

Master Thesis

Disciplining Bodies across Borders?

**Migrant Women's Attitudes towards Norwegian
Policies on Female Genital Cuttings**

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Abstract

This study aims at examining the issue of Female Genital Cuttings (FGC) in Norway, which is said to have one of the strictest laws on FGC. However, it has been argued that there is an incongruence between the research used by the Norwegian state and the independent research estimating the actual prevalence of the practice in the country. There has been no single individual convicted for FGC in Norway, and independent academic research has shown a negative attitude towards the practice among immigrant communities coming from practicing societies. Nevertheless, the Norwegian authorities have taken further stricter measures towards the practice. Since there is limited research reflecting the experiences and attitudes of immigrant women on the practice and policies in Norway, this work aims at involving the voices of these women and listen to their feelings and attitudes towards the Norwegian policy and discourse around FGC in Norway.

For this I have undertaken ten semi-structured interviews with women from the Somali and Eritrean community in Stavanger, Norway. Most of the women arrived as refugees/migrants and some were born in Norway. The theoretical framework behind this paper is Michel Foucault's concept of bio-power to explain the practice of FGC as a way to discipline women's sexuality. As social beings, we are disciplined by the society and culture around us, with each culture having its own form of discipline on the body. In some societies it may be FGC, in others plastic surgery.

The women interviewed emphasised the stigma towards the Somali community, some highlighting their Islamic faith as the reason for increased focus on them. Although, all women in this study agreed to some extent with the ban on FGC, they felt that the later additions to the law had led to hysteria and unjustified suspicion upon their community. All agreed that the Norwegian authorities should involve the Somali community when taking decisions related to FGC policies. Therefore, this paper concludes that further research needs to be done on the attitudes of the communities affected by the FGC policies in Norway. There should be more accurate knowledge of the prevalence of the practice in the country and amend the law in accordance with independent research. Most importantly, it is recommended that the Norwegian authorities work together with the affected communities so as to promote integration and eliminate the stigma, which is counterproductive to the former.

Keywords: *FGC, disciplinary practices, female body, Foucault, sexuality, immigrant women, Norway, refugees, Somalia.*

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Introduction

“To overlook the forms of subjection that engendered the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed.”

- Sandra Bartky (1988, p.27)

In the last few decades, the controversy and discourse in the Global North around Female Genital Cuttings has been steadily increasing to the point that such practice is casually discussed even on the public media. The most common definition taken in such public debates is the World Health Organisation’s definition: “...all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons” (2014). This increase in debates and concern around the practice is arguably due to the rising numbers of migrants from countries that carry it out arriving in the Global North (Behrent, 2011). The reason behind it becoming a topic of heavy discussion globally, is arguably, due to its dangers to women’s and girl’s physical and psychological health. Hence, FGC is regarded as a violation of Human Rights and violence against women and girls (WHO, 2014). However, for practicing societies the procedure is an ancient cultural ritual, a strategy to guarantee a successful future to women. Furthermore, “the practice is reinforced by the customary belief that circumcision maintains girls’ chastity, preserves fertility, ensures marriageability, improves hygiene, and enhances sexual desirability” (Nour, 2000). Due to its strong normativity, FGC is believed to be difficult to eradicate in the countries of origin. Therefore, it is also strongly maintained in the Global North that members of those practicing societies have continued to carry it out after migrating to non-practicing countries. Following Sandra Bartky’s quote above, this paper aims at breaking the silence and exploring the following questions: 1) *Does migration, the changing of contexts, change the attitudes towards a disciplinary cultural practice such as FGC?* 2) *What are the reasons behind the change in attitudes?* 3) *How is the Norwegian Government’s policy towards FGC perceived by those that come from practicing societies?*

Most countries in the Global North have taken already two or even three decades ago the strategy to make FGC illegal and punishable. This is the case of Norway, who introduced the ban on FGC in 1995 and amended it in 2004 making it one of the strictest laws on FGC. This criminalisation of the cultural practice gained international support (mostly in the Global North) due to its criticism as a Human Rights violation, since most

countries in the Global North deemed as “western”, uphold them as an essential value of their nation state. Human Rights are widely thought to be universal, therefore, countries that strongly adhere to them, mostly “western” countries, hold the belief that these rights should be respected by all. However, this has been defined as “ethnocentric universalism” (Mohanty 1984, pp.336), since Human Rights, although being held as universal values, are mainly influenced by “western” culture. Human Rights are said to have developed in the “west” out of a particular set of historical circumstances (Pollis & Schwab, 1979).

Nevertheless, this is widely ignored in the “western” countries, who introduce laws and policies based on Human Rights, with the belief that they dictate what is universally “right” and “wrong”. Since “western” countries are believed to be those that comply with Human Rights the most, this may provide them with a sense of false superiority when banning practices which they find unfitting with the “modern western” world, such as FGC. This ignorance of the influence of “western” culture on Human Rights and other rights and policies dictated in the Global North, may arguably go along the lines of the belief of the “west” as culture-less and the rest as cultured, with culture seen as something static. This laid out the dichotomy between the “west” as modern and developed, hence, superior, and the rest as cultured, underdeveloped, thus, inferior. Moreover, this argument was already used during colonisation to justify European actions in Africa, Asia and Latin America, making it very controversial. (Mezey, 2001).

Unfortunately, it seems this superiority still prevails among the “western” countries, where it seems that the law has been given such power, that once something is banned in the “west”, it is believed to be the rational way to proceed. The law has been turned into the absolute truth, once it is illegal, it means that it is not “right”. However, as Bourdieu argues, it is “not excessive to say that it (the law) creates the social world, but only if we remember that it is this world which first creates the law” (Bourdieu in Mezey, 2001, pp.46). Hence, it is often difficult to separate law from culture, as they end up being objects and subjects of each other.

Therefore, this thesis aims at critiquing the “west’s” feeling of superiority when condemning certain “non-western” (African/Asian) cultural practices as barbaric and patriarchal, and ignoring the “western” cultural practices still in place that may also be considered equally barbaric and patriarchal.

As David Newland argues “from ancient times men and women have modified their faces, hair and bodies temporarily or permanently (...) to enhance beauty, attractiveness, status, confidence (...) [through] make up, tattoos, scarification, circumcision, and now

plastic surgery” (2003, unnumbered). All such modifications of the body are dictated by society, by culture, as a way of disciplining the body. There may be different purposes behind each form of discipline. In the case of FGC since it is a practice that is believed to control sexuality, bio-power is the controlling force behind it. The term bio-power was coined by Michel Foucault and appeared initially in his first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Bio-power is said to be the force regulating the population, the human body as species. In particular, sexuality became the focus of bio-power since it is the origin of life, all biological developments such as illnesses as well as the reproduction of the population. “Through the themes of health, progeny, race, the future of the species, the vitality of the social body, power spoke of sexuality and to sexuality, the latter was not a mark or a symbol, it was an **object** and a **target**.” (Foucault, [1976]1990, pp.147, my emphasis) Hence, sexuality is targeted through norms on the body so as to regularise and discipline the population. Hence, since women’s bodies are seen as the site of reproduction, societies have developed different ways of controlling unwanted reproduction, different methods of birth control, starting by social norms sanctioning sexuality out of wedlock. Mostly, when its purpose was not for reproduction. (Foucault, [1976] 1990)

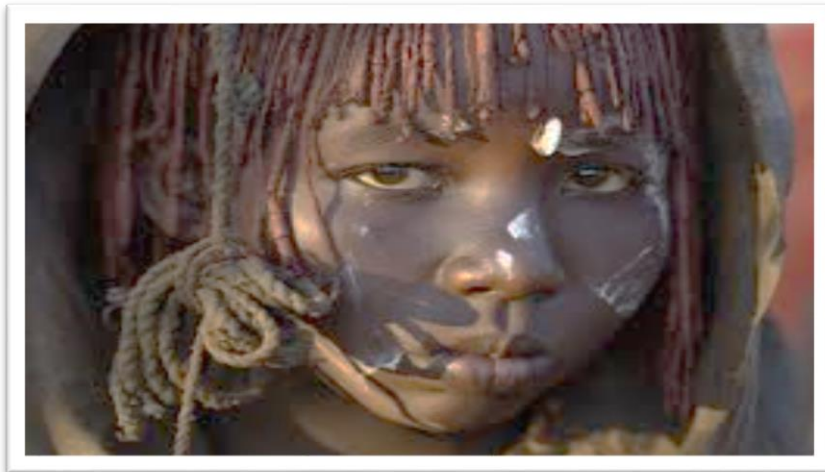
What are Female Genital Cuttings?

The most common word used by international agencies, NGOs and governments is Female Genital Mutilation. However, I have deliberately chosen not to use that term since I believe it imposes judgement upon the practice and those parents that decide to perform it on their daughters. It presents the parents and the practitioners as mutilators, implying violence and barbarism. Using such a term also disregards all the possible reasons why those undertaking the practice did so and also neglects their decision-making process. It may be even said that it tears their humanity from them. Therefore, I have decided to use the term Female Genital Cuttings, as suggested by Grydeland Ersvik (2013), since there are more than one type and form of cutting and reasons behind it. Furthermore, the WHO has divided it also into four types:

- **“Type 1:** Often referred to as clitoridectomy, this is the partial or total removal of the clitoris (a small, sensitive and erectile part of the female genitals), and in very rare cases, only the prepuce (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris).”
- **“Type 2:** Often referred to as excision, this is the partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora (the inner folds of the vulva), with or without excision of the labia majora (the outer folds of skin of the vulva).”

- **“Type 3:** Often referred to as infibulation, this is the narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora, or labia majora, sometimes through stitching, with or without removal of the clitoris (clitoridectomy).”
- **“Type 4:** This includes all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area” (WHO, 2014).

Hence, using a term such as “mutilation” to refer to such varied procedures, including pricking or piercing as Type 4 indicates, is a much exaggerated term and it seems to be used for ideological reasons to stir outrage and to gain support from non-practicing societies, mostly in the Global North. Moreover, the WHO definition arguably, also includes “western” practices such as clitoridectomy and any form of “cutting and repositioning” in the labia and vagina. Thus, since the majority of the international organisations and governments use the WHO definition, they are indirectly also condemning by definition practices such as vaginal plastic surgeries undertaken by “western” women. The following chapter examines this issue in more detail.



(Pokot girl. Source: www.independent.co.uk)

Relevance

Every year at least on the International Day against Female Genital “Mutilation”¹ if not more often, several articles are published on this practice in international newspapers such as “*The Guardian*”, “*The New York Times*”, “*The Independent*”, etc. Often these articles contain photographs such as the one above of a Pokot girl, a tribe in Kenya. The photographs usually show members of an African tribe, this way portraying those that practice FGC as *cultural, traditional and backwards*. In opposition to the “west” as a place of *freedom, modernity* and lacking the pressure of culture, unlike Africa which is portrayed as “land of torture” (Njambi, 2004). Arguably, this dichotomy is not only coming from superiority continuously exercised since colonisation, but also hypocritical, since the “west” is not free of performing culturally and socially imposed rituals on the body, mostly on women’s bodies. In the “west” there is the tendency to place culture and tradition as contrary to modernity, hence, portraying the “west” as lacking a culture. However, culture is an integral part of modernity. The placing of these two in antithesis is argued to come from the association of culture as religion, which is the cornerstone of many nations today. Yet, the idea of the modern nation-state was consolidated at the time of the Enlightenment, a time characterised by secular ideas. Hence, promoting until now the belief that the modern state should be secular and that religion should be practiced in private. Moreover, the Enlightenment also advocated the idea of religion as “irrational and superstitious” and instead scientific rational should be preferred. (Moore, 2007) Thus, with culture being very much fundamental in modernity, those so-called

¹ I write mutilation with quotation marks here because it is the term used by the campaigns but not the one I would like to use, this is to show as with other words in quotation marks, my disagreement or problem with the word.

modern states such as those in the “west” do have culture, which influences certain rituals inflicted on the body. The critique of FGC in Africa by the “western” anti-FGC discourse can be deemed as hypocritical, since a similar ritual was practiced in the “west”, of which it is not often talked about. The oldest evidence of such ritual was found in a Greek papyrus of the year 163 BC. However, a more researched practice is that of *clitoridectomies* dating as far back as the 2nd century, and being performed all the way up to the mid-20th century in some countries. This practice was recommended by physicians and its reasons have changed along the centuries. Hence, here we find the “*scientification*” and *rationalisation* of a cultural practice. The “*scientific*” explanation for *clitoridectomy* in the 2nd century was to prevent or even “cure” lesbianism, in the 10th to avoid masturbation and from the 17th century onwards it was recommended against nymphomania and hypertrophy of the female genitals. The procedure “stopped women and girls from actions that would drain energy away from their reproductive capabilities and return them to the state of reserved womanhood” (Green, 2005 pp.162). The practice was done to European middle-class women in the 18th and 19th centuries, and is believed to have been a way to preserve that “race” in fear of its demise due to the growing lower class and influx of immigrants. (Green, 2005) Therefore, this practice can be explained as Foucault’s bio-power intervention as a way to control the population, by limiting extra marital sexual intercourse, which is what clitoridectomy was meant to prevent, any sexual deviance that would prevent the reproduction of the “race”. All those physicians that performed such surgeries justified its necessity based on “*scientific*” explanations. Some of these were the “cure” of psychological problems and even illnesses such as epilepsy. These can be claimed to be “*scientifications*” of practices which are based on cultural beliefs, as many of them were later proven to be inaccurate and not really curing any of the mentioned illnesses. In USA and England these surgeries were performed until the 1950s in an effort to emphasise the gender differences by cutting the part of the female genitalia that was believed to have male aesthetics. (Green, 2005)

Clitoridectomies ceased then but were taken over by *intersex genital surgeries*, which is the modification of a child’s genitalia conforming it to either gender because of being born with abnormal genital organs. This may have made the gender recognition tricky, such as a girl with “abnormally” large clitoris. This surgery is performed to “*normalise*” the children’s genitalia so as to avoid embarrassment of the child in the future. Although, the surgery is not done for medical purposes it is still practiced by doctors and in that way “*scientificated*” and *rationalised* so as to justify it. Their genitals are cut and stitched to make them look like what is believed to be a “*normal*” girl or boy, and these standards are set by either the doctors or the parents. Thus, bodies have to meet specific social

standards of either maleness or femaleness, if they are somewhere “in between” they may not be accepted and may be discriminated (Ehrenreich and Barr, 2005).

More recently, there has been an increase in a practice similar to intersex genital surgeries in USA, Australia, New Zealand and England. However, it is called differently: *vaginoplasty*, *labiaplasty* or *designer vaginas*. Since there are different types of plastic surgery performed on the vagina and vulva there are also different reasons behind each of them. Initially, it was a procedure done to tighten the vagina muscles after giving birth. This was also called LVR “Laser Vaginal Rejuvenation” and in most of the cases this was not done due to any health complications or sexual dysfunctions, but to improve the sexual experiences of women but mainly their male partners. Some of the patients wanted to undergo this surgery to recreate the experience of virginity for their male partners and some others to keep their men from sleeping with younger women. Hence, the procedure was undergone under the belief that men preferred tight and young vaginas (Green, 2005). The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery claimed that from 2013 to 2014 the number of surgeries performed rose 50% (ASAPS, 2014).

The removal or modification of the labia was done out of the patients’ embarrassment of having too large labia, hence, the reasons for these procedure was in 90% of the cases an issue of aesthetics rather than of medical necessity. (For more see footnote) ²

In the UK there has been recently a discussion about banning *designer vaginas* claiming its similarity with female genital circumcision, which is already banned in the country. There has been a significant outrage from the plastic surgeons and the patients who have undergone such procedures. They believe *vaginoplasty* not to be at all similar to FGC since according to them the idea behind FGC is preventing women from having pleasure, and *vaginoplasty* is the opposite, it is to enhance a woman’s (and man’s) sexual pleasure and well-being (Sanghani, 2015). However, there have been several

² This is believed to be a result of the increasing sexualisation of society as well as the extra emphasis on appearance in the current society. When asking doctors, Fiona Green (2005) writes that they believed that women’s desires to alter their vagina’s appearance was due to the influence of media images of women’s genitalia, mostly coming from pornography. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has explained that one of the reasons behind the sharp increase of such surgeries mostly among young women has been due to “increasing trends in pubic hair removal, exposure to idealized images of genital anatomy, and increasing awareness of cosmetic vaginal surgery” (2016, p.2).² These images not only available in pornography may have created an image of the “perfect” vagina that is mostly desired by men, hence, driving women to sculpt their genitalia accordingly. According to the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, there has been an 80% rise in *labiaplasties* between 2014 and 2015. The most alarming issue is that the vast majority of these surgeries has been undergone teenage girls sometimes even under 18 years old (TASfAP, S. 2015). ² Sometimes medical professionals and patients try to justify the surgery arguing that they had sexual dysfunction or other problems. However, the majority of the cases of “labiaplasty” or putting one’s vagina or vulva under the knife is as previously mentioned for beautification purposes, hence a “desire ‘to look good in yoga pants and bikinis’” (Daily Mail UK, 2015).²

cases where such surgical interventions have resulted in pain and also losing sexual sensitivity hence, lack of sexual pleasure. Thus, *vaginoplasties* can have similar results to FGC. Yet, unlike it is usually portrayed in the media by the anti-FGC campaign, women who have undergone FGC do feel sexual pleasure, even orgasms, as the nervous endings are still to be found (Ahmadu, 2007). FGC is practiced in many societies for aesthetic reasons, because it is believed that the clitoris and labia are vulgar and similar to male genitalia. FGC is also performed for hygienic reasons, since vaginas with no odour, smooth and dry are believed to be preferred by men. Hence, FGC is performed to fulfil a certain ideal of the female genitalia approved by society, for which *vaginoplasty* is also undergone, to feel more attractive to men and/or mostly to enhance the men's sexual pleasure (with a tight and virgin-like vagina). Thus, the "genital ideal may differ historically and cross-culturally, yet to be a woman is to have a specific culturally prescribed and approved form of genitalia" (Green, 2005, pp.177). As argued by Kathy Davis (1991) as well as Foucault ([1976]1990) there is the belief across cultures that women's bodies ought to be corrected and controlled "to meet the norms of acceptable femininity" (Davis, 1991, pp.36).

