or Providence) on them. The Enlightenment brought into focus what is known as reason and the nature of the mind. This paved the way for a widespread belief in the human capacity to reason and think rationally.

35 As above.
36 RJ Vincent *Human rights and international relations* (1986) 38.
37 As above.
38 As above.
39 As above.
40 As above.
41 Zechenter (n 25) 320.

This belief was followed by a positive outlook on people's reasoning and thinking abilities. The positivist perspective postulates that universal standards of human rights have been created by international treaties and customary international law, and are embodied therein.[42]

Nussbaum examines feminist political philosophy when studying women's positions and global development. It focuses primarily on issues that mainly affect women in Western countries, such as workplace discrimination, sexual harassment, and domestic abuse.[43] In addition, she calls for the establishment of a shift in focus in favour of focusing on the urgent needs and interests of women in the developing world. These needs and interests must be examined in more detail, in dialogue with the women themselves. This is before adequate recommendations can be made since feminist philosophy needs to add new topics to its agenda to serve the developing world effectively.

It is peculiar to this situation since we are going to ask ourselves, 'How do we know whose body this is?' The topic of FGC became widely discussed during the era of human rights activism in the 1990s, but many have argued that it is not just a matter of body integrity; it is a minor part of a much larger battle. Is circumcision against human rights? Is maintaining genital integrity the more significant principle? The discussion of female circumcision cutting can, therefore, be considered a one-dimensional topic from a legal perspective, or should it take into consideration the opinions and positions of women who undergo the procedure? The first step on our path to achieving gender equality is to identify the two concepts that make up the basis for the core framework, namely, bodily (or sexual) integrity and equality between men and women. A fight for gender equality is about fighting for a world where discrimination against women no longer is permitted in any way, whereas a fight for genital integrity aims to protect both men and women from having parts of their bodies amputated without their informed consent and can be viewed as a smaller subset of the larger fight for bodily integrity.[44]

42 Zechenter (n 25) 321.
43 Nussbaum (n 33) 7.
44 JS Svoboda 'Genital integrity and gender equity' in GC Denniston and others *Bodily integrity and the politics of circumcision – Culture, controversy, and change* (2006) 151.

Human capabilities can be described in terms of the following human characteristics in a universal sense, and include the following characteristics: life, health, self-esteem, senses, imagination, thought, emotions and practical reason, affiliates, other species, play, and control over the environment.[45] This idea has been proposed by Nussbaum as a way of overcoming some of the objections that have been raised in discussions on cross-cultural universals, since it produces a kind of universalism that is sensitive to the complexities of pluralism concerning varying cultures.[46] Nussbaum's impetus lies in the idea that a subject can be conceived as being autonomous, as a bearer of their rights.

I believe that to achieve physical integrity and gender equality at the same time, we must recognise that these goals are not mutually exclusive. Particularly in the case of FGC, we can see how complex and entangled this link is. Despite this, it appears that the need to identify distinct genital integrity is relatively recent. Although campaigns for gender equality have been ongoing for more than a century, the official war for genital integrity began on 3 March 1989. This was when the First International Symposium on Circumcision approved a Declaration of Genital Integrity. The right of every human being to maintain an intact body is an inherent right for all of us. In this regard, we affirm this fundamental human right without regard to any kind of religious or racial prejudice. In this regard, we affirm this fundamental human right without regard to any kind of religious or racial prejudice.[47]

Indeed, if there is one thing that all civilisations share, it is their attitude toward corporeality as a human feature. According to Dekkers and Others, every culture has a unique attitude toward the human body that is increasingly being guided by moral terminologies such as holiness, dignity, and physical integrity. In this respect, it is also unacceptable not to provide a cultural context to conversations about FGC. The consideration of physical integrity with male and female circumcision by Dekkers and others in this manner yields a particularly insightful finding. Their initial consideration shows how inadequate the idea underlying the phrase 'body integrity'. As they point out, the use of the term conveys a

