

GENDER

Tobe Levin and Augustine H. Asaah, eds. *Empathy and Rage: Female Genital Mutilation in African Literature*. Banbury, U.K.: Ayeobia Clarke Publishing Ltd., 2009. Distributed by Lynne Rienner Publishers. xxi + 218 pp. Notes and References. Index. €16.99/\$26.50 Paper.

This timely and provocative book addresses the controversial issue of female genital mutilation (FGM) and offers innovative and practical strategies for curbing its practices across the globe. It is arguably the first edited volume of essays on FGM as a literary theme. The contributors empathize with the victims of FGM and show their rage toward the perpetrators of this violent act.

The essays are organized into three sections, with an introduction that provides a background to the focus of the book. The section entitled "Empathizers" has four essays. Elizabeth Beker's "From Women's Rite to Human Rights Issue: Literary Explorations of Female Genital Excision since *Facing Mount Kenya (1938)*" offers a critique of precursor texts about FGM, including Kenyatta's, Huxley's, Ngũgĩ's, Waciuma's, and Likimani's. The second paper, Stephen Bishop's "Oppositional Approaches to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in African Literature," argues that literature is an ideal vehicle for discussing a wide range of issues, including feminism, human rights, and religious and political fundamentalism. The third paper, Tameka L. Cage's "Going Home Again: Diaspora, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Kingship in 'Warrior Marks,'" reveals that Alice Walker's concepts of "diasporic dreams" and "sisterhood" provide a lens through which one can understand the crucial issues in *Warrior Marks*, especially the politics of race, place, and trauma. The fourth paper is Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez's "Mother as a Verb: The Erotic, Audre Lorde and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)," which dwells on the injurious practice through theorizations of female sexuality and eroticism.

The second section of the book, "Enraged," includes four essays that center on writers who display much stronger anger against FGM. Augustine H. Asaah's "Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Ambivalence, Indictment and Commitment in Sub-Saharan African Fiction" investigates the treatment of FGM in selected African narratives. To him, FGM requires sustained scrutiny and debate until it is abolished because it is a sensitive, emotional issue. Anne V. Adams's "The Anti-female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Novel in Public Education: An Example from Ghana" focuses on Annor Nimako's *Mutilated* to argue for effective social change through literary texts in education. Tobe Levin's "What's Wrong with Mariam? Gloria Naylor's Infibulated Jew" offers a pungent critique of Naylor's *Bailey's Café*, especially her characterization of Mariam and the rationale behind having made the genitally mutilated character a Jew. Marianne Sarkis's "Somali Womanhood: A Re-visionary" contains a lament for the underexamined life-writings of

Somali women and the ways in which their life narrations have been left to the inventiveness of androcentric anthropologists and historians who tacitly approve of the practice of FGM as an aspect of traditional codes of honor.

The third section, "Engaged," comprises three papers that interrogate vehemently the practice of FGM. In "Excision and African Literature: An Activist Annotated Bibliographical Excursion," Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana attempts a diachronic reading of increasingly militant discourses on FGM in Nigeria from Nwapa to Aminata Maigaka. Muthoni Mathai's "Who's Afraid of Female Sexuality" is a creative nonfiction memoir on FGM written from the point of view of a physician, activist, and researcher. Nura Abdi and Leo G. Linder's "Tränen im Sand/Desert Tears" is a collection of excerpts dedicated to all the world's women, both victims and nonvictims of FGM. It offers a deconstruction of the various justifications given for the cultural practice and captures the agony and suffering of the victims.

Commendably, the book covers the spectrum of feelings that exist about the millions of girls and women who have undergone FGM. The strength of the book is its multidisciplinary approach to the issue. The authors have shown searing and unsparing temper, corroborating the time-honored role of writers, in the words of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, as the unacknowledged legislators of the world. They have apprehended the practice in a visceral way, with freshness and innovation.

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