Those that argue against the similarity between *vaginoplasty* and FGC, hold that one of the main reasons behind *vaginoplasty* is a woman's psychological and sexual well-being, defending the procedure with medical and health justifications to explain its necessity (Sanghani, 2015). However, just like with FGC, those women's psychological well-being and sexual satisfaction are influenced by social and cultural norms. As it is done often, "western" cultural norms and practices are *rationalised* and "*scientified*", hiding its cultural component to justify them.

The main argument of those critical of banning *vaginoplasties* is that these are done with the full consent of the patient and with her full choice, unlike FGC, which is argued to be forced on to underage girls. This latter argument is not always the case as many young girls are very happy to undergo the procedure, and some even beg their parents to be circumcised (*See interview quotes below*). It may be disputed that they are still children and may not know what is best for them but if the main issue is with the consent, then the girls are very often in agreement with the practice. The reason for this may be due to the internationalisation of social expectations, FGC has been practiced for so many centuries that it has been deeply embedded and surfaces in the form of self-discipline (Foucault, [1976] 1990). This, arguably, may also be the case with the women desiring to modify their vaginas and labia with *vaginoplasties*, they may have internalised the social expectations of how women's vaginas need to look and feel for men. Not complying with the societal expectations may be affecting their psychological and sexual

well-being as well as being afraid of feeling social sanctions, such as attracting less men. This may result in fear of not getting married, not having children, which in “western” societies is not as humiliating as in other societies, but may still have an impact on women’s psyche. Hence, in both cases, FGC and *vaginoplasties*, we are talking about conforming to a social norm, one through more open societal discipline and the other with a more internalised self-discipline respectively.

Moreover, when looking at the WHO definition: “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons” (WHO, 2014), it could be argued that *vaginoplasties* are also integrated in the definition, since most of them are not performed for medical reasons. Although, as seen before, several doctors and patients may claim that the plastic surgery procedures were undertaken to “cure” sexual dysfunctions, the causes of these are very often not physical but psychological.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, in the “west” the intersex surgery may also be likened to FGC since it is also a practice that shapes the body aiming to conform it to cultural norms of gender difference. It is not undergone due to medical complications but just as FGC parents make their children undergo the surgery to “normalise” them and avoid the child’s embarrassment and to help her/him succeed in the future. When discussing the issue of concern, arguably most commonly both practices are performed on children without their concern, “violating their sexual and gender autonomy” (Ehrenreich & Barr 2005, pp.114). Both practices are painful with possible severe physical and psychological after effects (Ehrenreich & Barr 2005). However, intersex surgery, just like *vaginoplasty*, is not usually penalised in those countries that have criminalised FGC, such as Norway. Yet, the law reads: “The prohibition laid down in the Act applies to all forms of female genital mutilation where the genital organs are injured or permanently changed.” (regjeringen.no) By this wording of the law, all operations that change the vagina, intersex, *vaginoplasty* and FGC would be illegal, as long as they are not undertaken due to medical complications. The Norwegian law adds that the law does not “apply to the correction of congenital abnormalities or lawful sex-change operations” (regjeringen.no). Thus, by allowing genital surgeries for those with “congenital abnormalities” meaning those born with not “normal” looking genitals, the law can be seen as culturally biased accepting “western” forms of female circumcision. Hence, this shows the way the “west” often aims at rationalising and “*scientificating*” practices that are indeed culturally induced. Yet, only to those that belong to the “western” culture. Other “non-western” practices are seen as “cultural”, “barbaric”, “traditional” and in need to be abandoned.

As mentioned earlier, Norway is considered to have one of the strictest laws against FGC and although the policies have been in place since 1995, there has not been the corresponding debate neither among academics nor involving the immigrant communities, who may be affected by it. The few research that has involved the views and attitudes towards the practice in Norway of immigrant communities from countries with high prevalence, such as Somalia and Eritrea, has been mainly conducted by a small number of researchers: Abdi A. Gele, Elise B. Johansen and Sara Johnsdotter. These investigations have shown that the majority of the participants, members of the Somali community in Norway, have changed their attitudes towards FGC, they have started rejecting such practice. However, as it will be further examined below, this has been continuously ignored by the authorities, who still persistently hold to the belief that FGC is practiced by a large proportion of mostly the Somali, Eritrean and Ethiopian community in Norway. Since previous research has been disregarded, there seems to be more need to engage in more research involving the voices of those communities, expressing their rejection towards FGC. Moreover, it appears that previous research has been lacking a strong theoretical background for the cultural practice and the change in attitudes towards it. Therefore, this thesis aims at providing such theoretical framework, to bolster the conclusions which shall be drawn from the investigations. Finally, this paper also aims at filling the gap in the literature regarding the opinions and experiences of the members of immigrant communities regarding the policies against FGC.

Hence, since this paper departs from the hypothesis that the practice of FGC has almost been abandoned in Norway, it is necessary to ask the first question: *Does migration, the changing of contexts, change the attitudes towards a disciplinary cultural practice such as FGC?* Since this question is relatively shortly answered, a further question is needed, that is: *What are the reasons behind the change in attitudes?* Finally, since the paper puts a strong focus on the Norwegian policies towards FGC the next question is asked: *How is the Norwegian Government's policy towards FGC perceived by those that come from practicing countries?* Thus, the following chapter presents the Norwegian policy on FGC and the discourse among the authorities and also the media.

The Norwegian Context

Lack of data

As mentioned earlier, due to the flows of migration from FGC practicing countries to Europe, the practice is believed to have migrated as well. Although there being lack of reliable data on the extent of the practice in Norway, the practice is seen as a big issue by the authorities and often the public. Therefore, since 1995 there exists a law illegalising the practice. The law made all forms of circumcision on girls and women a crime. "Act no. 74 of 15 December 1995 no. 74 relating to the prohibition of female genital mutilation § 1. Any person who wilfully performs a procedure on a woman's genital organs that injures or permanently changes the genital organs will be penalized for female genital mutilation" (regjeringen.no). The penalty can reach up to 10 years of imprisonment and expulsion from the country for foreigners. Even if the girl was taken to another country and the procedure was undertaken there, parents can also be convicted in Norway. Moreover, if there is suspicion of a girl being at risk of circumcision and she is leaving the country, the police has the right to keep her passport under the suspicion of being circumcised either in her home country or somewhere it is not illegal (UDI, n.d.).

Regarding the origin of the migrants in Norway from countries practicing FGC, the Somalian community, those not born in Norway and of Somalian-born parents, are not only the largest group in Norway, (almost 30,000) out of the list of countries with most prevalence of FGC, but it is also from the country with most incidence of the practice in the world (Gele et al, 2012). Other groups of migrants in Norway from the countries with high FGC prevalence are Eritrea (14,741), Ethiopia (6,716), Sudan (3,123), and Egypt (6,716) (SSB, 2015).

Nevertheless, there is a lack of information regarding how many out of those groups of migrants are girls at risk of FGC. In 2007, 3800 girls were believed to be old enough for circumcision. In 2006 and 2007, there was a large number of reports of suspicion of FGC. However, there were only 15 cases of circumcision confirmed, yet, finally no one was convicted (Gele et al, 2012).

Generally in Europe, there is a great absence of reliable data regarding the prevalence of FGC due to "under-reporting and incomplete data" according to the European Commission (n.d.). In Norway a report in 2012 detected little or no synchronisation on the data collection methodology regarding the extent of FGC in the country.

Nevertheless, the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress recently published a report estimating 8.000 girls and women potentially at risk of FGC (Ziyada, Norberg-Schulz & Johansen, 2016). This was calculated using the extrapolation model, which is the one often used also when evaluating the predominance of FGC in Europe.

This model used in Norway is as simple as calculating the number of women and girls coming from countries with FGC prevalence of over 30%, and from those, counting those that are in customary age for circumcision or younger. This model is believed, even by the authors themselves to be problematic and not very accurate as it may ignore the different levels and types of circumcision practiced by different ethnicities. The authors claim that this may result in an under or overestimation of figures, as there seems to be increasing qualitative research conducted that is showing a shift in attitudes towards FGC among practicing communities in Norway and other receiving countries. The report claims that this model is the only available due to lack of population based representative surveys (Ziyada, Norberg-Schulz & Johansen, 2016). Hence, the Norwegian government, which bases its policies towards FGC on this report, seems to be ignoring the voices of migrants from practicing countries stating their rejection of the practice. The following voices of women of Somali origin living in Norway are part of a number of interviews carried out as part of this thesis with women from the Somali and Eritrean community in Norway.

"I'm with the law, banning FGM, I am happier with no FGM in this world." (Somali woman 3)

"I know it's torturing and I know it's against the will of somebody (...) a lot of things can happen to that person and it's a torture and I'm so happy that we have a law, which is saying to ban FGM" (Somali woman 2)

"It was a culture and it was bad, it was a kind of torture and now we are happy it stopped." (Somali woman 5)

"We are supporting the ban of FGM" (Somali woman 4)

"It is something we should stop, cos it's not part of our religion it's more a cultural thing." (Somali woman 1)

“FGM wasn't something that was important for me (...) my opinion is that this is one part of the culture that you could throw away” (Somali woman 6)

“My parents have never supported it, female circumcision (...) when I was living in Somalia that's when I learnt that it actually existed, I didn't know it even existed, I didn't know anything about it when I went to Somalia.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

Not only were all ten women I talked to against the practice but also they were very confident that other Somalis in Norway are also against it or not daring to circumcise their daughters anymore.

“No I don't think it's happening in Norway. Families are aware that if they do that they are going to jail for 6 years and nobody is ready to go to jail.” (Somali woman 4)

“I'm Somali, and I'm with the Somali community and I know a lot of Somalis which I met here, some of them I used to know in my country and some of them I met here. So according to the people that I know, who are married, who have children, let us say that half of the society that I know, I never recall them thinking about doing FGM to their children” (Somali woman 2)

What is more the majority also thought that people in Somalia were slowly abandoning the practice or reducing the amount that is circumcised:

“With the years it got better and better and the circumcision got milder and milder. For example my mother is worse than me, I am 40 and I don't have the worst one and the girls that are younger than me are better and better and I got circumcised of a doctor not in the home.” (Somali woman 1)

“In Somalia people wanted to get rid of it in the first place, so it isn't something that all Somalis hold do or die, so many don't affiliate with the practice.” (Somali woman 6)

Despite the voices of the Somali community in Norway also in former researches, stating their rejection of the practice, the authorities and the media have accepted the estimation of the number of girls at risk of FGC in Norway of the above mentioned report.

Nevertheless, as it is common of the media, the Norwegian news channel NRK has not bothered to mention the possible inaccuracies in the estimation of FGC. Regardless of these evidences for change in beliefs about FGC among mostly the Somali community

in Norway, NRK has recently published the following headlines: “Up to 8,000 children at risk of female genital mutilation” followed by a subtitle highlighting that due to these numbers more prevention is needed according to researchers (Omland, 2016). These sort of sensationalist media reports reach the majority of the population. However, the numerous researches based on interviews with members of the Somali community stating their rejection of the practice do not seem to reach beyond the academics. When asking Somali women about their thoughts on these 8000 girls at risk in Norway most of them were surprised, they could not believe it, others were outraged and others even though they had never heard of anyone in the Somali community being in favour of it were almost convinced by the authority and credibility of the so-called statistics.

“I don't think there exists a family in Norway that if they are aware of the damages of the practice I don't think they will go back home and do their children. I never heard about a family who wanted to do that.” (Somali woman 4)

“I think the news and the Norwegian government are exaggerating this issue. The Norwegian government should wait until something happens, if something doesn't happen, I think they are trying to create and issue for those families. Nobody knows the mentality of these people and the country they come from can be different. I think the government should wait and see if something happens.” (Somali woman 4)

Just as this woman highlights, there are no cases of convictions due to FGC in Norway, hence, such exaggerations should not be made without any proper evidence. However, this seems to be the modus operandi of the Norwegian policy makers as argued by researchers Olav Elgvin and Beret Bråten. In their report of 2014 called “Research-based policy?” as the title indicates, they examined whether Norwegian policy draws on its corresponding research. They found out that several policies such as those related to FGC had shifted from being based on dialogue and knowledge, to be more focused towards confrontational prevention.

“Actually in the statistics, something that I know they are doing is generalising, not everybody in that specific group is going to do it. If for example those 8000 children are still at risk, it can be something that they exaggerate, and it can be something that it's a reality, which we don't know. I wonder if the Norwegian Government is trying to be psychological against FGM.” (Somali woman 2)

This woman believes that the government may be exaggerating the numbers of those at risk as a strategy to tackle FGC, make people scared and this way reach its abandonment. Other women were outraged at the number and claimed that many families in Norway had decided to stop practicing.

“It's wrong, it's not a valid number, cos everybody can be at risk of something (...) you have to see people individually, like the cases, so many of those 8000 girl they have families where this is not important, they have families, that stopped practicing.” (Somali woman 6)

Just as this woman, others also mentioned how the way of calculating the girls at risk of FGC in Norway was not valid as it was a pure generalisation without taking into account specific cases. For example the woman below, she was born in Norway, was not circumcised and she was not planning to do her daughter either. Yet, her daughter would technically be one of those 8000 girls at risk of being circumcised just because of being born with Somali origin.

“I was born in this country and we are part of those in this country who we never saw circumcision, it is nothing that we talked about. I never knew what it was before it was on the news. I was like, what is this? (laughs) because it is not something that you talk about.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 9)

As she explains, she heard about FGC in the Norwegian news, not in her family, which once again shows how the media puts more attention on the practice than those communities that come from practicing countries.

As Norwegian researcher Aud Talle explains, the media very seldom publishes information on those that have abandoned the practice but rather on those that continue practicing (Talle, 2007). Firstly, this results in receiving public support to having such strict measures towards certain immigrant groups believed to be practicing FGC in Norway. Some even think that the government is trying to get support and funding for the project:

“The way it looks it's like this project that has to have funding so have to have big numbers to make it continue rolling.” (Somali woman 6)

Additionally, it contributes to feeding those generalising and discriminatory views about immigrants, mostly those from certain countries, and what is more, to be equally

discriminatory to those born and raised in Norway. This is the case of this woman, born in Norway of Somali origin. She explains how she felt insulted when reminded at the clinic that female circumcision was illegal in Norway, not being circumcised nor thinking of circumcising her daughter.

"I was born in this country, My daughter is 3 years old, when I was at the control for vaccination, she had to tell me: you know that you can't do this and this and I was like: yeah I know. But what does that mean? I'm also at risk of doing this to my daughter? Is she also part of the 8000? That doesn't make sense just because, will they be asking her daughter, oh we know you are Somali so..." (Norwegian-Somali woman 9)

Moreover, the Institute of Social Research in 2008 published a report that claimed that FGC was not a great problem in Norway. In 2014 also the Institute of Labour and Social Research declared that the Government of Norway approached the issue of FGC with much stricter attitude than it was necessary as FGC was proving not to be significantly prevalent in Norway.

Previously mentioned report by Elgvin and Bråten's (2014) supports this premise, as it mentioned that since the introduction of the law against FGC in 1995 there had been no convictions. Furthermore, only 13 cases of potential risk of being circumcised were reported to the Child Welfare Services between 2009 and 2013.

However, Solveig Horne, Minister of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion responded in regards to this that for her the numbers were not important. She argued that as long as there was one girl circumcised, there was an illegal activity conducted and this was a problem to be dealt with. Horne also mentioned that the Government would introduce obligatory gynaecological examination for girls as she believes it is a way to send a clear signal to immigrant families to realise that FGC is an illegal practice in Norway (Vojislav Krekling, et al., 2014). It seems then that for Solveig Horne and the Norwegian government it is not that much about the concern for these women's health and lives but more "about the appropriation of women as political symbols (...) the issue at stake is not the women's own interest but, rather, the consolidation of the powers of others to define those interests" (Winter, 1994: 939 in Njambi 2004, pp. 281). This, as argued by Wairimu Ngaruiya Njambi (2004) is what the anti-FGC controversy is actually about. Moreover, it seems that the best way to tackle the issue of FGC is by intimidating immigrants and making them scared of the authorities.

Regarding the compulsory gynaecological check-ups, already in 2000 there was a debate around them in the media and among politicians. Firstly, the conversation circled around whether to introduce this measure for all girls or only girls with origins in countries with FGC prevalence, also called “risk groups”. Finally, the government in 2007 decided that examinations were not to be mandatory, instead those girls and women with origins in countries with higher prevalence than 30% were given the option to voluntarily undergo the check-up. However, if this was refused, they could be reported to the authorities as potentially being at risk of circumcision (Teigen & Langvasbraten, 2009). This may result in families having to make their daughters undergo the check-up against their (family’s and girl’s) will in fear of being reported. This cannot be considered voluntary action, as people are in a way coerced to do it. The Somali community’s reaction to these has been of outrage, calling it a humiliating and invasive measure:

*“This just developed a **hysteria**, there is a lot of girls being checked but they haven't found anything yet. The whole ‘we have to look at their private parts’ is the downside of it. This mass hysteria, oh circumcision, oh no, all the girls have been circumcised, we have to check their private parts. There is a lot of people that **feel humiliated** by it, this is not something that the Somali majority wants, it's a practice that we want to be done with and so the whole suspicion it is not good for anything” (Somali woman 6)*

*“I think that it's an **invasion** I don't think I would have been very glad if that happened, I understand why but it's like you don't trust me it's like your violating, it's my body it's not your sake to check at least on me you get me?” (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)*

The debate surrounded around whether The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) had the right to make gynaecological examinations as a condition to renew the residence permit. Later the Ministry of Justice claimed that this would be an “interference with the child’s integrity and it would have a negative effect on integration.” As of now the gynaecological examination is compulsory if there is a suspicion of the girl having been circumcised. For now the UDI only has the duty to inform asylum seekers and newly arrived migrants about the illegality of FGC in Norway. For the asylum seeker’s application to be accepted he or she must sign an information sheet confirming that they have comprehended the Norwegian law (udiregelverk, n.d.).