45 Nussbaum (n 33) 78.
46 Nussbaum (n 33) 8.
47 W Dekkers and others 'Bodily integrity and male and female circumcision' (2005) 8 *Medicine, Health Care, and Philosophy* 179.

certain point of view: It is only within the context of a particular moral narrative that one can determine whether specific uses of the body are to be praised, condemned, or regarded as morally neutral.[48] Because of this sacredness of the body, the belief that circumcision must only be performed if it promotes a person's health contributes to one of the main reasons that some cultures, such as the Jews, do not consider male circumcision to be a violation of bodily integrity.[49] There is no human reasoning or inquiry allowed into the divine law since it is a law dictated by God and not created by man. It is relevant to consider that among Jewish and Islamic examinees as well, female circumcision is regarded as a violation of bodily integrity. This is because it is a ritual that promotes a sense of communal cohesion. It is without a doubt that such a procedure does not conform to any transcendental law to which it should adhere and that it does not promote physical health as some people believe.[50]

In the case of female genital modification, as I mentioned previously, the term 'bodily integrity' refers to both the individual and the community as a whole. In my view, the community is like the body. The body must be whole for the wholeness of the community, which ironically can only happen by changing the inherent imperfections of the body. According to Dekkers and others, who address a certain paradox on this matter, all opponents of circumcision, regardless of what form it takes, assert that body integrity and related concepts such as wholeness cannot be reconciled with circumcision.[51] A clear distinction is drawn between the importance of the body as an influential determinant of social identification and recognition of one's identity and the arguments against FGC. These arguments claim that bodily integrity is a fundamental human right. There are two approaches to examining bodily integrity, namely, the self-focused approach to understanding bodily integrity, as well as the body-focused approach. It has become common practice in the realm of modern medical ethics and law to apply a self-focused approach, which is based on the idea that a person has a right over their own body. According to this view, the right to protect oneself from humiliation is defined by the right to be protected against

48 As above.
49 As above.
50 Dekkers and others (n 47) 187.
51 As above.

violations by others as well as the right to have a sense of self-control over the body, which is the principal frame of discussion in Western anti-FGC discussions.[52]

The notion of a community that is founded on collective integrity is not compatible with a mindset that emphasises the individuality of the individual. There is also a similar issue with Nussbaum's idea of human capabilities. It seems that in the human capacity perspective, societal institutions are left out, despite their underlying role in invoking FGC. Instead, the focus is placed on individualism that's excessive and absent of social norms. Although exploring the concepts of health and wellness from the body-focused perspective is more appealing to the needs of cultural communities since the body's value is an integral part of those communities' identities, it may not pertain to the values of individual communities. According to Dekkers and others, the body-oriented approach seems to contradict the idea of personal autonomy over the body. This may be because the approach to the body itself carries a moral value of its own:[53]

> Even if people are considered to be owners of their bodies, they may not be able to do everything with their bodies that they might want to. From this perspective, the duty to maintain bodily integrity conflicts with the view that the body is the property of the person. The doctrine of bodily integrity thus contradicts the personal ownership or property paradigm.

A primary dispute area associated with the self-focused approach is regarding the right to sexual freedom and, more importantly, the right to sexual health, which should be an expectation of every individual. Across the pond, Boyle explains that although in the United States it is common for couples to seek treatment for such purposes as, for example, boosting women's sexual desire, in other parts of the world procedures are performed that are intended to decrease women's sexual desire. The desire for sex that a woman has may not be remedied in both scenarios, so it is also something that needs to be corrected in one of them. Regardless of circumstances, males are assumed to benefit from the intervention in both situations. In both situations, women feel embarrassed and uncomfortable expressing their sexuality.[54]

52 Dekkers and others (n 47) 183.
53 As above.
54 EH Boyle and others 'International discourse and local politics: Anti-female-genital-cutting laws in Egypt, Tanzania, and the United States' (2001) 48 *Social*

According to the WHO, 'sexual health is the integration of the mental, physical, emotional, and social elements of a sexual being', while the World Association of Sexual Health, the Declaration of Sexual Rights has been adopted which states:[55]

> To assure that human beings and societies develop healthy sexuality the following sexual rights must be recognised, promoted, respected, and defended: the right to sexual freedom, excluding all forms of sexual coercion, exploitation, and abuse; the right to sexual autonomy and safety of the sexual body; the right to sexual pleasure, which is a source of physical, psychologic, intellectual and spiritual well-being; the right to sexual information ... generated through unencumbered yet scientifically ethical inquiry; the right to comprehensive sexuality education; the right to sexual health care, which should be available for prevention and treatment of all sexual concerns, problems, and disorders.

Further, Fourcroy asserts that physical health includes more than the absence of disease, dysfunction, or disabilities.[56] Due to the predominant use of sex as a means of reproduction and the importance of the kin overshadowing the importance of the individual in African societies, FGC is most common in these communities, where the removal of the organs responsible for sensual stimulation is required to fix certain social values and to accept rigid standards of conduct.[57] This constitutes a deliberate restriction of sexual freedom, the sense of bodily integrity, and the pleasure of intimate interaction. It emphasises once again both the cultural relevance of FGC as well as the gendered premise of the procedure. As mentioned above, one of the main goals of FGC is to reduce a woman's libido and prevent her from partaking in any pleasure. Therefore, the argument of sexual freedom (as with the universality of human rights) is not a productive one against FGC, especially when one considers the fact that recent research shows that the reduction of sexual feelings is not inevitable following FGC, as the results of the research made by the Women's Health and Action Research Centre in Nigeria demonstrate.

As Shell-Duncan argues, focusing only on the effects of FGC on the sexual aspects of violence against women weakens a comprehensive

Problems 524.

55 JL Fourcroy 'Customs, culture, and tradition – What role do they play in a woman's sexuality?' (2006) 3 *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 955.

56 Fourcroy (n 55) 954.

57 KO Bankole 'Clitorectomy' in MK Asante & A Mazama (eds) *Encyclopedia of African religion* (2009) 172.

understanding of the more complex socio-economic contexts of broader abuses of women.[58] As a consequence, the Western understanding of the body as having a certain state of autonomy that presupposes the autonomy of the individual is not consistent with the majority of African societies and, therefore, is judged to be ethnocentric and reductionist.[59]

In the context of FGC-practising communities, it should be assumed that women are not considered independent entities, thus highlighting the role that women play in these societies. While it indeed is an accepted fact that FGC is conducted for the benefit of the man, it is rather interesting to note that practically every aspect of the procedure is planned and implemented by women: Even the question of whether a bride's suitability is acceptable is generally left to women as arranged marriage is the norm, with the groom's mother having the most prominent voice.[60] The fact that women control the procedure signifies that the patriarchal system of gender segregation remains deeply rooted. The fact that this practice is not restricted to men is of importance to relativist anthropologists. This is because they can argue the opposite, namely, that women are willing to do so and not just for their benefit. Although marriage plays a vital role in the lives of these women, it leads one to question whether or not they truly are willing to undergo genital modification.

A study conducted by Van der Kwaak argues that, in eradication programmes, the issue of female circumcision should not be seen solely in terms of its medical or clinical relevance.[61] It should become a central part of the complex discussion on how to create development policies that can reach women. This discussion should include how to reduce inequalities in access to services, land, and employment, and how to give them a major say in development interventions. For us to be able to uncouple gender identity and circumcision, we will need to accomplish the following. The viewpoint of Van der Kwaak is very similar to that of

58 B Shell-Duncan & Y Hernlund 'Female genital cutting: Social and cultural dimensions of the practice and the debates' in CR Ember & M Ember (eds) *Encyclopedia of medical anthropology. Health and illness in the world's cultures* (2004).

59 RM Abusharaf *Transforming displaced women in Sudan: Politics and the body in a squatter settlement* (2009) 160.

60 Salmon (n 26) 56.

61 A van der Kwaak 'Female circumcision and gender identity: A questionable alliance?' (1992) 35 *Social Science and Medicine* 777.