Feeling targeted

Having such a law against a specific cultural practice that comes from the outside may also be considered as a way of sending a specific message. The prohibition of FGC could instead be integrated in the Child Act, making any violent or sexual act towards a child illegal. However, it is believed that by having a separate law for FGC, whether it is a strategy or not, reinforces the image of non-Western immigrant groups as primitive and criminals. This then helps to feed the beliefs about immigrants bringing crime and being dangerous that the more conservative population has. Hence, it justifies the hyper-vigilant and discriminatory attitude towards them, stressing that they should be fortunate to be in Norway, but that this can change any time if they do not stick to the rules (Macklin, 2006).

"I understand it's a problem but there are ways to attack it, the importance is to take it by the roots and to not point fingers at people and humiliate them." (Norwegian-Somali woman 9)

Many of the women I talked to highlighted that Somalia was not the only country that practiced it and that they felt that Somalis were specially targeted by the media and government.

"I remember seeing it in the library, they would have leaflets (about FGC) copied in different languages, especially in Somali, I remember seeing it I was thinking why is all printed in Somali and English." (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

"It's not just the Somali people, all the neighbouring countries Egypt, Sudan, and a lot of other African countries." (Somali woman 1)

"I've noticed that they focus too much on Somalia a lot more than maybe other country that has it. (...) I hear only Somalia, Female Genital Mutilation, then it's kinda offensive in a sense, it's like saying that's the only thing we are known for so that plays a role because every time, not in my class but in my brother's class when they watched anything about Somalia it has to be FGM, it's the only thing they talk about, and it's like come on! There is much more to the country than that, it's kinda like you are discriminating when the practice is pretty common in the East of Africa, so that victimisation has to be removed first of all of you are really serious about this don't target one society." (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

Also Somalis in Sweden have expressed their frustration towards the constant feeling of being under suspicion which such a law creates. They also wondered how many generations of Somalis would be kept under the radar just for being ethnically Somali (Johnsdotter, 2007).

The Duty to Avert

In 2004 the law was revised and bolstered with the duty to avert. “By establishing a punishment of up to one year in prison or a fine, the duty to avert is meant to motivate professionals (health, education, etc) to act on their suspicions of an imminent FGM procedure” (Lien & Schultz, 2014, pp. 197). Health practitioners and education professionals also have the duty to report to the Child Welfare Services if a girl’s health is affected by FGC. This law which was approved with little public, media or expert debate is based on the subjective opinion of individuals about migrants in general, or those from specific countries and their cultural ascription. This way the law may be approving drawing on conclusions that are prejudiced and stereotypical of migrant girls and women (Lien & Schultz, 2014).

Yet, the Norwegian Government believes this to be an efficient and neutral way to prevent FGC, and to aid those with duty to avert they have been provided with guidelines to identify the signs that could potentially set the alarm of possible risk of FGC. This “formalized knowledge creates the illusion that a reliable and qualified interpretation can be made based on the list alone” (pp. 207, Lien & Schultz, 2014).

These signs on the guideline can be: that the girl’s mother, sisters, female relatives have been circumcised, that the girl seems to be suffering from abuse, that her family may be planning to travel to their country of origin, that the parents want to extend her holidays, and of course that the parents of the girl are originally from countries that practice FGC. However, these can be claimed to be very vague signs of a possible risk of FGC, and for professionals to have to be constantly aware of these signs out of fear of not fulfilling their duty to avert, it may put them under stress and become very sensitive possibly resulting in exaggerating some cases (Lien & Schultz, 2014).

When asking Somali women in Norway about the duty of health and educational personal to report suspicions based on these guidelines they thought first that many of the situations were exaggerated such as stopping a girl from leaving Norway to visit Somalia. There could indeed be many reasons why families with girls under customary age would want to go back to Somalia, for example because the country had been getting safer and safer as mentioned by one informant. The women also emphasised once more that no

family would think of taking such a risk even those few who may still agree with the practice. Most did not like the scandalous approach of preventing girls to get circumcised.

“It's ok when you have a nurse telling you, giving you information because it's in private and trying to give you helpful information, but the problem is when you have people stop you at the airport and they are like you can't go anywhere because we think maybe you are taking your daughters to circumcise them and make like a big scene out of it.” (Somali woman 6)

“Maybe it can be the government's and the health worker's suspicion, but even today in Somalia the government and we have a lot of organisations that are lobbying or advocating to stop FGM in the country, so I don't think a Somalian family go back home and circumcise their children.” (Somali woman 5)

*“I heard that the authorities would be standing on the airport for any Somali family that is taking their daughter back home because they fear that she was going to get through the whole process. I remember a lot of people getting worried thinking, because a lot of people were thinking of **going home cos it is more safer**, and I heard some people got refused, cos I thought they were looking at the age of the girl, if she is under age, she would be put through that process. So Norway is pretty scary as well, and I think the ones that live here know for sure that's illegal, you can get into prison for some years I think, but more than that is who is willing to do that I don't think that any parent would be willing to do that, specially getting arrested and things like that.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)*

Moreover, some scholars (Johnsdotter 2007, Lien & Schultz 2014) have highlighted the controversy of this law as it may put the professional in a position between the obligation to report suspicion of FGC and violating the Discrimination Act. (“...indirect discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, national origin, descent, skin colour, language, religion or belief....” (Lien & Schultz, 2014, pp.198). More pressure is put on caregivers, who if reporting a case that turns out without evidence, can be charged with infringing the Discrimination Act (Lien & Schultz, 2014).

Hence, not only may this law contribute to increasing stereotyping but also presents the practice as a crime, which is arguably not the most culturally sensitive and efficient way to reach its abandonment. This fierce law may be argued to be more adequate in a situation where FGC is largely practiced, which according to several researches is not the case in Norway. This highlights how policy in Norway is not based on knowledge but

rather on confrontation and an anti-immigrant agenda in agreement with Elgvin and Bråten (2014).

Moreover this law, believed to be one of the strictest in the world (Gele et al 2015), may be interpreted as a strong belief by the Norwegian Government and possibly society about migrants' sturdy attachment to their culture and little possibility of reflection and change after migration. This is an essentialist idea of culture arguing that the only rationale they have for continuing the practice is because of their culture. This portrays migrants so irrational and barbaric that they do not even think about why the practice is done, but follow culture blindly. However, FGC rather than "just" a cultural practice, is believed to be a strategy, to be able to succeed in society. Once the strategy has no longer any meaning, such as in Norway, the practice is usually abandoned (Talle, 2007).

The civilised "west" and the barbaric "other"

I do not want to delve into a discussion of the nature of human rights. However, I would like to examine the way that the Norwegian state and its laws present women from certain cultures as victims of culture in line with "western" white feminism. With this term, as Chandra Mohanty explained in her 1984 article "*Under Western Eyes*", I do not aim at essentialising western white feminism, or suggest that all "western" white feminists hold the same beliefs about women of colour. However, my purpose is to refer to a particular set of beliefs that some "western" white feminists (and those of colour at times too) maintain about "African women" or "Third World women" as homogenous groups. The underlying belief, which Mohanty terms as "Third World Difference", that leads to this homogenisation and essentialisation is the historical determinant that results in all "Third World women" to be oppressed mostly by men and culture in opposition to the "western" woman, who is free of such oppression.

Hence, by using the term "western" white feminist/feminism or just "west" on its own, I want to, as Mohanty suggests, "draw attention to the similar effects of various textual strategies used by writers which codify Others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western" (1988, pp.334).

In line with Susan M. Okin, (1999) many "western" states including the Norwegian, are of the opinion that the "west" is much better than many other countries around the world at gender equality. Hence, that there are some elements of certain cultures that are violent and need to be eliminated, that these cultures need to adapt to the "western" culture of equality. This implies that there is a hierarchy of cultures, where the Norwegian

in this case is the best and the culture of some immigrants needs to be abandoned (Teigen and Langvasbraten, 2009).

One of the women I interviewed expressed that it was when she came to Norway when she learnt that FGC is a damaging practice and that it was against the law, hence had to be abandoned. The rest of the women had heard about the negative sides of the practice back in their countries of origins due to campaigns or at school.

“When I came here I was younger because it was 15 years ago, so I was feeling like it was something about daily life in Somalia to do FGM.” (Somali woman 5)

One of the women that was born in Norway specifically said that those that come to Norway stop practicing FGC because they get “enlightened” about the dangers of it.

“You don't see what's wrong with it before you come out of it. You have to open their eyes and see oh this is something that is not good so when they come here they got information, the laws came they saw the seriousness and many of them went from it and some still very steadfast, they believed that it was their tradition and they had to do it.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 9)

Possibly, this woman by being born in Norway and raised in the Norwegian culture uses expressions such as “you have to open their eyes”, implying that some people in some places are practicing certain cultural rituals that they may not know are damaging. This may suggest that there are some cultures that have to show others what is right and what is wrong, because some cultures are better than others. Hence, this statement could indicate that also she thinks that the culture and the laws in Norway are the “right” ones and people that come from other cultures, such as those that practice FGC need to drop those traditions because they are “wrong”.

The other woman also born in Norway when expressing her outrage towards the stigma towards Somalis always being associated with FGC she said: *“We are not stupid you know? We know what's right what's wrong.”* Declaring FGC as something “wrong” and something only “stupid” people do. This is not to say that the practice is good, yet, this may be argued to be the kind of reactions that “western” culture imperialism creates. Thus, that only practices that are legal in the “west” are the ones that are “right” and those that are illegal in the “west” are “wrong”. This way the “west” is placed as knowing the ultimate truth.

The belief that one culture is “right” and that your culture is “wrong” or has “bad” things may lead to statements such as the one of this Somali woman where she accuses the Somali society for FGC:

"I believe our community, my society yes, I'm blaming them and I believe that they were sick when they were thinking to have somebody's pain is going to be another person's pleasure."

(Somali woman 2)

Another woman referred to FGC as "a kind of torture" and another claimed that "FGM is a kind of 21st terrorism to a woman". These could arguably be assertions made with the influence of the "western" anti-FGC discourse as it goes along the lines of devaluing and dehumanising certain cultural practices and accusing them of being barbaric. This could well be the case with this woman as she used to work for an organisation in Somalia that was fighting against FGC, this organisation most probably was funded by "western" donors, hence, reproducing the discourse found in the "western" anti-FGC campaign.

Bodies in the spotlight

The constant focus on FGC and Somalis, as seen earlier, irritates some of the members of the Somali community in Norway. I noticed that the most critical were those that have been born in Norway and hence are not circumcised. Thus, I wondered whether those that are already circumcised feel uncomfortable with the amount of attention they get from the media and public and these were their answers:

"When the people are talking about it, we are not feeling like they are against us, we are not feeling what we believe was bad, what happened to us was bad (...) something which wasn't talked about in the community, today is becoming something we are talking about and which is a problem and we know it that religion was against it." (Somali woman 3)

"If someone is talking about it I'm feeling happier because people understand today what it is like feeling how it is." (Somali woman 2)

These women that are circumcised and arrived in Norway as refugees find the attention that the practice of FGC has in the Norwegian media and public a sign for the end of the taboo of talking about the practice. Possibly this is because they associate the dialogue around FGC with that which happens in their country which has been leading to more people abandoning the practice.

However, other members of the Somali community in Norway believe that the constant talk about FGC may create a complex for some of the young women and girls arriving in Norway, which are already circumcised. While discussing this topic with Somali women in informal conversations they would tell me situations where young girls would arrive in

Norway and in school they would be told the negative sides of FGC, such as pain during intercourse, birth-giving and also the dangers with it. The women telling the story would claim that it was not right to tell a young girl who had not had her first intercourse yet that she would experience pain and also that it could be dangerous. This could make her feel anxious and paranoid as well as feel different from the rest of the girls in the school as if she did not feel different enough for coming from Somalia. Moreover, the women were outraged that those telling those things to the girls were Norwegian teachers, who had never had the experience of FGC themselves.

“They do not have the right to tell them how their sex life will be like, this can lead to girls being scared and then actually having bad experiences with sex. Besides, pleasure is not merely physical but psychological so it may well be possible that the circumcised women feel pleasure. This is not the right approach.” (Somali woman 10)

Another woman also explains how women can be paranoid of their first intercourse or having children if they get circumcised because of hearing about the danger of FGC.

“When a lady has FGM and she wants to get married and she knows all the problems that she has she is more like paranoid to have first time sexuality and then whatever she is hearing, it's like ok you know, why are you being circumcised, to cry more, to bleed more for the pleasure of somebody else?” (Somali woman 2)

However, there are studies that show that women that have been circumcised do feel pleasure and not necessarily have to face problems with their sexuality, also among Somalis (Johnsdotter and Essen, 2004). It is believed that when the culture portrays the circumcision as something positive, sexual pleasure is felt. However, when the discourse of the negative sides of FGC such as the lack of sexual pleasure, the pain during intercourse and birth, etc, the women may start having contradictory thoughts about their bodies and their sexuality. This may have a deep effect on their psyche and result in paranoia of not feeling pleasure and even feeling pain due to the circumcision (Catania et al, 2007; Ahmadu, 2007).

As the first woman expresses above (Somali woman 10) pleasure is psychological, hence, being circumcised may not have any effect on the possibilities of reaching orgasm as also Fuambai Ahmadu's (2007) research among circumcised women has shown. Hence, it may be the negative discourse about circumcised women's bodies and their culture that seems to be resulting in African women in “western” countries, having problems of lack of pleasure and so-called “sexual dysfunction”, which they did not have in their country of origin (Ahmadu, 2007).

Therefore, Catania et al., a group of gynaecologists, sexologists and experts in FGC have argued that it is necessary to be very careful when imparting sexual education to immigrant women, as this may change their perception of their bodies and their sexuality. The negative beliefs around FGC are argued to “cause a distortion of their cultural values and they undergo a sort of ‘mental/psychological infibulation’ which could result in iatrogenic sexual dysfunction” (2007, pp.1675).

“I know it's torturing and I know it's against the will of somebody, I don't know but I've read a lot of books and a person who is been FGMed is not happy to have sex, it can be a problem, delivering a baby, at pregnancy time, when you have the menstruation, yeah, a lot of things can happen to that person and it's a torture and I'm so happy that we have a law, which is saying like ban FGM.”
(Somali woman 2)

As this woman explains, she had read about the complications that may come with FGC. Yet, neither she nor any of the women that talk about the complications have ever experienced any of them themselves. This is either because they have not had sexual relations yet or because they simply have not experienced the complications. By having been living in Norway for quite some time now or having been born there, these women have been exposed to either the introductory courses for immigrants and refugees where FGC is discussed, or to the debate in the media regarding the dangers and illegality of FGC. This may have influenced their views about the effects of their circumcision and about their bodies as well.

Moreover, by constantly referring to a cultural practice as a crime without taking into consideration the reasons behind it, leaves those belonging to that culture voiceless. It takes their ability to explain themselves and are merely portrayed as violent criminals. Depicting those that practice FGC this way, dehumanises them and it does not allow for others to understand why they do it.

Representing FGC merely as barbaric and “a serious crime (...) a kind of criminal act that ruins their [the girls'] lives”³ (pp. 263, Teigen and Langvasbraten, 2009) as Sylvi Listhaug, member of the Progress Party and currently Minister of Migration and Integration, does, obscures the reality behind. This is often that parents circumcise their daughters because they wish to increase the chances of marriage, which for some cultures provides social status and hence happiness.

³ translated from Norwegian

“When they do this to their girls is not devalue them is because they value them, they think It’s what’s best for our daughters, because they value their daughters so much. (...) they value their daughter and they want to increase her value. Some people believe that and she can’t get married because she is not valuable (if she is not circumcised)” (Somali woman 6)

Circumcision may also be seen as a coming of age sort of bravery, providing pride and empowering the girls, turning them into women, which creates then ties among women. All this is ignored when circumcision is mainly tagged as a patriarchal form of control, a criminal act and a violation of human rights, certain cultures are then orientalised (Ehrenreich and Barr, 2005). This way the “west” and often “western” feminists also by upholding those arguments, are portraying themselves once more as the “enlightener”, the “culture-less”, the educated and free of control over their bodies (Mohanty 1984). Acting as if western forms of cultural oppression on women such as strict dieting, cosmetic surgery and intersex surgery are not forms of “circumcising” the body and obeying societal expectations (Herlund and Shell-Duncan, 2007).

Norway “World Champion”⁴ in Gender Equality

The cultural superiority mentioned earlier has also been often represented in Norway’s gender policies. The topic of gender equality, such a treasured value of the Norwegian culture, has been mainly mentioned when discussing policies on immigrants and integration (Teigen and Langvasbraten, 2009). Moreover, in the period 2000 to 2005, there was no elemental and comprehensive gender equality action plan. Furthermore, issues regarding women from ethnic minorities, which had been in the centre of discussion since 1990s, were not included in the general policy for gender equality. However, it would be expected for a country that is so proud of their equality policies and values, to also have equality of treatment when it comes to women in general and not have such segregated policies, seemingly discriminatory (Langvasbraten, 2008). If women of colour ought to be “saved” from their patriarchal cultures because all women deserve to have equal opportunities and rights then why are those that migrate to Norway separated from the rest of the women in the country and given “special attention”, based on homogeneous assumptions about their cultures? Norwegian researchers Annfelt and Gullikstad (Skauge-Hagland, 2013) claim that immigrant’s cultures, termed as “ethnic minorities’s” cultures are often referred to in public debates as the main problem of

⁴ Words of a Norwegian Minister in 2008 (see in Korsvik, 2014)

integration. Furthermore, the discourse also maintains that once they have left their culture behind and adapted to the Norwegian culture, they will not face any more discrimination and enjoy equality and integration (Skauge-Hagland, 2013). Additionally, in the recent equality report/white paper, when referring to immigrant women's issues, there is not mention of class differences, no mention of possible intersectionality, instead all issues are seen as a result of "their" culture (Bergstrøm, 2015).

This way Norway once again portrays its cultural superiority, arguing that as long as immigrants follow "their" culture, they will never be respected or accepted in the Norwegian society. This in a way seems to say that integration is immigrant's responsibility and is their own fault if they do not leave their cultures behind. The low percentages of non-Western minority women are directly related to their patriarchal culture, rather than possibly not having proof of education from their country of origin or speaking little Norwegian. The Action Plan to Promote Equality and Prevent Ethnic Discrimination between 2009 and 2012 declared to be "unacceptable for women (to be) deprived of the right to education and work based on culture based explanations that are not compatible with Norwegian equal opportunities, legislation or human rights" (Skauge-Hagland, 2013, unnumbered). Hence, the lack of immigrant women in the labour market is due to "their" culture, yet, that 40% of Norwegian women only work part-time is seen purely as the woman's individual decision (Skauge-Hagland, 2013). This is once more believed to be so because the immigrant non-western woman is controlled by her culture, but the Norwegian is not.

Moreover, Solveig Horne, the Minister for Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, has asked feminists to respect Norwegian women that decide to be housewives. However, regarding migrant women, she highlighted their need to work regardless, to integrate themselves in the society (Korsvik, 2014). This results in a paradox and also a discriminatory treatment, based on essentialist beliefs about cultures, believing that in Norway gender equality has been already achieved hence, and that Norwegian women make always free decisions. But is that really the case? Norway has been one of the leading countries in introducing gender equality measures, it created the first ombudsman for gender equality in the world in 1979, and it was the first country in the world to command public limited companies (PLCs) to have at least 40% of both sexes and gender diversity in top positions. Nevertheless, there are still very low numbers of women in the high rank positions and they still receive less pay than men in the majority of jobs. Moreover, there is still a large gender division in the work market (Sund, 2015). It is said that the sectors of education and employment are more gender segregated than the average in Europe. Even a group of researches in 2011 selected by the government

to examine the state of Norwegian gender equality policies, highlighted that these have failed. They noted that the problem was that although gender mainstreaming was “everybody’s job” no administrative body has the responsibility to implement the policies. Moreover, only since the 2000s did the Norwegian government really take on gender equality as a representative value, hence it may not be so much part of the Norwegian “culture” as it is usually portrayed (Korsvik, 2014). Norwegian researcher Berit Sund (2015) argues that the reasons for which Norwegian women are underrepresented in positions of power in the labour market is because authority and management are still seen as male characteristics and women are afraid of being perceived as too masculine and being stigmatised.

Furthermore, gender equality policy in Norway mainly focuses on the high participation of women in the labour market as well as the long parental leave, mostly the father’s leave. Yet, this means that the gender policy is based on the welfare policy. Just as Rosi Braidotti (2005) argued that the current most popular form of feminism, the neoliberal post-feminism, has its main focus in gaining financial equality, this may be the case of Norway. Moreover, the results of higher involvement of women in the labour market and introduction of the father’s leave have not been a more equal distribution of domestic and child caring duties among mother and father. It is believed that fathers have not taken over some of the responsibilities in the household, which means that the gender equality policies have not had an effect in the private sphere. Therefore, signifying that gender equality is not something that Norwegians practice that much in reality, or at least not more than in the distribution of resources and not even there equality is found. A further paradox results from this scenario, with Norwegian mothers working more and fathers not taking over responsibilities in the home, and that is that there has been an increasing demand for care workers. What is more, the demand has been for women from certain ethnicities, hence, Norwegian women have been able to enjoy more work opportunities and less domestic work at the expense of the “housewifisation” of migrant non-Western women (Stenum, 2010). This supports the argument that firstly, there are stereotypes about non-western women, such as that they are better at domestic and child care, and also that they are worth less because they can be used at the Norwegian’s women’s expense. Hence, it may be argued that the emblematic Norwegian value of gender equality is rather selective.

Nevertheless, the Norwegian government has a very well developed list of 9 goals of gender equality policies, the Gender Equality Act is based on intersectionality, hence aiming at preventing all forms of discrimination. These points go from fighting gender stereotypes, equal opportunity in parenting and work, economic power, in government,

health, education and freedom from violence and sexual abuse as well as equality in international politics. However, over the years there have been several developments that have received criticism, such as the deficient engagement in fighting violence against women, due to the closing of centres for women. Additionally, the current government reduced the measures against sexual harassment in 2014, up to the extent that sexual harassment is not mentioned in the Gender Equality Act (Korsvik, 2014). More recently in January 2016, the Norwegian government has proposed to join the equality and anti-discrimination laws, in an effort to make it more “accessible and more effective” (Lappegård Lahn, 2016). This has received substantial criticism as it is believed to weaken the protection of women from discrimination. The law is argued by Vibke Blaker Strand, professor at the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights at University of Oslo, to have very imprecise language which can lead to cases of discrimination against women in regards to employment, pregnancy, maternity and adoption. Furthermore, the proposal includes the removal of the prohibition of discrimination in the “family and personal matters”, which has been denounced by Strand as dangerous as discrimination and violence can also happen in the privacy of people’s homes (Lappegård Lahn, 2016).

This clearly shows once more, that although there are some instruments in the Norwegian policy that are more advanced in gender equality than other countries, it does not mean that gender equality is practiced continuously in the society. Norway may be presenting itself as “the world champion of gender equality” as stated by the Gender and Equality Policy Minister in 2008. Still, there are many gaps in the implementation of such policies and too much focus on the welfare policy rather than on a more wide view of gender equality (Korsvik, 2014). Declaring themselves as the winner in gender equality may be just a way to portray themselves as better than others, and being at the top of the hierarchy giving them superiority to criticise “Others” cultures and having the “right” to teach “them” about equality. This may be a way to justify their focus on non-western immigrants’ as the challenge to gender equality, rather than concentrating on improving the own challenges at home. This superior belief of being the best at gender equality and hence the one to follow, ignores the fact that the Norwegian society as all societies, has its own gender norms regulating the body, as explained by Foucault ([1976] 1990) with the term bio-power, thus each society has to follow its own path of development.

Theoretical Framework

“The body itself is “forcibly produced” by power and discourse, gender and sex result of “ritualised repetition” of certain behaviours design to render the body either “intelligible” (normative, heterosexual) or abject (unthinkable, homosexual)”.

Judith Butler, 1993, p. xi

Foucault’s disciplined bodies

This thesis focuses on FGC as a form of discipline of women’s bodies. It will draw on Foucault’s theories on power, most particularly on the effects of power on the body, the disciplinary techniques of power. According to him the body is part of the apparatus of power, as it is able to be trained and imprinted to work as desired. In his *Discipline and Punish* (1977) he claims that bodies are “docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, 1977 pp.136). This is possible through different types of supervision and subjection that sees bodies as objects that in case of disobedience would be punished, hence, creating a “relation of docility-utility” (p. 136). This discipline could be enforced by different powers, physical, hence visible or invisible. Foucault classifies power into three types: The power of law, authority and violence that often has a physical form of surveillance and punishment. Another form of power is that of institutions such as schools, prisons, etc, that train the body on its behaviour, creating a form of self-discipline. Finally, there is the bio-power, which is in control of the reproduction of the population. Hence, it is a form of discipline on the body through norms on sexuality, since this is the origin of the species (Foucault, [1976] 1990).

Most importantly, Foucault claims that power is implemented through discourse/knowledge creating self-discipline (Sarup, 1988 in Milani, 2013). These penetrate the conscious as well as the unconscious mind and remain rooted as well as embodied. How we understand culture, society, bodily practices etc, is interconnected to power structures.

For this thesis I will delve into the bio-power, the regulating force of bio-politics, that is the politics dealing with life, a “technology of power by which human life can be controlled and managed in its natural indeterminacy” (Kristensen, 2013, p17). As I have shown this is done through discourse as well as practices, setting up norms and hierarchies and

punishment and rewards to control the individual with discipline and the population with bio-power techniques (Kristensen, 2013). Norms about sexuality, mentioned earlier as one of the tools through which to implement bio-power, are argued to have been generated explicitly to manage the power over life. Sexuality, is as argued by Foucault, a “corporeal form of behaviour”, where body and population converge, hence where discipline and regulation respectively meet (Foucault, 1976, pp.251). It has two results: the reproduction of the species and the diffusion of illnesses, as form of sanctions, therefore, it is necessary to control it, discipline it, and organise it through norms (Foucault, 1976). It is believed that modern sexuality has three main goals, these are: to guarantee population, create labour and control social life for its preservation (Repo, 2013).

As seen earlier, unlike the two first forms of power, bio-power does not necessarily have clear and formal enforcers of the discipline such as laws and institutions, instead it is induced by self-discipline and social sanctions. However, there is one institution that is active in the bio-political control of sexuality that is the family. It is in charge of gender and sex roles socialisation of the children, to guarantee the social order (Parsons, Money in Repo 2013). The control or “pedagogization of children’s sex” as stated by Foucault ([1976] 1990) is believed to be essential as children are thought to be highly sexualised and hence in need of control. This belief is same for the body of women (“the hysterization of women”), and since the female body is the place of reproduction, it is believed to need further social control (Foucault, [1976] 1990).

Power and knowledge need to ensure the right “socialization of procreative behaviour” and enforce self-discipline as well as norms that sanction sexual intercourse that is not aimed at reproduction, as sexuality’s only purpose, seen by bio-politics (Foucault, [1976] 1990). This is could arguably be the case of FGC, which is believed to be a way of controlling women’s sexual activity before marriage, or women’s non-reproductive sexual activity.

The feminist perspective

According to several scholars Foucault failed to delve into the way the female body was an objective of discipline and social control (King, 2013, Bartky, 1988). The rationale behind the control of female bodies is its biological nature, different to that of men. This belief that women are innately emotional and misguided by instinct and in constant search of sexual pleasure, results, as claimed by Bartky (1988) in three main types of disciplinary practices. Those controlling the size of the body, those that restrict body movements and behaviour and those related to its beautification. All these are relative

to cultural and historical locations. If these social norms are not followed, women and relatives could be subjects of sanctions and punishment of different forms, psychological such as stigmatisation, and embarrassment leading to exclusion from social relations (marriage, procreation) up to even violence (Bartky, 1988, King, 2013).

Several feminist and foucauldian scholars (Beauvoir, [1949] 2014; Bordo, 1993; Bartky 1988; King, 2013) follow Foucault's theory of torture, which is to leave a mark of shame on the victim's body. They have applied it to the way women have been and are still adorned and modified or more accurately punished and disciplined throughout history under the disguise of fashion and aesthetics (eg. corset, heels, make-up). These act as "emblem of the power of culture (...) on the female body (Bordo, 1993, p.143). This may be argued again to be the case of FGC, a cultural practice disciplining the body of women, modifying it in the name of culture, driven by the forces of bio-power and discourse as illustrated in the quote by Butler (1993) in the beginning of this chapter.

Often women's behaviour and practices are directed towards protecting the genital area, from sexual assault or to prevent being seen as too sexually available. The female body is believed to be an object that needs to be corrected, constrained and formed to the ideal femininity by the naturally rational and controlled man. However, it is not always actively men or other members of society that impose these disciplines on women. The mere discourse of women's bodies and nature as flawed or incomplete becomes embedded in the psyche of women resulting in self-discipline, agency in these punishments or adornments. Women may also follow the self-disciplinarian practices and behaviours to feel sexually desirable. Therefore, it may lead to the belief that such manufactured femininity is deliberate or even natural due to the lack of the visible enforcing institution (Bartky, 1988; Kiani, 2005). As mentioned earlier the self-disciplinary practices differ in history and culture, as by words of Bordo (1993) the body is the location of culture, hence its appearance may differ just as the culture and social practices as a form of social control.

Social norms

Although these cultural disciplinarian practices are imprinted on the body and in the psyche, it is uncertain whether they actually turn into self-discipline in the case that the subject migrates away from the location where those disciplines are imposed, to a location where they are not. Some believe that migration, from more patriarchal to less patriarchal societies, may lead to reflection on the gender structures and result in change of behaviours (Adkins, 2004). Others may prefer to claim that any change in context with

different norms and role played in society makes women, and of course men, reflect upon the norms of their society of origin and possibly lead to change.

As mentioned earlier FGC is a social norm which is followed by individuals in a society. Usually it is based on the shared morals of the society, though, it may often continue being practiced through centuries due to several reasons. These may be the taboo around discussing the reasons for its practice, hence, discussing its abandonment is not something allowed in the society (Bicchieri, 2006).

For example when migrating, certain topics that in the countries of origin are not spoken about, are discussed openly in the host society, which leads to increase in knowledge and further reflection, thus possibly to change in cultural practices. One of these topics is commonly sexuality, which as seen earlier is believed to be a form of organising society, and the “forces (that) shape and mould the erotic possibilities of the body may vary from society to society” (Heeks (1986) in Ahmadi, 2003, pp.685). One of these forces may be FGC, usually a taboo topic to discuss openly, or even between mother and daughter, in the countries where it is practiced in high numbers. Thus, through discussion in the host society, the migrant women’s and community’s beliefs and cultural and social practices may be impacted by those of the host society. With FGC being a topic of large debate in the Global North, women of practicing societies, when migrating are surrounded by it and may feel freer to discuss it openly, possibly leading to changing their opinion on it.

Back in the country of origin, social norms may be obeyed either because of fear of social sanctions such as exclusion from the society, stigma etc. They may also have been internalised and be followed automatically without any further reflection or opinion on them.

Some norms are adhered to after a careful decision-making process weighing out the pros and cons, hence, it ends up being a strategy to follow a social norm.

When one accesses a context, one reflects on how to behave and there are three different models that one may take to make such decision:

- 1) The traditional rational choice model: in this case everything is considered, the consequences, the expected utility and finally a decision is made with the option that brings the maximum utility to us.
- 2) The deliberational route to behaviour: This one is picked when we know we will be held responsible for our decision.
- 3) The heuristic route: In this case there are some rules that have been carved in our brain to which our conduct is directed by these and come in to work according to the context

we find ourselves. Social norms are usually followed by this route, they usually are obeyed automatically.

“Norms are context-dependant, different social norms will be activated or appear appropriately depending on how the situation is understood” (Bicchieri, 2006, pp.5).

Often it is said that the last two routes are used at the same time, people do not just follow rules automatically but there may be a significant reflection undertaken before the choice of action is taken. Individuals are most aware about the consequences of each action they may take, such as social sanctions, exclusion etc. Some societies may have a strong value system, which has harsh consequences for one’s honour if violated.

Social norms are based on empirical and normative expectations, the first being one’s expectation of others following the same rule, this is expected not by seeing such behaviour but by believing the others are privately following such norm. The normative expectations are trusting that everybody should follow the norm. Accordingly, there is the normative expectations condition, which means that one expects the others to follow also if one believes they expect one to comply.

As mentioned earlier, often social norms are obeyed without significant or at all agreement with such but they are followed due to these expectations mentioned above. The empirical expectations cannot be changed unless there is open communication among the members of this society. This absence of open communication is called “pluralistic ignorance” and no one is willing to break such silence due to fear of ostracism (Bicchieri, 2006).

Hence, this “pluralistic ignorance” is one of the main reasons why social norms endure, as talking with other people about their opinion on the norm is considered a “normative breach”, which could also have consequences (Bicchieri & Mercier, 2014, pp.68).

The feeling of belonging to a social group is important as it “provides us with a sense of place, purpose, and belonging” they boost our self-esteem and makes us feel worthy (Haslam, et al. 2009). Moreover, it is said that belonging to a group and the desire to maintain such membership may be due to the potential physical benefits (Bicchieri, 2006).

Methodology: Doing research with women, rather than on women

“The point is not only to know about women but to provide a fuller and more accurate account of society by including them” (Nielsen, 1990, in De Vault 1996)

Historically, certain members in society (women, migrants, homosexuals, certain ethnicities, etc) were excluded from research altogether, or they were researched by powerful groups and never given the chance to speak for themselves or document their experiences. Although there has been now several decades of research including migrants, it is believed that these studies have not always involved their voices and valued their experiences. In the context of FGC in Norway, there have been very few studies regarding this topic, most of them have been with focus in the Oslo region and what is more these studies have been often neglected. It seems so as there has been little debate with the local migrant communities in regards to the ban of FGC and the duty to avert. These communities have been isolated from the policy-making process, not granting them equal rights as the rest of the “native” citizens. Hence, the purpose of this research is to listen to women and the ways their attitudes and experiences regarding FGC have been affected by migration, the new environment and the policies towards FGC in Norway.