Nussbaum, who argues that women should be put above diversity as the level of desire for diversity must always come before (precede) claims of multiculturalism (of multicultural sensitivity and cultural integrity).

3 Articulating the self in the face of pain

To examine FGC during the early stages of academic research meant to condemn it without consideration of the cultural context. Radical feminist ideology dominates the public discourse. It is due to Fran Hosken's predecessor's portrayal of female circumcision that popular opinions about female circumcision have had a significant influence on the way people view the practice: 'FGCs are preparations for male aggression and are used to establish male dominance over women, not only in Somalia but also in other parts of Africa.'[62] In addition to Hosken, several radical feminists have drawn attention to the role of patriarchy in defining the motivation for external female genital intervention, as well as the need to regulate women's sexuality.[63] Historically, self-articulation narratives have been largely ignored in the feminist discourse within Western societies, which led to the creation of the so-called 'Third World Woman', which is presented as a monolithic, empowered subject[64] who represents African women as helpless with their lives gutted by a brutal patriarchal system.[65]

Apart from providing an academic perspective on 'Third World' problems, there is another reason or focus that will enable us to centre our attention on the autobiographical writings of women who were impacted by this experience. Additionally, the entire FGC sphere is dominated by men although the circumciser most often is a woman. Moreover, in cultures that practise FGC, speaking about the procedure is also considered taboo within their families. In these situations, how will women cope with the pain of such traumatic experiences? What kind of processing does she do with it or does it remain a silent part of the process of her life?

62 FP Hosken *The Hosken report: Genital and sexual mutilation of females* (1994).
63 AH Asaah & T Levin *Empathy and rage: Female genital mutilation in African literature* (2009).
64 CT Mohanty "Under Western eyes' revisited: Feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles' (2003) 28 *Signs* 333-334.
65 EK Silverman 'Anthropology and circumcision' (2004) 33 *Annual Review of Anthropology* 431.

Moreover, what are the effects of the notion that they have lost a crucial part of themselves in their lives and their sense of self? To answer these questions properly, it would be worthwhile to first clarify what context is implied by the word 'pain'. Nevertheless, according to the International Association for the Study of Pain, pain is 'an unpleasant and emotional experience caused by actual or potential tissue damage, or described as such damage'.[66] However, for me, the pain has a social and psychological dimension beyond its physiological manifestation. Utilising a variety of pain-research studies conducted by the eminent pain researcher, Merskey, who concluded that pain is a unique experience, which, at least, as a rule, cannot be broken down into organic and psychological components.[67] Jackson suggests that the pain experience is always both 'mind' and 'body', mental and physical since the pain experience is always embodied. Based on Jackson's interpretation of pain, physical and emotional pain are both synchronised.[68]

A powerful capacity of writing is the ability to hear the voices of those who have been suppressed. A suffering body does not have a voice, but when it finds a voice, it begins to share its story with the world. There is something that people cannot take from them, unlike parts of their bodies, and that is their soul. This is a topic that clearly illustrates the absurdity of the situation. The writer's word is such that in addition to expressing and regulating subjectivity, it might also be a means of translating it into values and principles by which all people can live their lives.[69]

There has been a recent increase in the number of female writers in Africa who are daring to address controversial issues associated with a woman's femaleness and her bodily appearance.[70] Even within the discourse of FGC in the West, the voices of women who were subjected to FGC were often overlooked.[71] The book *Possessing the secret of joy* (1992)

66 JE Jackson 'Pain and Bodies' in FE Mascia-Lees (ed) *A companion to the anthropology of the body and embodiment* (2011) 373.
67 Merskey as cited in Jackson (n 66).
68 Jackson (n 66).
69 J Harris *Signifying pain. Constructing and healing the self through writing* (2003).
70 D Naguschewski & F Veit-Wild *Preface* in D Naguschewski & F Veit-Wild *Body, sexuality, and gender – Versions and subversions in African literatures* (2005) xiii.
71 E Bekers 'Painful entanglements. The international debate on female genital excision in African and African-American literature' in I Hoving and others (eds) *Africa and its significant others. Forty years of intercultural entanglement* (2003) 45.

by Alice Walker raised public awareness that led to the production of Desert Flower (2009) by Waris Dirie and Infidel (2009) by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. It is worth mentioning that in African literature the female body appears as a 'body' on multiple levels. By articulating itself about the body of the Other – that is to say, postcolonial – through the 'writing back' movement, it attempts to move out of the gray zone of hybridity. Regardless of how central this theoretical body may be, it appears that Nuttall's consideration of the 'bodily' element of the body – as a body comprised of sensory organs – has been largely ignored in postcolonial discourse.[72]

In addition to acting as a way to retrieve and process a lost self, autobiographical writing also influences the individual's life.

4 Conclusion

As a topic that has gained increased attention over the past few years, particularly in the field of human rights, female genital alteration is gaining increasing popularity. Female genital cutting, by definition, deconstructs and reduces the female genital system to its most generalised state, which is necessary for women to be healthy: A woman without modified genitals is considered an odd woman. There were few critical discussions of FGC within the anthropology field during the 1980s. In recent years, these perspectives have been reshaped rapidly with scholars introducing FGC to the non-academic public through books such as *Desert flower* by Waris Dirie, or *Infidel* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, weakening the influence of cultural relativists. Recently, circumcision has occupied quite a large part of the public sphere, in general. Only a short while ago, debates about male circumcision were reintroduced into the German public environment. Such shifts are the most obvious indicator that there have been some profound changes in that discipline, although there still are academic debates over anthropologists or feminists who begin to criticise Western civilisations as they become entangled in the history of colonialism and become puppets of the Western elite.[73] In Nussbaum's

72 S Nuttall 'Dark anatomies in Arthur Nortje's poetry' in Naguschewski & Veit-Wild (n 70) 188.
73 Nussbaum (n 33).

view, it does not matter whether the description is that of one who is a determined critic of colonialism or not: [74]

> Any attempt by international feminists today to use a universal language of justice, human rights, or human functioning to assess lives like those of Vasanti and Jayamma is bound to encounter charges of Westernising and colonising – even when the universal categories are introduced by feminists who live and work within the nation in question. For, it is commonly said, such women are alienated from their culture, and are faddishly aping a Western political agenda.

Although the urging problem of FGC is among the most urgent problems facing society today, it still carries a strong post-colonial anxiety that is becoming toxic to an academic discussion that tries to present an objective view. As an example, it is noteworthy to mention that Somalia is a country that is still struggling with this problem. A strong argument cannot be used to rationally defend the cultural significance and benefits of FGC, as no evidence can be presented to defend them. As a countermeasure, we need to prevent the practice from spreading among those people who come from a society where FGC is regarded as the most natural and widespread.

A successful way to confront this problem is by preventing the practice among people who come from societies where FGC is well-established and common. Every day, we witness an increase in violence against women and incidences of FGC. Therefore, in my own opinion, FGC is more than an issue of individual liberties or physical integrity, but rather is an issue beyond those simple concerns. In part, this is due to the powerful patriarchal structure dictating the operation's necessity, thereby rendering women dependent on this treatment. This issue is much more thorough in its exploration of women's rights and development policy in general. It focuses on how to eliminate disparities in health care, land, and employment for women, as well as how to integrate their voices into development initiatives. When this first step is accomplished, we will be able to separate gender identity from circumcision.[75]

The argument that FGC is a disgraceful and prohibited practice may not be following allowing women to undergo such cosmetic surgery at the same time. In my opinion, the primary challenge resides within the disagreement between academics and those who are working in

74 Nussbaum (n 33) 36.
75 Van der Kwaak (n 61) 778.

non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are actively engaged in combating FGC. The importance of emphasising colonial history cannot be understated. This is because it gives us a better understanding of what it is like for those who hail from communities where this practice is the norm.