By following feminist methodology I do not want to just merely create knowledge with the narrators, but seek for that knowledge to highlight the variety in migrant women’s experiences, contribute to understand and change power relations as well as contest socially constructed gender inequalities (DeVault 1996; Chafetz 1999, Jaggar 2008; in Shaughney and Krogman, 2012; Undurraga 2012).

“Gender is not enough” ⁵

White feminists have been and still are often convinced that they can do “research” about women of colour simply because they are women themselves. This portrays their superiority and lack of awareness on their positionality (Mohanty, 1984). Yet, just as Riessmann (1987) claimed, being of the same gender is not sufficient. The power

⁵ Words taken from the title of Riessmann’s (1987) article.

hierarchy is not only found between genders but among them as well. Ignoring this has led often to western feminists speaking on behalf of the subaltern, that is as argued by Gayatri Spivak (1988), those part of groups whose voices are silenced, due to being at the lowest point of the power structure. In this case I refer to women “suffering” from FGC, who western feminists have attempted to “save”. However, by highlighting the victimhood and being led by biases about other cultures as highly patriarchal, some feminists have failed to display the full array of attitudes towards FGC. They have neglected to humanise those deciding to practice it, and portray them as unable to reflect on their decisions. Hence, since the colonial period until now, experts on FGC have been mostly western men at first and then western women, in either case neither of them having experienced it nor being an insider. Therefore, my aim was to ask the insiders themselves about FGC and their experiences and attitudes towards the practice.

I am aware that by being a “western researcher” writing about non-western women I may be accused of following the same pattern. Nonetheless, I believe that just because of being an “outsider” this does not mean that “outsiders” should not engage in conversations with “insiders” to gain understanding. As long as we, “outsiders” keep in mind our positionality and do not claim to be experts on the “insiders”. As Edwards claims, to gain “wisdom” it is not necessary to have had the experience yourself, but it is enough to have had an “empathetic dialogue” with the ones that have (Edwards 1996, pp.172). I engaged in these dialogues with these women always keeping in mind that I “view the world from (my) embodied location(s)” (England, pp. 289, 2006). Hence, the result of this thesis is not to be seen as just “data”⁶ about Somali women in Norway, but “data” created and influenced by all those involved.

Although, I like to call it a research with women rather than on women, I always have my positionality in mind, thus I was aware of my location in the power and privilege ladder (England, 2006, Skeggs 1994, Holland and Ramazanougw 1994, Glucksman 1994 Letherby 2003, Reinharz, 1983 in Undurraga 2013; Hesse-Bieber, 2007). Being the “researcher” meant that I had still the power as I was the main one approaching them and asking them questions with a specific goal, this thesis (Glucksman 1994, in Undurraga 2013).

⁶ I have written some of the terms such as “data” and “research” with quotation marks because I do not like to use them in the normal sense. I feel like referring to the stories of these women as “data” or “research” and to them as “informants” reduces them to just data and slowly dehumanises them and allows them to be turned into object that can be used for the researchers benefit. This is partly true as my thesis is a requirement for me to obtain a Master’s degree, hence it is for my benefit. Nevertheless, it is necessary to highlight the various purposes of this study and not forget that behind these words there are women and lives.

Cautious Interpretation

Researchers always start the investigation with a specific hypothesis, even though we often try to go into the “field” with an open mind and ready to find whatever there is out there. However, our hypothesis is always in the back of our mind, as often as feminist researchers, we are seeking to highlight a form of inequality or injustice. Before I started to carry out the interviews, I had an idea of what I could “find”. Yet, when listening to the women I realised that what I was hearing was not what I expected. I was expecting the women to be more critical of the Norwegian system and discourse but many of them were not. I started trying to find reasons for it, yet, I felt that my interpretations started to hide the women’s voices, I was starting to impose a particular explanation to their experiences, which was not provided by them. As highlighted by Alan Bryman (2012) I felt that these interpretations were clashing with the “principle of a non-hierarchical relationship” (pp.40) that I was aiming for. As feminist researchers we need to be good listeners and be conscious of our biases influenced by our social location, as we may be contributing to reinforcing the oppressing stereotypes (Billson, 1991, Reinharz and Chase, 2002).

The Ethical Issues with my Research

The first step before contacting anyone to reach the informants was to get the approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) as it is required of all research using informants in Norway. After some weeks I received an answer from them and they suggested me to make some modifications to my interview questions. Because I was planning to ask my informants about FGC and this practice was a criminal act in Norway my research was especially sensitive. The NSD explained that my questions could lead to receiving some information about cases of FGC in Norway and this would result in an ethical dilemma. That is that I would be between having to keep this person’s identity anonymous as pledged with my research, and then being an accomplice of a criminal act or report it and then breaking my pledge. To avoid being in such situation I should modify my questions.

Although, initially this worried me it actually made me realise that I may have taken the research too lightly and since it had been all about desk research until then I had thought little about the interviews. It was a good opportunity to examine my interview guideline more in detail and refine my research as well.

Methods

The Search

The initial aim was to interview women from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia as they were in highest numbers from those countries that have high FGC prevalence. I had no idea how accessible it would be to reach each of the communities, so I left the final ethnic group decision open to whatever I would find. I wanted to listen to the experiences and attitudes of migrant women from the mentioned countries, in regards to cultural practices in general and specifically Female Genital Circumcision, as is the focus of this thesis. I looked for women that had been in Norway for longer than one year or two. This was because there would be high chances of them being refugees or asylum seekers, hence, if they had been in Norway shorter than that period they may still be in the process of settling in. I wanted to talk to women that had already had some time to settle in and reflect on the cultural differences and changes that they may have done to their customs and practices. So I set out to find them. First I went through the more formal route and contacted several organisations, research centres and educational centres dealing with migrants. They were all very welcoming and helpful initially, yet I had to continuously call them and ask them if they had found any informants for me. This was a tough task for me since I do not like to pressure people or become insistent.

After a couple of weeks of not getting any news from them I tried other routes. I started going through my contacts, and I contacted friends from these ethnicities and friends of friends hoping they could put me in contact with the local communities in Stavanger. They did their best, they put me in contact with others that they thought could help more, so that was another round of uncomfortable calling and reminding them of me and my research. I also looked for ethnic organisations and shops and called them and attended some gatherings hoping to find informants or contacts there. I also contacted the local mosque and the Muslim Students association. I had contacted so many people that it turned out that two of those helping me to get informants resulted being from the same family although having taken contact with them through different channels.

Only after several weeks of stress and insisting the first informant appeared and slowly more followed over the next month. All informants were reached through contacts in the local Somali and Eritrean community, rather than through the organisations and research centres. The first contact was made around mid-January and the first interview was conducted near the end of February, although my initial idea was to be done with all interviews by the end of February. Instead the process took a month longer.

There were several challenges encountered that had an impact on the search. The first one is the difficulty of gaining access to a specific group being an outsider, in this case not only of the Somalian community but also being a foreigner in Norway. I often sensed that some of the people I contacted were at first a little suspicious of me, so I made sure I explained that I was an international student at Stavanger University and that I was writing my thesis.

Another challenge was the fact that I wanted to ask people to talk about Female Genital Circumcision, a practice that is strictly forbidden in Norway and that is severely controlled and punished. Whether they practiced it or not I understood that the practice is not really something that is discussed in public, firstly due to its illegality and secondly because in the societies of origin it is known to be a taboo topic. Later I started reading news articles and also academic articles emphasising how mostly the Somali community had become tired on how the media always mentioned them when they talked about FGC. This brought me to think that maybe the Somali community would not be as open to talk about it because of being saturated with the topic. This is something I also set out to find in my interviews.

Even though I reached out to as many sources I could think of, I ended up using the snowballing method for part of the interviews. The snowballing method is believed to be a useful method to come to groups that are difficult to reach (Tracy, 2013).

Another challenge was the language, my Norwegian skills are very basic and often those who I was calling did not speak English. However, it always worked out, once even I ended up carrying out a phone call in three different languages and in the end we managed to understand each other.

The women

My intention was to interview at least five women, finally I ended up interviewing and having some informal conversations with ten women. I decided to extend the number because when I reached five interviews I saw that I had come to the majority of the women through the snowballing method from the same source. This meant that their opinions and experiences may be very similar, hence the data that I would get could also run the risk of lacking diversity (Thagaard 2009). Avoiding falling into one of the limitations of snowball sampling I decided to continue the search for a few more respondents. I decided to stop at seven because of time limitations as well as because I was more interested in keeping the number low as it was not meant to be a representative study.

Nine out of the ten women ended up being from Somalia as it turned out to be difficult to find informants from Eritrea and Ethiopia, even though I managed to establish some contacts in the local community. Only one of the respondents was born in Norway, although later having also lived in Somalia for a while, the rest were all born in their countries of origin. The majority had come to Norway between 2006 and 2012, one of them had come in 2001 and one in 1989. Moreover, from the informal conversations one of them was with a woman born in Norway with Somali background. Initially the idea was to collect experiences and attitudes only of those that had come to Norway in the last ten years more or less as I would be comparing their experiences with the more recent developments of 2004 in the regulations towards FGC. However, as I was hearing similar experiences among the first five women, I thought that having more diversity would also be interesting. Moreover, I also decided to bring in one interview and one informal conversation with women born in Norway as I wanted to see if there were any differences in their experiences and attitudes.

The interviews

My aim was to amplify these women's voices and to do so I used semi-structured interviews. This is the most accurate way in my opinion to comprehend a person's experiences, beliefs and sense-making of the world. Moreover, it allowed me to ask questions that were relevant to the research and still give the women enough flexibility and power to express themselves and delve into issues they found relevant. Furthermore, this tool made it also possible for me to ask further questions if she made an interesting or controversial statement. Due to its flexibility, providing power to the interviewee, this tool is believed to be a meaningful way to make the voices of neglected groups, such as these migrant women in Norway (Hammersley, 2003, Reinharz, & Davidman 1992).

Most of my informants did not speak English fluently and I did not speak either Norwegian fluently nor Somali at all, so often I had to use an interpreter. This would be either the same person that had put me in contact with the informant or a friend of theirs. Hence, as Murray and Wynne (2001) highlighted this may have compromised the level of complexity and length of the answers as the interpreter may have taken certain topics for granted, which could have been of my interest. I observed this when the interpreter would use words such as "and yeah" or "and things like that" at the end of a sentence, which always made me wonder if it meant that she had left certain things out or forgotten them. Several researchers (Temple, 2002; Temple and Edwards, 2002; Temple and Young, 2004) have recognised the influence of interpreters and the need to value them

as contributing as much as the informant to the research. As Murray and Wynne (2001, pp. 165) termed it is a “three-way production of data”.

Another challenge was that the interpreter would not always speak very clear English, and it was difficult to carry out a spontaneous conversation rather than just sticking to my questions. This often resulted in missing important points of clarification or chances to explain their point further and this was made clear once listening to the taped interviews again. I noticed this when I had the first interview one-to-one in English, it was much more fluid and I had a chance to go deeper into some issues.

Another problem with having an interpreter is that it loses the privacy between the researcher and the informant and she may not always be comfortable to share some things in front of the interpreter. Also in some of the cases I interviewed two women at the same time with help from the interpreter as this was the most convenient for them. This may have resulted in providing similar answers due to having heard the other one’s response, as well as possibly not sharing certain things out of fear of the others judging her. On the other side, there may also be certain advantages in having these double interviews, for example, it could spark a certain debate among them that could be interesting for the research. Moreover, the answers of one of the informants could spark some memories or thoughts in the other informant’s mind, which could also make the research more fruitful.

Nevertheless, I found it important to conduct the interviews in the way the women preferred as it, not only regarding who was present but also where they felt most comfortable to conduct it. Sometimes we conducted the interviews in my living room, other times in their living room, with babies laughing and crying by their side and other times in the hall of the university. I always made myself very flexible to their preferences regarding location and made sure I always explained the research and asked for their consent before initiating the interview.

FGC: A social norm in flux

Humans as social beings have a social identity which is by words of Tajfel (1981) “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (pp.255). The sense of belonging to a social group, ethnic, geographical etc, is created by shared symbols, rituals and common knowledge. These create the “culture” of the group and hence, they establish the mind and the selfhood of the members of that group (Jenkins, 2008). Each group has its own symbols and rituals, FGC is one kind of ritual of belonging, only if one is circumcised can one belong to that group, at least this is the case in some groups. The following story of one of the Somali women participating in this research is an example.

*“I remember I was 8 or 9 years and I was in this school, all the children in my school had it (FGC), and I was the only person that did not have it. My family was against that because my mother was educated after she did my sisters. So she decided not to do me and then I couldn't go to this school because every day the children told me that **I am not one of them**, that I'm not FGMed, that I'm not a clean woman, that I cannot go to the masjid or mosque to pray. And they were always telling me that **I am not a part of the community in this school**, children bullying each other.” (Somali woman 2)*

Already at such a young age there exists a pressure from the group to comply with the group symbols and their social norms such as undergoing FGC. In this woman’s story it is also possible to identify the social sanctions such as ostracism and bullying she was experiencing for not obeying the social norm (Bicchieri, 2006).

*“So I was bullied, and then **I felt like I should do it**. I went home and I asked my mom that I had to do it, and she said there is two types of FGM, one is very easy and we don't need to cut you and all that stuff but the other one she said she will never ever do it to me. Then me and my cousin we were in the same class and we used to live in the same house, we cried a lot and asked a lot and we said we cannot go to school because the children are bullying us, **we are not part of the community in this school**. And the my father was not at home at the time, her was a diplomat so he used to travel a lot, and then the next day I went to one of the women who used to do FGM and she had a clinic I went to, she is friends with my mother and we me and my cousin told her that **we NEED to do this** today in our house because we couldn't go to the school because the children bullied us. It was summer time, the school was closed, and we were dreaming the next school year we would be a part of the children. She came to our home and my mother was*

*surprised and my auntie and they were like: what is she doing? Because she had all her stuff, and the sterilised things, which she needs to do FGM. We told our mother that we should do it or we are not going to this school and that time in our city that is the only one we had in the part that we live and then she said ok but in a different way, a way that she can help us morally to be FGM but it's not like FGMed, but **I did it because of the bullying.**" (Somali woman 2)*

As she explains herself she needed to do it and when she was telling me the story she placed special emphasis on the word "need". If they did not do it they would not be part of the community in the school and that would mean exclusion and shame for them, which they did not see as an option so they convinced their mothers to get circumcised. The mothers understood the stigma the children could feel and accepted to circumcise them the lighter way. It is argued that changing our perception of social identity, such as when being excluded from our former group, may affect our psychological well-being (Haslam, et al. 2009). Thus, the mothers of these girls, knowing this, did not want their daughters to suffer from more bullying.

"The reason that people did it or do it is because they value their daughter and they want to increase her value." (Somali woman 6)

"They say it keeps the girl modest, it keeps her virgin, basically you will not have any sexual desires. Reputation, family reputation and honour is really important if you are found out that you have done any acts like that or anything bad, then your whole clan is kinda held accountable (...) in the sense, that you won't get married afterwards, no one is going to marry you, that name will always live with you, that's why people are still doing it, and because they really believe this works, they really believe this keeps the girl virgin so that's why." (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

Hence, practicing FGC as a social norm is a strategy, those that undertake it have done a process of weighing out the pros and cons of each circumcising and of not circumcising. Norms can arguably also be engraved in the mind of the individual and followed without much reflection on them due to being aware of the consequences of not following them. Commonly, individuals take a combination of routes between the deliberational and the heuristic and choose the best strategy. This means that although a norm is embodied it may not mean that it belongs to the individual's set of values (Bicchieri, 2006). Hence, as this woman explained above, not all may believe in the practice of FGC. However, they are aware of the consequences if their daughters were not circumcised. So, out of love to their daughters, wanting to avoid them facing the social sanctions they continue the practice.

Nevertheless, it is believed that people follow social norms to be part of a specific group not because they do not want to face the social sanctions but because belonging to a group is linked with receiving some rewards (Bicchieri, 2006). These could be economic such as part of a common land or a wife/husband, etc. As seen earlier social norms are a form of discipline, and according to Foucault, to keep such discipline there should be punishments, in this case social sanctions. Nevertheless, he argues that more important that punishment for keeping discipline is gratification, “rewards (should) more frequent than penalties”, one has to be “more encouraged by the desire to be rewarded (...) than by the fear of punishment” (Foucault, 1977, pp.180).

FGC as a form of bio-power, does not have a particular body that enforces such discipline, only in some cases the family can be considered as the institution imposing norms related to sexuality (Repo, 2013). Similar to the enforcement of anti-FGC norms by Norwegian culture, the society in some cases acts like the extended family by also dictating the social norms and disciplinary practices.

“When your family is educated and the next door family is not educated, which always happens in Somalia, is very difficult to tell someone who is not educated what's your opinion and they are not going to respect you so you should follow what people are following. Like majority leads minority. So we should do that and we did it.” (Somali woman 2)

This woman explains how, even though a family may not agree with the practice and would want to abandon it, they should follow it because the majority does it. As she says the majority of the society is disciplining the minority to follow the social norm.

Self-discipline

As we have seen above, since disciplinary practices of bio-power do not have a particular enforcing institution, when they are not controlled by the family norms are self-enforced. That means that discipline becomes autonomous, without external bodies having to control it. It becomes embedded in the psyche and turns into self-discipline. As illustrated by foucauldian researcher Bartky (1988), women enforce self-discipline on their bodies to achieve the desired and society accepted form of femininity.

“Many of my very good friends, even they wanted to get circumcised because all the other girls were. ‘Oh I'm looking forward the day when I get circumcised’, because that is the mentality because everybody was doing it, it was a normal practice.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 9)

Unlike the woman earlier that was bullied to get circumcised, this woman explains the case of girls that were happy to get circumcised, they saw the practice as something positive and she even uses the word “normal” because everybody did it and they wanted to be like the rest. Once more we see this desire to belong to the group behind the reasons to follow the norm. Conversely, in this case we do not see the direct pressure to comply such as the Somali woman 2, instead it may be argued that the practice has already been embodied, that is why it is not questioned and there is such excitement around the ceremony.

“In Somalia we were very happy because we were younger than today, and we were not informed (...) because all the community was supporting it, the child should have it and even our mentality was like: if I can't have this I am not a part of this community anymore” (Somali woman 5)

This woman’s case shows self-discipline by mentioning that they “were very happy” with circumcision. Yet, she also explains the discipline the society undertakes through the fear of social sanctions such as not belonging. This illustrates the complexity of social norms, how even though some may not wish to follow them they feel compelled to.

Different context, different norms?

The strategies towards a social norm may change according to the context the individual finds itself in, it is believed that when migrating, as the context is different, social norms such as FGC are likely to be abandoned and new ones are adopted (Talle, 2007).

As seen above there were some people that already in Somalia did not want to continue the practice but they were pressured by the society.

Most of the women I interviewed had heard about the negative aspects of the practice back home, and they said that people’s opinions about FGC had started to change mostly since the end of the civil war.

“I knew it when I was in Somalia, because most of the people from capital city they went to this school and they run a lot of workshops or seminars against FGM, which she attended, or some friends and family. In the radios we had campaigns against FGM, which the media works together with the organisations. I knew it from the media, from the schools, from the seminars.” (Somali woman 3)

“When I went to Somalia I saw billboards that say ‘this organisation is fighting against it’” (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

As these women explain, most of the other women also mentioned many campaigns against FGC in the radio, TV and on billboards in Somalia as well as being told about the negative sides of FGC at school. Despite all the campaigns the practice is still widespread in Somalia and many other countries in Africa and there may be several reasons for this.

“Nobody can stop something that is already spread as a culture, everywhere in the country, nobody can stop it within a day or night or year or year a half.” (Somali woman 3)

“It is very common in the country side where people don't have access to information, and Somalis are very nomadic people, we live in the country side with our camels and out livestock and people don't really interact with people from the city.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

Although, this woman explains that the reason why maybe the practice is still widespread in Somalia is because the information does not reach to the more rural areas, she has a further reason for the continuation of FGC:

“There has been a lot of civil war for a long time, war between the warlords so I think in war time you don't really have time to spread good news or spread knowledge.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

It is obvious that campaigns of any kind may not be efficient in a country that has been torn by war and conflict for decades now and has seen its people emigrating until the date. The extent of the effect of the conflict on the practice of female circumcision is out of the scope of this thesis but it would be an interesting point for further research. Hence, there is more than one obstacle to the abandonment of FGC in Somalia.

Despite this, according to this woman who arrived in Norway in 1989, when the law against FGC was introduced in 1995, the practice was not a big topic among the Somali community in the country.

“This was a culture that people wanted to go away from (...) there wasn't any hard focus on it in the Somali community also before the law.”

and

“Coming here would help, because you don't have that pressure so they are like ok this is the time to stop doing it.” (Somali woman 6)

Hence, as this woman argues the majority of Somalis that came to Norway they already wanted to abandon the practice and because in Norway FGC was not a social norm, the abandonment was easy.

“It's different the idea when we were in Somalia then when came to this country. In Somalia it is very common to happen.” (Somali woman 5)

“After my family it stopped, because it lost value. So it's one of the cultural baggage that was thrown out because there was no sense in it.” (Somali woman 6)

As this woman explains, the practice lost its value in Norway because there was no sense in practicing it, as the norm in Norway was of not cutting. This is an example of how bio-power and norms differ according to each society and how quickly a new norm can be adopted and discipline the body (Foucault, [1976] 1990).

Culture or religion?

Migration usually results in encounters with people with other cultures and religions, often also with those from the same religion. As Johnsdotter's (2003) research on Somalis in Western exile shows, the interaction with other Muslims that do not practice FGC may result in a re-examination of people's Islamic beliefs and sources. It is often the case that to large numbers of people practising FGC, the religious scriptures are not available, due to for example illiteracy. Hence, they hold the belief that FGC is a religious mandate and therefore plays an important part in representing their social and religious identity. FGC may be seen for some as the highest form of devotion.

“Some of the people told us FGM was a part of the religion but later on when people learned religion, in the best way, we knew it was a culture but not religion (...) now we found out that our religion is against violence and our religion never accepted to cut the genital of the females.” (Somali woman 3)

When meeting other Muslims, these people may realise that FGC is not a command of Islam, hence, they may start informing themselves about it and changing their minds. Others may have started the religious education already in their countries and learnt that Islam does not support female circumcision.

“When people started learning and really understanding what is it to be a Muslim, and looking at the scriptures and seeing and finding the truth in it and many saw that this is actually a forbidden practice for Muslim people because you are not supposed to cut a piece of the human body like that.” (Somali woman 6)

Upon the realisation that the practice is a cultural norm rather than a religious one and together with the rejecting social environment in the West, migrants may decide to abandon it.

“I think that's when people started really studying the religion, and try to write what is right and what is wrong so of course there is still a lot of social norms that are to break but I think people have it a lot easier to separate between the two.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

Other practices or values associated with religion are not as easily abandoned as religion is believed to be unchangeable, but culture on the other hand is (Johnsdotter, 2003).

“The circumcision for the guys, that's religious so all parents do it” (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

As this woman explains, male circumcision is a religious duty, therefore it cannot be changed, which is different than female circumcision.

Talking sexuality

One of the main reasons why social norms are so persistent and difficult to change is because of the normative breach it supposes to talk about them (Bicchieri, 2006). The attitudes towards a social norm are rarely discussed, mostly they are not discussed between groups such as men and women if the norm is related to sexuality such as FGC. Not all cultures discuss sexuality openly in society, in school or even at home, not even all individuals do it even in a society that openly talks about sexuality. Moreover, sexuality, since it is the place of reproduction, is believed to be in need of control or also called bio-power. Hence, in all societies there exist norms sanctioning the sexual activity that is not meant for reproduction (Foucault, [1976] 1990). Hence, talking about sexuality, further than to explain its reproductive function, has been sanctioned and limited in many cultures. There is little knowledge about intercourse before marriage, so when migrating to a new context where sexuality is discussed in the media and in public debates people may also start evaluating their knowledge about sexuality and their culture's practices around it (Ahmadi, 2003).

“We never talked about having prevention (laughs) or something like that because its taboo in the culture and society.” (Somali woman 2)

“It is more open in this country, we cannot talk in our country (about sexuality).” (Somali woman 3)

“First step coming in this country is like the first time knowing how to use a condom and how to use preventive tablets and having sex and everything. Now it’s not taboo any longer because in society we can talk about it and even with our friends we can talk about it, we discuss, we watch movies and you know, even watching a movie you get to know a lot of things about sexuality.”

(Somali woman 2)

As this woman explains, the fact that they were all introduced to contraceptives and intercourse when arriving in Norway has opened the doors to discuss sexuality more openly among the Somali community in Norway. This way also the discussing of FGC may have stopped being so taboo and this way with dialogue between young men and women they may have realised just like the woman above explains, that men do not desire circumcised women. This may have helped the abandonment as another motive for women not to get circumcised.

Pressure from older generations?

It is alleged that one of the main obstacles for the abandonment of the practice in the countries of origin has been the respect for the elder’s opinion, due to the age hierarchy in many of these countries. However, the Somali women that I talked to mentioned that even though some grandparents may still support FGC, the majority of the people do not agree with them, hence they do not necessarily follow the elders’ suggestions.

“There is no pressure back home, grandparents maybe they still think that FGM should be continued but they cannot say out loud because they community understood better today.

(Somali woman 5)

Another woman mentioned (almost laughing) that the war had left few grandparents alive.

“There are no more grandparents in Somalia anymore, because when there is poverty, when there is fighting I think the age of the people lowers, and they are dying quicker.”

(Somali woman 2)

With migration to Norway, often families migrate leaving elders behind, hence with the distance it is said that parents can take their own decisions without the grandparents being aware of their granddaughters not being circumcised.

"I guess as a grandparents pressure can be very strong, telephone-wise you can get away with it because they live the other side of the world like they can't do anything about it. I don't think they have a strong influence because they don't live together." (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

That is if the grandparents agree with the practice, which may not always be the case as this woman explains.

"My mom's mom maybe (was in favour) in the olden days but after she gained knowledge about it she was all completely against it so all my cousins, we didn't get that pressure" (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

Thus, attitudes are believed to be "neither static nor immutable, they are spatially and temporarily variable (...) and subject to modification and transformation" (pp.935, Gele et al. 2015). Migration brings people into new socio-cultural environments, this may induce reflection upon one's own cultural views.

"When you are in Somalia you believe more in it, it's the culture and the community that we live in. So you come here and then you know that it is something against the law, the idea is changing now." (Somali woman 5)

Some women I talked with highlighted that the context where people live in makes a difference in what social norms to follow. Moreover, they noted that there are different ways of keeping oneself virgin and pure until marriage which other Muslims do instead of circumcision. Although they may not undergo FGC, bio-power is still in place, since the body is still disciplined for the sake of sexuality.

"I genuinely believe that the mind-set of people that live here is a lot less than people back home. Society really does play a role, because you don't see any benefits of it, a lot of the Muslims around they are pretty serious about keeping themselves virgin until they get married and it's nothing to do with their parents' beliefs, it's more that they actually wanna keep it for God's sake." (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

The same woman also provided a possible explanation for the reason why people in Somalia have slowly started abandoning the practice or at least supporting it.

"Society can play a role it started becoming more known people started talking about it, started being on TV. TV has a big role I would say when people saw it there they started talking about it and think: do we really need this? And then they evaluate what they went through I think that might have been the spark and then after civil war have to start again trying to re-build the society, you kinda think about what you wanna drop from society that is not good for people,

that could be one of the things that people thought about, do we really need this, is it worth it?"
(Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

As this woman explains, there may be some positive in the aftermath of the war in Somalia. As bad as war and as hard as re-building a nation may be, it may provide the chance to re-construct it yet in a different way. As another woman previously mentioned, there were several circumstances in the country that may have contributed to the abandonment of FGC. She mentioned the case of the reduced amount of elders left in the country, which may have therefore reduced the amount of voices and pressure against the FGC abandonment.

"When you come here, you cut the traditional bond because you get enlightened, you get new knowledge, so you say ok this is not something I want to further." (Norwegian-Somali woman 9)

"When you are born outside (of Eritrea) the parents they know that it is not good, so they stop. Because they know that that is not good, before they believe that is good for women, when they come here they get information about that (...) because the rule here, and the society is different here." (Eritrean woman 8)

Hence, being in a new socio-cultural environment, with different laws and social norms makes people evaluate their social norms and laws and possibly change them to adapt to the society they have migrated to.

Somali men's attitudes towards FGC

Since this paper explains FGC as a cultural disciplinary practice related to beautification and ultimately to the control of women's bodies due to their hypersexualization, it understands such practices as patriarchal (Bartky, 1988). All practices of all cultures that regulate women's bodies and behaviour. Hence, it would be expected of men to be in agreement with FGC as well as enforcing it as this woman explains:

"The idea behind FGM was a man in Somalia (laughing) and then telling us it is religion based and today everybody tells us that was a myth, that it is not based in the religion." (Somali woman 5)

This woman also believes that FGC has patriarchal ideas behind it, although the origin of her belief is rather uncertain as she changed her mind about the practice when she came to Norway.

Nevertheless, since it is believed to be a practice to regulate a woman's sexuality for marriage, it was necessary to find out whether the women thought men still wanted FGC for their brides and daughters or not. The answers were the following.

"Today's men they would prefer to marry, and the life of their children to be un-FGMed, it was years ago, men's mentality was like: I want to marry a girl with FGM because I'm sure that she is pure but today everybody says, this is torture so they don't want to marry someone like this, so the mentality also has changed among men." (Somali woman 5)

As they explain it seems that they mean also men in Somalia as well as in Somali men in Norway, from young to older.

"Today nobody wants that (circumcised brides), I'm in my 20s, so I can understand the men in their 20s and I have a lot of friends, which I can talk more openly." (Somali woman 2)

Another one explains how it has stopped being a demand from the man, and now only the women are the ones that have taken control of the practice and the ones also promoting it. Hence, it seems that it is the women who are disciplining other women.

"You don't hear the guy demanding it, it's kinda weird, why would you do something that the guy didn't demand (...) they don't really get involved in that stuff, it's more of a female thing." (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

One of the women explain that the reason why women in Somalia had changed their minds about FGC was due to the influence of the Western films.

"I don't think so (that men want FGC), men in Somalia they are with Hollywood so they understand more that everybody wants to have pleasure, nobody wants to have pain." (Somali woman 3)

Even though it is believed that what constitutes as pleasure is very much dependent on each culture (Shell-Duncan and Herlund, 2007) it seems that as this woman explains in Somalia they have started to understand pleasure the Western way by referring to Hollywood. She dichotomises pain as the Somali sexual culture and pleasure as the Western. This echoes once more Mohanty's (1984) criticism of the claim that "Third World Women" in this case Somali women are presented as oppressed and in "*pain*" in opposition to the Western woman, who has power over her own body and sexuality and feels "*pleasure*".

Although sexuality is believed to be a socio-cultural construction, (Weeks 1985) it is often that we are influenced by the Western hegemonic culture and we end up believing that

is the ultimate “right” culture. This belief is encouraged and justified when migrating to a country with Western values such as Norway, where elements of the Somali culture such as FGC are criminalised.

Integration in Norway

One of the few FGC researchers in Norway, Abdi A. Gele, conducted several investigations on the attitudes towards FGC among the Somali community in Norway and determined that the length of time of residence in Norway plays an important role in the change of attitudes. That means the longer people live in Norway, the less approving are they of the practice. Padilla (1980) argued that for the acculturation process to occur, that is the change and adaptation to another culture, there needs to be a certain level of knowledge about the host culture as well as the language. Several of the women I talked to mentioned the language and culture as important factors in feeling integrated.

“I felt that I am in another country where I am a foreigner, because it’s a country which you don’t know the language, the culture, how people dress up, the weather and even the food.” (Somali woman 3)

“I still feel like I’m a stranger in the country (because of the) language barrier (...) when I am communicating with other people I am feeling like I cannot speak enough Norwegian and I am still in the process of learning it.” (Somali woman 4)

The more integrated people feel the more it is believed to lead migrants to adapt to the new social norms, in the case of Norway not circumcising their daughters. Hence, it would be to the benefit of the Norwegian state and for abandonment to put further effort on the integration of migrants. Moreover, due to the strict measures of the Norwegian state towards those that infringe the law against FGC, people may abandon it out of fear of prosecution and expulsion (Shell-Duncan and Hernlund, 2007).

As mentioned above according to the Somali women I talked to, there are very few Somalis in Norway that support the practice, and those few that do would not dare because of the strict law and prosecution.

“I don’t think there exists a family in Norway that if they are aware of the damages of the practice I don’t think they will go back home and do their children. I never heard about a family who wanted to do that.” (Somali woman 4)

“Norway is pretty scary as well, and I think the ones that live here know for sure that's illegal, you can get into prison for some years I think, but more than that is who is willing to do that I don't think that any parent would be willing to do that, specially getting arrested and things like that.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

Additionally, most respondents of the researches undertaken in Norway regarding FGC including this thesis claimed to be in agreement with the Norwegian law banning FGC. Hence, once more there is clear evidence of incongruences between the harsh Norwegian law and public discourse around it and the reality of the practice (Gele et al. 2015). Solveig Horne's belief that even if there is only one girl circumcised there should be strict laws to avoid it may have worse effects than believed. The media as seen above does not spread the news with accuracy but rather writes to spark sensationalism. This creates an image of certain immigrants as barbaric, law-breakers resulting in stigma towards certain groups of immigrants. This, in turn, may result in a lack of integration due to feeling excluded and judged (Padilla, 1980).

“It gives us a negative connotation, because when someone sees me and asks me: Where are you from? And I say Somalia, the first thing that will come to their head is FGM and you know someone? Has it happened to you? Especially when I tell them I went back home and I've lived there, it's like, no one said that to me but I'm saying I wouldn't be surprised if they said that to me now and that's offensive, really offensive, like what are you trying to say, we are not stupid you know? We know what's right what's wrong.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

“You have this extra focus and humiliation and it just brings more problems than good because you are just pointing a finger at people that are doing their best at getting rid of the custom and have gotten rid of it years ago and they are still being controlled or check and how are you going to say afterwards welcome and integrate into the society, then you wouldn't feel welcomed.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 9)

From the women that I interviewed the most critical about the policies of the Norwegian Government and the negative image of the Somalis were those who were born in Norway, possibly because they feel more entitled to live here and to have a say about the situation of Somalis in Norway.

If there is evidence of the change in attitudes about FGC among what are believed to be the practising communities, then why is there still such harsh discourse in the media and by politicians? Critics may argue that it is a case of cultural imperialism, imposing the majority culture upon a specific group of migrants through a specific law aimed at them (Johnsdotter, 2003). Some may claim that Norway is already a multicultural society

where groups' rights are respected. However, in the case of FGC, the law needs to protect from discrimination at an individual level, despite its clash with groups' rights to self-determination (Lien and Schultz, 2014). Hence, the Norwegian state would, in theory, be following Kymlicka's theory of multiculturalism that is allowing group rights as long as they do not infringe the individual's right or freedom. It is believed that Norway's strict legislation against FGC is merely the country's right to define its own rules and as Poulter (1985 pp. 596) argued to "prevent acts of cruelty or harm from being performed under the cloak of custom or ritual". Hence, the Norwegian state is merely doing its best to preserve everybody's human rights, which are believed to be basic standards shared by all cultures. Yet, there are those that disagree and maintain that human rights are influenced by Western cultures and a way to impose their norms through cultural imperialism and intellectual colonialism (Kalev, 2007). These norms, which as we have seen earlier are disciplinary practices of bio-power, which are observed in the Norwegian context as well as in other so-called "traditional" cultures. Thus, it could be argued that Norway's approach towards migrants is not that much of multiculturalism but rather of assimilation. As seen earlier, the discourse and the authorities express that if migrants follow "their" own culture, they will not be integrated into the Norwegian society, since many elements of "their" culture are the ones hampering their integration.