As a result, the conflict between scholars and radicals who advocate the rights of women, combined with our inability to unite to fulfil our goal, has distracted us from the truth that millions of underage girls are subjected to this practice annually. Moreover, no community of meaning is sufficiently significant to justify interference with the right of female children to be free from genital cutting.

From the preceding paragraph, it is not just academic researchers who are politicised. Instead, they are those who are actively seeking to prevent the practice of FGC without having sufficient knowledge of the culture of the local communities. This situation can be attributed to the lack of knowledge and understanding among activists and radical activists, and the moral values they adhere to for their activism. I am not seeking to argue that cultural relativism should be prohibited from academic discussions. Instead, I would argue that Western anthropologists, radical feminists, as well as African organisations advocating FGC are two extremes that have attempted to erode cultural relativism.

No doubt exploring the potential such a comparison can provide between conventional and non-Western methods of body modification carries with it some element of curiosity. Due to the similarity between Western body modifications such as genital cosmetic surgery and female genital cutting, I believe that the practice of female genital cutting will not be tolerated if the practice of genital cosmetic surgery is outlawed in industrialised nations. This chapter examines, despite the apparent absence of gray areas, some of the shades of the gray present in cultural relativism as well as in human rights advocates, more specifically, radical feminists.

The work of Franz Boas undoubtedly was influential on modern attitudes towards non-Western cultures and the need for a humane diversity of cultures. The fact that he influenced today's approach to non-Western cultures cannot be denied. As much as Boas introduced a form of cultural relativism to combat supremacy, contemporary relativists are no less superior in their invocation of universal tolerance. This is quite a paradox in itself. However, it is quite discouraging that the context of

cultural relativity is consistently ignored. The neglect of Western radical feminism as well as failing to challenge existing policies derived from radical feminism also is a serious problem.

Often, it appears that cultural relativism has become an alibi in modern relativistic discussions. Despite the deep roots of human kind's colonial history, it remains an ongoing argument. This has led to the creation of a mechanism of which the sole purpose is to shield Western scholars from accusations of neo-colonialism, as well as to preserve their integrity as academics. Academic integrity is pivotal when it comes to discussions about FGC. Participants seem to be in a state of uncertainty as there appears to be a lack of integrity on all sides. Anthropologists who are committed to strong relativism can lose their moral integrity, whereas those who reject FGC are bound to give up their integrity as anthropologists. Furthermore, FGC implies that women who are subjected to it sacrifice their bodily integrity. In contrast, women who refuse to have their bodies mutilated risk losing their social status and identity. Whose integrity is to be sacrificed here? It is a question worth asking.

Bibliography

Androus, ZT 'Critiquing circumcision: In search of a new paradigm for conceptualising genital modification' (2013) 3 *Global Discourse* 266

Abusharaf, RM *Transforming displaced women in Sudan: Politics and the body in a squatter settlement* (University of Chicago Press 2009)

Asaah, AH & Levin, T *Empathy and rage: Female genital mutilation in African literature* (Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd 2009)

Bankole, KO 'Clitorectomy' in Asante, MK & Mazama, A (eds) *Encyclopedia of African religion* (SAGE Publications 2009)

Bekers, E 'Painful entanglements. The international debate on female genital excision in African and African-American literature' in Hoving, I, Korsten, F-W & Van Alphen, E (eds) *Africa and its significant others. Forty years of intercultural entanglement* (Rodopi 2003)

Boyle, EH, Songora, F & Foss, G 'International discourse and local politics: Anti-female-genital-cutting laws in Egypt, Tanzania, and the United States' (2001) 48 *Social Problems* 524

Cassman, R 'Fighting to make the cut: Female genital cutting studied within the context of cultural relativism' (2008) 6 *Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights*

Dekkers, W, Hoffer, C & Wils, J-P 'Bodily integrity and male and female circumcision' (2005) 8 *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 179