Colonising bodies

It may be claimed that not only does the “western” anti-FGC discourse try to “other” those practising it but also it aims at “normalising” them. It does so by moulding their bodies to “western” ideals, in a sort of colonisation of their bodies (Herlund and Shell-Duncan, 2007). This starts by portraying women of colour as victims of patriarchy, hence, building a “monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance (that) leads to the construction of a similar reductive and homogeneous notion of ‘Third World Difference’” (Mohanty, 1984, pp.335). This results in the representation of all migrant women of colour in Norway as victims of their culture, unable to speak for themselves. They are depicted as objects that need to be enlightened and told about gender equality and abandon FGC (Rogers, 2007). However, as the extracts of the interviews with Somali women in this thesis show, all of them are strongly voiced and empowered woman, which do not seem to be under the foot of patriarchy. Most of them were against the practice before coming to Norway, and one of them even had worked in an NGO against FGC back in Somalia.

“When I grew up I realised I should do something against this and then I got this job to work against FGM and this is the story that I was telling people, today I'm against to do it at all. So I'm against it and I will be against it forever!” (says proudly) “What we were doing was against FGM, women empowerment, so we were feminists.” (Somali woman 2)

Arguably, this objectification can be observed in the lack of dialogue with the immigrant communities and much less with the immigrant women (Teigen & Langvasbraten, 2009). Moreover, using words such as “mutilated” to refer to circumcised women incites the idea that they are not complete, that they are flawed and inferior to the Western woman that is complete (Talle, 2007).

One of the women I talked to even told me how some of her Somali friends who had arrived in Norway with her had gone to the doctor and had done a reconstruction of her genitals and she was considering doing it also herself.

“When I was coming to this country, I had two friends who came at the same time with me, and they were ‘FGMed’ like me, so they went to the doctor and they made an operation to open in here and I am feeling the same way, maybe I want to do that too.” (Somali woman 4)

These women, like many other African women from practicing countries, after continuously hearing how they are ‘mutilated’ and missing an essential part of their female bodies, that what would make them ‘normal’, decide to get their circumcision reversed by being ‘opened’ and ‘reconstructed’. What is more, these surgeries to make

them 'look normal' again are generously covered by the state in Scandinavia according to Johansen (2007). As Spivak argued, the woman of colour is continuously compared to the Western woman, which is the model to follow. The belief is that "normal" body that every woman should have is one with a clitoris, which is the "site of feminine agency in the West" (pp. 151, Rogers, 2007).

*"FGM was like they were making sure the girl was virgin, when she is getting married, now they understood virginity is not like cutting somebody's genital and sowing it **but today they understood** that there is a virginity which God created, **it's normal, everybody has that virginity**"*
(Somali woman 4)

As this woman explains, before the virgin body in Somali culture was believed to look one way, circumcised. However, as she says "today they understood" that the "normal" bodies and virginity look "normal", with a clitoris, because a woman without clitoris is not a woman, or that is at least the belief in the "west" as seen earlier with the intersex surgeries. Moreover, a non-western woman without a clitoris is not to be considered a free woman as it is believed that she has been pressured by her culture to be 'mutilated' (Rogers, 2007). This is a purely cultural notion of gender identity, which once again is rationalised by the 'west', the cultural/social nature is "forgotten" or better omitted and seen as the only possible reality. As we have seen before, not everyone is born with equal looking genitals. Hence, it is this idea of one type of "normality" as universal which needs to be contested and emphasised that all bodies are disciplined through norms of bio-power, in the Norwegian context as well as in the "traditional" cultures.

The 'voiceless' or the silenced?

It is argued that "the submissive body of the (Muslim) female migrant may serve to demarcate the boundary between the civilised westerner and uncivilised and illiberal outsider" (pp.80, Kofman, Saharaso and Vacchelli, 2013). Ironically, while the submissiveness of migrant women's bodies to their patriarchal cultures is criticised by some western feminists and states, they themselves make them submissive once more to the scrutiny of the host society, the Norwegian in this case (Kirk, 2007).

This Somali woman born in Norway highlights the feeling of observed and judged just by society's stares.

"That stigma of everyone just looking at you and thinking you should know something, when this is your home country, it's kinda negative." (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

“We know well that there’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’. There are only the deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard” (Roy, 2004). Arundhati Roy’s statement at the 2004 Sydney Peace Prize ceremony, illustrates what can arguably be claimed to be the strategy of the Norwegian State and other Western states. That is the little or no involvement of migrants and especially migrant women in debates regarding the policies that may directly affect them.

*“I know we live in Norway, so we have to live by Norwegian laws and regulations, which come under the norms as well but when Norwegians stand there talking is like but you don't know what we've been through, you don't sympathise with us, we know it's your country but you don't get us. When you just stand there and give demands it's like you order us in a sense and if you really want people to understand you, you have to try to find that barrier and see what unites you, it's like we are on the same side here, we are not enemies, we believe exactly what you believe in for different reasons but we believe, our common goal is this and we should eradicate it and **see people more as a friend than an enemy.**”* (Somali woman 7)

This Somali woman born in Norway, is highly critical of the way that Norway approaches the immigrant community and she implies that sometimes they may be even seen as enemies by the Norwegian government.

“If the government thinks oh FGM, taboo, its better if they talk to us then asks us how we feel, how we can stop, what we are doing and step by step... The Norwegian society or government have never experienced FGM, but WE are those who experienced FGM, WE are those who come from the mentality of FGM and then we know how we feel, so we can express how we feel, they can express how they feel and then together we can have a middle solution and then maybe the strategies that we have can be more practical than the strategies that they have to stop FGM.” (Somali woman 2)

Both women are of the opinion that the government should involve more the Somali and immigrant community in general when tackling issues that are related to them such as stopping FGC among others.

However, this way of treating immigrants and tackling issues linked to them may be done out of fear of patriarchal and traditional values overtaking the gender equal and free Norwegian society’s values. Some go further to argue that this reaction may be stemming from an Islamophobic and anti-immigrant agenda (Kofman, Saharaso and Vacchelli, 2013).

Pressure to normalise their bodies

When asking the women in this study if they had felt at any point pressure from the Norwegian society to change something about their culture two of them shared two very similar stories.

“I sometimes feel that (pressure) I go to the swimming pool that is only for ladies, and there are two Norwegians helping them, sometimes when I go there people see that I have long hair, black and curly beautiful hair. They ask me: Why are you wearing the headscarf? You have beautiful nice hair! If you take it off you are going to look gorgeous. They always tell me that I'm so young that I can live in my beauty. Sometimes I'm feeling like they want to tell me a message which is like: who they like me to be and I'm always telling them who I want to be.” (Somali woman 3)

*“I also go to the swimming pool in my city before I came here, everybody asked me: oh you have beautiful hair, take off the hijab and try to be nice. I used to go Zumba class with a lot of my friends and then they asked me: oh you can dance well, your shape is nicer when you have skinny tights, why you always wear hijab or abaya (Muslim tunic) or something big, so it seems like you are fat when you are in those clothes and when you have these clothes you are more nice more attractive. **I'm feeling like that is the person they want me to be if I want to be part of this society** but we still prefer who we want to be and then to be part of the society as well.” (Somali woman 2)*

Both women express their distress with the comments made by Norwegians regarding their Muslim clothing, which they chose to wear and are happy to do so. They indicate that they feel pressure to change the way they present their bodies, they feel that members of the Norwegian society would prefer them wearing “tight” clothes which are normally worn in Norway. Hence, they are being pushed into following certain disciplinary fashion styles and as Bartky (1988) explains part of the third type of disciplinary practice, the beautification of the body. Such as with all forms of disciplinary practices, those that do not follow are punished in various ways. In this case, the women I talked to mentioned feeling like they felt if they removed the hijab or wear skinny clothes they would feel more part of the Norwegian society. Their “punishment” for not following the disciplinary fashion style of Norway is feeling less integrated, hence more excluded from social relations (Bartky, 1988, King, 2013).

Also not involving themselves in certain “normal” activities of the Norwegian society such as going to a discotheque to party, or have boyfriends, eat in restaurants where the food

is not halal, where there is alcohol and where men and women are close to each other make the Somali women I talked to feel less integrated.

*“Sometimes when my friends go to the pub or discotheque in my city and I can't go with them and everybody is going and I'm feeling like I'm lonely. But I feel like this is my dignity, this is what I used to be and this is our family's legacy and our religion's legacy and I can't change and **I don't want to change.**”* (Somali woman 2)

*“Most of the time when people meet each other, it's like we are going to the restaurant or hotel some place that makes us happy, and then two cultural differences are getting in conflict in that issue. Because wherever we go we are looking for something halal and then if we go with the Norwegians most of the places are non-halal places and they drink and Norwegians eat pork and something like that. Also when women and men come together **it's difficult for us** to be in a place where there is a lot of men and to be happy and **to behave like Norwegians** when they are with men.”* (Somali woman 6)

Hence, the only way they see integration happening is if they behave and dress like Norwegians, even though they are accepted by the society in general, the relationships with ethnic Norwegians is very limited as they explain. Thus, if the Somali women do not “normalise” their bodies and follow the Norwegian disciplinary practices, then they may feel social sanctions such as not being allowed the full inclusion into the Norwegian society. To do so they would have to ignore Islam’s commands, hence, integration in Norway seems more like assimilation mostly in the case of Muslims, then, if they want to follow their religion they will not be really integrated into the society.

It may be argued that these seemingly innocent comments towards these women’s hijabs can be considered part of a larger anti-Muslim agenda, together with the culturalist arguments against FGC and other practices such as forced marriages or domestic violence believed to be innate to Muslim cultures. Hence, it seems the West, in this case, Norway, feels the “need” to protect itself from such “tribal” values that put their liberal and gender equality values in danger and help Muslims with such values to leave those behind, take their hijabs off, stop mutilating etc, and turn to modernity. This ignores once more the reality that all societies’ bodies are disciplined by bio-power, controlling their sexuality with social norms (Foucault, [1976] 1990).

Moreover, this has a certain similarity to the “need” of Europeans to teach and discipline the non-European “Other” in colonial times to move away from their barbaric and coercive cultural disciplines.

Several women that I interviewed expressed that they felt that the Somali community was more on the radar and target of the anti-FGC policies and that they were very often put as an example of practising community in the media. This, as seen earlier created a stigma towards the Somali community in Norway. When asking these women the reasons why they thought Somalis were in the spotlight of the anti-FGC campaign the response was because of their religion.

“They focus too much on Somalia, I don’t know why, if I may take a wild guess, I feel like they would probably assume that it’s more common within a Muslim society, which I think it’s kinda wrong, because if they had said we will look at anyone who is Ethiopian, Eritrean, Sudanese, and say it out loud and we would hear cases that they have also messed up I think we wouldn’t feel that much as being a target.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

The Norwegian state has statistics of all the practicing countries and knows that in Ethiopia and Eritrea, countries with Christian population, they have almost as high prevalence of FGC as in Somalia, hence they know that Christian communities also practice FGC. So why is it that Somalis, a Muslim community feel more targeted by the anti-FGC policies and the media?

*“I think it’s also because we don’t really integrate in the society as much as Ethiopian, Eritrean and I think many of them are orthodox Christians as well so they can understand the Norwegian society better. I don’t think I understand them but I think I understand Ethiopians a lot better than Norwegians, I feel like we have kinda similar morals I would say but I think it’s the fact that they are both Christian, these societies work together and also because I would say Ethiopian and Eritreans I feel like if you are a Christian you have a sense of respect, people don’t bother you it’s like they are religious people they are holy people, like let’s leave them in peace **I feel like people have a lot more respect towards them than towards Muslims**, whether you are liberal Muslim or secular I think just **the word Muslim has a negative connotation** whereas an orthodox Christian will be left in peace.”* (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

As this woman explains Eritrean and Ethiopian, even though they practice FGC in high numbers as Somalia, many of them may be Christian, hence, as she mentions, their integration in a Christian nation such as Norway may be easier than for Muslims. What is more, Muslims if they are visible by wearing Muslim clothes as Somalis usually are, they may feel even less integrated for dressing differently from the majority of the Norwegian society. They may receive such comments as Somali woman 2 and 3 mentioned above about their hijab. Due to this “hypervisibility of the Muslim woman’s body” (Razack, 2004, pp.130), these may be treated with less respect as the Norwegian-

Somali woman 7 stated earlier than those that do not have any Muslim clothes on. Starting with the clash with the Western beauty ideal, which sees a hijab as something that stands in the way of beauty, as well as baggy clothes, which hide a woman's body. Therefore, implying that a woman can only be beautiful if she shows her hair and the curves of her body. This may continue with the Western belief that the body of a Muslim woman is "fixed in the Western imaginary as confined, mutilated and sometimes murdered" (Razack, 2004, pp.130).

All this may be henceforth tagged as an anti-Muslim sentiment, if it is believed that there are more similarities between Eritrean/Ethiopian and Norwegian culture than between Somali and Eritrean/Ethiopian culture who are neighbouring countries, merely due to sharing the same Christian religion.

Just as this Norwegian-born Somali woman (7) explains:

"I think I understand Ethiopians a lot better than Norwegians, I feel like we have kinda similar morals I would say but I think it's the fact that they are both Christian."

Even among some members of the Christian Eritrean community in Norway it is believed that Somalis hold on to the practice of FGC more strongly than Eritreans.

"Because Somalis, even some people that are born here they continue, but I think our group is like when they move to some places they change their mind." (Eritrean woman 8)

Thus, Somali women and families are at the centre of attention in the media and at the focus of the FGC policies of the Norwegian government as they feel their Muslim culture is responsible for their lack of integration. They justify the "colonisation" of their bodies, by disciplining them with Norwegian norms in the dress code, behaviour, mentality, etc. This is done in an effort to push away what is believed to be Muslim cultural practices and beliefs that are incongruent with Norwegian laws and values out of the Norwegian borders. As Sherene Razack (2004) argues, Muslim communities in exile have been monitored for the sake of gender equality, and this has been coordinated globally under the rationale that the Muslim values and the Western values will always be in conflict.

"We need to teach them what is right and what is wrong"

To be able to prevent the "patriarchal Muslim culture" from spreading in Norway not only the Muslim women need to be disciplined with "right" values but also the Muslim men. One of the ways of doing this is through the introduction of courses for migrant men on

“how to treat women”, where rape and violence against women is discussed. These courses are provided since 2013 in the reception centres not only in Norway but also other parts of Scandinavia to those asylum seekers and refugees that wish to attend. For now they are voluntary, though, in Denmark policymakers wish to make them compulsory together with the language and society courses for migrants. Nina Madibya, the reception centre manager of Sandnes, South-West Norway, explains that the courses are made for the migrant men to “at least know the difference between right and wrong” (Higgins, 2015). This measure is believed to have sparked after a number of rape cases between 2009 to 2011 in Stavanger, Norway, where the police had said to have found a “link but not a very clear link to rapes cases and the city’s immigrant community” (Higgins, 2015). This may reinforce the homogenisation and “orientalisation” of the term “immigrant men” and strengthen the belief that all those men coming to Norway were from patriarchal, sexist and violent countries. This continuous reproduction of the “Third World Difference” as explained by Mohanty (1984) has led to the belief that all immigrant men need to be taught about gender equality and how to respect women, not only to save women of colour but also the Western woman in the host country. Even the police authorities in Norway also believe that “there are lots of men who haven’t learned that women have value, this is the biggest problem and it is cultural” (Higgins, 2015). This once more implies that there are some places in the “Third World” where it is their culture to not value women unlike in Norway (and the West) where the cultural values are to respect women and value them. Hence, placing the Western culture at the top of the culture hierarchy, being the one that should be taught to those that are uncivilised. This all seems to ignore the fact that not so long ago in the West women were not always respected and even today their work is not always and everywhere valued equally to that of men.

However, not all reception centres in Norway take the same approach to these courses, Hero Norge, a private company in charge of several centres around Norway has a rival program. It focuses on getting men to discuss about relationships between sexes but avoiding “making migrants feel as if they are under suspicion” says Berit Harr, the course monitor at a reception centre in Hå, Norway. They do so by using a fictional character that does bad deeds, which is represented by Arne, a native Norwegian and then the other character, Hassan, is an immigrant man, who is presented as good. The course participants are supposed to discuss the actions of Arne by deliberating what should Hassan do (Higgins, 2015).

It may be beneficial to have discussions with men, and women generally about what they think is right and wrong when it comes to the relation between sexes. The main issue is with bulking all immigrants together as if they came from cultures where violence against

women is part of their values. This essentialisation by categorising the “Other” may be seen as a form of psychological and even physical violence, as Edwards Said (1977) argued.

The same way that immigrant men are seen as violent towards women, immigrant women from countries that practice FGC are seen as suffering from the worst possible consequences of FGC, either psychologically or physically and mortality due to FGC is portrayed as very high. However, these cases are believed to be the exception rather than the rule (Johnsdotter, 2007). Enhancing and exaggerating the cases of mortality and morbidity allows to promote the idea of certain cultures as mutilators and victims of their cultures.