Denniston, GC, Hodges, FM & Milos, MF 'Preface' in Denniston, GC, Hodges, FM & Milos, MF (eds) *Bodily integrity and the politics of circumcision – Culture, controversy, and change* (Springer 2006)

Denniston, GC, Hodges, FM & Milos, MF *Genital autonomy. Protecting personal choice* (Springer 2010)

Fettner, P 'Rationality and the origins of cultural relativism' (2002) 15 *Knowledge, Technology and Policy* 196

Fourcroy, JL 'Customs, culture, and tradition – What role do they play in a woman's sexuality?' (2006) 3 *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 954

Gluckman, M 'Les rites de passage' in Gluckman, M (ed) *Essays on the ritual of social relations* (Manchester University Press 1966)

Harris, J *Signifying pain. Constructing and healing the self through writing* (State University of New York Press 2003)

Hosken, FP *The Hosken report: Genital and sexual mutilation of females* (Women's International Network News 1994)

Jackson, JE 'Pain and bodies' in Mascia-Lees, FE (ed) *A companion to the anthropology of the body and embodiment* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2011)

James, S 'Reconciling international human rights and cultural relativism: The case of female circumcision' (1994) 8 *Bioethics* 1

Jean-Klein, I & Riles, A 'Introducing discipline: Anthropology and human rights administrations' (2005) 28 *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 173

Lewnes, A *Innocenti digest. Changing a harmful social convention: Female genital mutilation/cutting* (UNICEF & ABC Tipografia 2008)

Lindholm, C *Culture and identity. The history, theory, and practice of psychological anthropology* (Oneworld 2007)

Macklin, R *Against relativism: Cultural diversity and the search for ethical universals in medicine* (Oxford University Press 1999)

Mohanty, CT '"Under Western eyes" revisited: Feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles' (2003) 28 *Signs* 499

Nussbaum, M *Women and human development: The capabilities approach* (Cambridge University Press 2000)

Nuttall, S 'Dark anatomies in Arthur Nortje's poetry' in Veit-Wild, F & Naguschewski, D (eds) *Body, sexuality, and gender – Versions and subversions in African literatures* (Rodopi 2005)

Salmon, MH 'Ethical considerations in anthropology and archaeology, or relativism and justice for all' (1997) 53 *Journal of Anthropological Research* 47

Scupin, R *Cultural anthropology. A global perspective* (Pearson 2012)

Shah, NA *Women, the Koran and international human rights law: The experience of Pakistan* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers 2006)

Shell-Duncan, B 'The medicalisation of female "circumcision"': Harm reduction or promotion of a dangerous practice?' (2001) 52 *Social Science and Medicine* 1013

Shell-Duncan, B & Hernlund, Y 'Female genital cutting – Social and cultural dimensions of the practice and the debates' in Ember, CR & Ember, M (eds) *Encyclopedia of medical anthropology. Health and illness in the world's cultures* (Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers 2004)

Silverman, EK 'Anthropology and circumcision' (2004) 33 *Annual Review of Anthropology* 419

Svoboda, JS 'Genital integrity and gender equity' in Denniston, GC, Hodges FM & Milos, MF (eds) *Bodily integrity and the politics of circumcision – Culture, controversy, and change* (Springer 2006)

Toubia, N & Izett, S *Female genital mutilation: An overview* (World Health Organisation 1998)

Van der Kwaak, A 'Female circumcision and gender identity: A questionable alliance?' (1992) 35 *Social Science and Medicine* 777

Veit-Wild, F & Naguschewski, D 'Preface' in Veit-Wild, F & Naguschewski, D (eds) *Body, sexuality, and gender – Versions and subversions in African literatures* (Rodopi 2005)

Vincent, RJ *Human rights and international relations* (Cambridge University Press 1986)

Washburn, WE 'Cultural relativism, human rights, and the AAA' (1987) 89 *American Anthropologist* 939

Zechenter, EM 'In the name of culture: Cultural relativism and the abuse of the individual' (1997) 53 *Journal of Anthropological Research* 319