Exaggerating is being used as a tool to justify the policing and disciplining of the Muslim migrants in Norway under what could possibly be a large Islamophobic and anti-immigrant agenda. This is seen once more in the stark essentialisations made by Norwegian authorities and public figures such as Hege Storhaug. This Norwegian journalist and founder of Human Rights Service, an organisation said to be working for integration and inclusion. The organisation is also linked to the Progressive Party (FRP) currently in the coalition government. Storhaug is a strong critic of Islam and has written several books which are argued to be full of orientalist essentialisations (Razack, 2004). In early 2016, she published a book, *Islam, the 11th plague*, about the rise of Islamic extremism, to which she gave an interview in the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* with seven policy proposals, among these were: 1) To delete certain verses from the Qur’an in Norwegian mosques, that incite violence. 2) State control of the content of Muslim communities 3) Close some mosques and not build any more for a while 4) Prohibit hijab from kindergarten until university. In addition she suggests to build fences and use the military to tackle the refugee crisis and give money for some families to go back to their countries of origin.

The reason why Storhaug treats Islam differently from Judaism and Christianity, for example banning hijab but not the Jewish kippa or the Christian cross, is because she argues that the two latter religions do not clash with democracy, yet Islam does (Aftenposten, 2016). She shows again the arrogance of the West towards Muslim cultures, in need of being taught some democracy and “manners” because their religion and culture is “backward”. “Modern states expand their scope of authority, legitimacy, power, wealth, and control not only over citizens – in the name of freedom, autonomy, self-determination, and self-direction – but also over those racially considered incapable or not yet capable of self-rule” (Razack, 2004, pp.149).

Saving women from their culture

As seen earlier Norway presents itself in the position of rational, civilised enlightener by claiming to have gender equality as part of their identity and values in several governmental reports as well as in the media (Bergstrøm, 2015). This way creating the idea that some countries have gender equality and freedom in their values and culture and others not. Therefore, they place themselves as entitled as well as compelled to make sure everyone enjoys these. By presenting FGC, forced marriage and domestic violence in their policies as multicultural issues and discussing a plan on domestic violence and forced marriage as the “minority women’s situation”, the Norwegian government creates a picture of the migrant women as homogeneous and victim of her culture. This is highlighted in opposition to the Norwegian woman, free of culture (Langvasbraten, 2008, Mohanty, 1988). As claimed by several researchers (DuBois, 1991, Abu-Linghod, 2002, Spivak, 1988) this constructed superiority has allowed the “west” to justify their invasions and colonisations, often alleging to be saving women from their patriarchal societies. In the case of Norway, it is used as a justification for the tough law against FGC, to get approval for the compulsory gynaecological examinations and for the duty to avert. Moreover, Norway is also a country that accepts refugees who flee out of fear of being forcibly circumcised. Hence, once more playing the role of Western saviour of women of colour, freeing them from their patriarchal cultures (Obiora, 2004).

The justification for the intervention to “save” women from their culture, whether it is in the countries of origin or in Norway, is accentuated by the constant portrayal of women and children suffering from FGC. Only those suffering or saved from the practice are chosen to tell their stories in the Western media. Rarely do we hear the voices of those that are proud of being circumcised, for being considered a woman, mothers that are happy for having provided their daughters better chances for marriage. “Bodily experience is produced through culture, desires and pleasures can be culturally and historically specific” (pp.58, Boddy, 2007). Thus, what makes us happy and gives us pleasure may be very different from culture to culture, and this arguably is also a form of bio-power both in the in the “traditional” cultures as well as in the Norwegian context.

There are those that identify these interventions to “save” women as “everyday voyeurisms”, constantly talking about it as much as possible as a way to constantly maintain it in the focus of attention. This form of voyeurism is justified once more by the moral duty to prevent there being victims (of culture) (Johnsdotter, 2007). This goodwill of the Norwegian government is understood by one of the women I talked to, yet, she disagrees with their methods.

"I understand, that the government's interest is in the best of the girls I would like to believe that and I think it's truth, if there could be another process of checking I would be much more thankful." (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

This moral duty can also be seen as superiority, the need to be the saviours, the heroes of women of colour, it used to be the white man saving the brown/black woman, now white feminists are the ones wanting to save them due to their feminist postcolonial agenda. However, as Spivak puts it, postcolonial feminists are those not allowing the subaltern or women of colour to speak. She argued that efforts from outsiders to help or "save" the subaltern, mostly result in clustering them under one homogeneous characteristic, hence obscuring their wide heterogeneity. Moreover, through being their saviours, the relations of dependency are heightened leading often to outsiders such as white feminists to speak for the subaltern instead (Spivak, 1988). Hence, once more turning them into objects/bodies that need and can be "normalised" and formed.

Suggestions on how to tackle the issue of FGC in Norway

As we have seen earlier, these women of Somali and Eritrean background, have expressed their outrage and disapproval of the way the Norwegian government has been tackling the issue of FGC until now. Since they are the ones to be affected by the laws, policies and other measures by the government in relation to this practice they have also emphasised the need for further dialogue between the government and the Somali community and in general immigrant communities. Therefore, I have found it necessary and important to ask them how they think the issue of FGC should be dealt with.

“The law and the programmes making people understand they have to go side by side, because then you wouldn't get rid of it, just get rid of the person that got caught. They need rehabilitation, making the people understand, getting in touch with the people, programmes. Just jailing doesn't help solve the actual programme, you want to catch it before it's done.” (Somali woman 6)

This woman for example emphasises on the need to have programmes that go side by side with the law, it is not enough to make people afraid of the law but also understand why there is such law:

“It is a slow process to make people understand and why you shouldn't do it. To make people accept it but I believe that is not that easy to say you get punished if you do it and that's it but it has to be an ongoing informational thing that you have to pound into people slowly to erase it” (Somali woman 6)

She argues that people need to be constantly informed about the risks of such practice and that this may take some time, since such an engrained cultural practice is not easy to be left behind. Most importantly, as this woman explains the prosecution and the strict monitoring of the Somali community by Norwegian authorities may make some even reject such law.

“The scrutiny of controlling it doesn't help the issue, you have to take it from the lower levels, from the health maybe also talking to people with understanding” (Somali woman 6)

Similarly, another woman born in Norway of Somali background, highlights how the victimisation of the Somali/immigrant community is one of the first impediments to working effectively to end the practice.

“Victimisation has to be removed first of all of you are really serious about this don't target one society cos this is over 90% in all these countries so it is a lot that would be generous if they could do this as well.” (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

After that an efficient strategy is arguably to look for arguments against such practice in the religious scripts of those practicing it. This may they can be convinced that their God would not be in agreement of such deed. If this is not enough, then, as this woman points out, there is the alternative of highlighting the possible health complications of FGC.

“You have to look at what are their arguments and try to refute those arguments and if they are practicing Muslims, then go from the religious perspective that what they are doing is wrong and if not from a religious perspective, then from a health one. That this is something that is harmful to your daughter, and why they shouldn't do it.” (Somali woman 6)

Hence, as this woman suggests, the person involved in presenting such arguments found in the religious texts against practicing FGC should be someone that Somalis and in this case Muslims would respect, hence, a fellow Somali.

*“I think Somalis would listen more to other Somalis who have lived here before them they would take their words a lot more serious, (...) one way of convincing the parents is saying that also religiously speaking this is not supported is not worth that your daughters go through that and try to talk to them from that aspect, because Somalis mostly will be willing to speak to fellow Somalis instead of Norwegian, because then they know **this person understands what I'm going through they are one of me.**”* (Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

As this woman born in Norway explains, Somalis in Norway would respect much a fellow Somali or religious person that would tell them the reasons for abandoning the practice. As she argues, Norwegians would not be as respected and listened to since they have not gone through similar experiences as Somalis nor do they practice FGC. Only an insider has the right then to tell another why they should stop practising such important and ancient practice, outsiders' explanations and efforts may not be listened to and may even cause rejection towards these efforts.

Hence, the most appropriate way to deal with the practice of FGC in Norway, according to women that have either gone through the practice and were once part of the society in the country of origin as well as women that may have not gone through FGC but are part of the Somali community in exile, is to take the religious route.

“I think working with the local mosques is another way to tackle it, like I said people listen more to the locals than the authorities, so if the government or the organisations can work with them and try to get them to talk about it, because as I said some stuff can be taboo, but in religion nothing is taboo, but culture says should be taboo, but if the local imam takes the initiative to talk about it as well and highlight the problems of it and say this is that and you will be held

accountable for what you did to your daughter what you made her go through, you get me?"
(Norwegian-Somali woman 7)

As she is arguing, the best strategy would be for the Norwegian government to work with the Somali community and other communities that practice it as well as working with the local mosques. Since the imams and sheikhs are people with influence and respect in the Muslim communities they should be involved in the abandonment programmes. Already in some countries where FGC is heavily practised such as Sudan, there are programmes working towards the abandonment of the practice which heavily cooperate with religious leaders as ambassadors of the programme, such as UNICEF's funded Saleema Communications Programme (Saleema toolkit). Other African countries that practise FGC in large numbers have also started campaigns including religious leaders, such is the case in The Gambia where 16 religious leaders have signed a declaration for the abandonment of FGC (Dukureh, 2016). In Somalia also many religious leaders have continuously gathered to discuss and preach about the harms of FGC and lack of religious support for such practice (UNICEF, 2011).

This way people are encouraged by following the advice of those they respect and admire. When in exile, living in a society that is foreign to ones' it is common that immigrants turn to that which is most familiar to them for advice and guidance, which in the case of Somalis is either the Somali community in Norway or the Islamic leaders such as imams and sheikhs. Therefore, the most efficient and also culturally sensitive way to tackle the issue of FGC in Norway is for the Norwegian authorities to work at an equal level with the representatives of the immigrant communities as well as its religious leaders.

Concluding remarks

This study has examined the issue of FGC in Norway, in particular, it has analysed whether migration as the changing of contexts alters people's attitudes towards cultural disciplinary practices such as FGC. Moreover, it has investigated the factors that may influence such change in attitudes whether it was in the country of origin or in the host country. Finally, since the practice of FGC is illegal in Norway and it is believed to be one of the strictest laws on FGC, the thesis has also laid out the discourse of the media and authorities about the practice. It has also explored the attitudes of female members of the Somali and Eritrean community, towards the policies against FGC in Norway. This study argues that the Norwegian law against FGC and further policies regarding the practice are exaggerated since several previous studies have shown that migrant communities with origin in countries with high prevalence of FGC have altered their views on the practice and have claimed that the vast majority of their community has abandoned FGC in Norway. Since such studies have been largely ignored by the Norwegian policy makers, this thesis has aimed at exploring the attitudes of women of the Somali and Eritrean community in Norway towards the practice as well as to the policies. To do so I carried out 8 semi-structured interviews and 2 informal conversations with Somali, Somali-Norwegian and Eritrean women and I have intended to give space for these women's voices since previous voices in previous research and migrant women's voices have often been ignored. Since I felt previous research on the topic lacked a strong theoretical framework, I undertook my analysis with help of Foucault's discipline theories, in particular with the theories of bio-power to explain the practice of FGC. Hence, I have argued FGC to be a cultural disciplinary form of bio-power, in other words a social norm regulating sexuality.

The results have shown that the attitudes of the Somali and Eritrean women towards the practice in some cases changed after migrating to Norway. However, the majority had a negative attitude towards FGC already in the country of origin. Those that had changed their views after arriving in Norway expressed that since the practice was normal in their country, they thought so too. Moreover, most also explained that the practice had been for centuries and still until today believed to be a mandate of their religion, hence, necessary to follow. Those that already in their country of origin did not agree with FGC, argued that it was difficult not to comply since the society pressured others to follow, if they did not they would suffer from discrimination and social exclusion. Something that many women emphasised was that parents would cut their daughters as a strategy, to help their daughters succeed in society and not be ostracised. Hence, unlike it is often

perceived in the “west”, FGC is frequently performed, not without reflection and just for being part of someone’s culture, but it was preceded by a careful deliberation. The main desire of performing such practice was highlighted as the desire to belong, since FGC is a social norm, a shared ritual of a society, having undergone it, would be rewarded by membership in the group.

Several women also explained that many of those who had been wanting to move away from the practice in their country of origin, could finally do so when moving to Norway, since there the practice is not part of the norms. On the contrary, FGC is strictly forbidden and punished with a high prison penalty, even deportation. It seems a new norm had to be followed in Norway, the norm of not-cutting.

Regarding the experiences and attitudes of the Somali and Eritrean women to the Norwegian FGC policies, although all of them agreed with the law against FGC, since all of them were against the practice, they expressed their concern and outrage towards several policies. The compulsory gynaecological examinations were referred to with strong aversion and outrage, deeming them as invasive and humiliating, so were also the police intervention when families with young girls wished to visit Somalia. Several Somali women felt particularly targeted by the authorities due to their ethnicity, and several of them emphasised their wishes to be disassociated with FGC. Despite all, the findings disclose that the most critical of these policies were those women of Somali origin who were born in Norway. This may be due to them feeling more entitled to express their opinion for having Norwegian citizenship.

Nevertheless, the findings show that the change in attitudes towards FGC had already started back in their home country, migrating had provided the few extra ingredients missing for the abandonment of the practice. Many women explained that already in their country of origin they had started to have more access to religious texts, which had allowed them to realise that nowhere in the scripts was the command that FGC had to be performed, unlike they had been told before. Migrating to Norway had made religious scripts even more accessible for many others, as well as the contact with other Muslims, who do not practice FGC. This had led to many finally changing their opinion about the practice. This has proven to debunk the claims of the discourse in Norway and the “west” such as that migrant communities continue to follow “their” cultural practices without any reflection since these are deeply rooted in their psyche. Yet, as the findings of this study show migrants go through a significant reflection and deliberation process when arriving to a new country. This is a result of the change of contexts, where they find new norms

and discourses. This triggers contemplation of the norms in their society and the norms in their new society and often leads to adaptation of some new norms.

Moreover, this paper also claims that very often what is deemed unlawful in the “west”, which is usually in line with Human Rights, is seen as what is universally and morally “wrong”. This belief seems to ignore that Human Rights and laws in general are merely a production of a society’s values, hence, laws may vary from society to society and through time, as much as values and culture does. Therefore, not only the members of the “western” societies may strongly believe that their laws dictate what is universally “right” and “wrong” but due to the persistent hegemony of the “west”, may also non-“western” societies do so too. This can be observed in the results of this study, where several women expressed that once they arrived in Norway and they “found out” FGC was illegal they changed their minds about it. This may be interpreted as, once someone arrives in the “west” and realises something is illegal there, this may mean that it is also “wrong” everywhere else.

Additionally, this paper also criticises the strong discriminating and essentialist tone of the mostly “western” anti-FGC discourse, which the Norwegian authorities also carry out. Together with the strict law, the Norwegian media discourse around the practice has merely highlighted the dangers and barbarity of the practice, it has mostly involved members of the Somali community in Norway and has exaggerated the numbers of girls potentially at risk in Norway. This study has illustrated the way this discourse represents migrant women as victims of “their” culture and “their” men. It continuously emphasises the health complications women who have undergone FGC can experience during birth or intercourse and the lack of pleasure they may feel. Previous research has shown how such discourse has been internalised by some African women and led them to be paranoid and develop sexual dysfunction, which had never been an issue before arriving in the “west” (Ahmadu, 2007). This is also seen in the findings of this paper when one of the women claimed that Somali men and women do not want to feel pain anymore but pleasure instead. It can be argued that she is associating pain with the Somali culture and the FGC practice and pleasure with the “western” culture. She also referred to the impact of “Hollywood” films on changing Somali men’s attitudes towards FGC, hence, a further influence of the “western” culture.

As mentioned earlier, people usually follow norms to avoid social exclusion and other sanctions and to belong to the group, and people may follow new norms due to changing contexts as contemplated by Bicchieri (2006). This can be observed in the findings of this study, since several women expressed their feeling of pressure to change elements

of their appearance or activities to feel more integrated in the Norwegian society. Moreover, the discourse from the authorities suggests that the reasons why migrant women are barely represented in the job market is due to “their” culture. They have claimed this to be an obstacle for their integration into the Norwegian society.

However, the pressure seems to be mostly on women’s bodies, the less migrant women look normal, like Norwegian women, less integrated they feel. Several women in this study expressed that they felt particularly targeted by this pressure for wearing Muslim attire such as hijab and abaya. Some even claimed that the Somali community was particularly targeted by the FGC discourse and policies because they were Muslim. Hence, the extra focus placed on the Somali community by the authorities to change their bodies, could be due to a certain level of Islamophobia.

Moreover, paired with the anti-FGC discourse continuously highlighting their “mutilation”, as if they were incomplete women, has led to feeling stigmatised as women in this study have expressed. What is more, one of the women voiced her wishes to undergo the surgery to reverse her circumcision, as friends of hers already had done. This may be a sign that the discourse has been so internalised, that it has resulted in their desire to “look normal” like Norwegian women. Hence, the anti-FGC discourse in Norway and the “west” is arguably colonising the bodies of migrant women of colour to “look normal”.

Thus, this paper has aimed at highlighting the way bio-power disciplines women’s bodies not only those coming from the considered “traditional” cultures by the “west”. Bodies, in this case women’s, have been and still are continuously (self-) disciplined by bio-power, to look and behave following the appropriate femininity canons. In the “west” we have tended to forget that although having achieved substantial rights equal to men, women are still disciplining their bodies. Hence, bio-power is still very much in place in all societies regulating sexuality and imposing gender roles. It has been argued that FGC is just like any other form of disciplination of a women’s body in the “west”, from plastic surgery to strict dieting and even waxing. Women (and men) have disciplined their bodies throughout history and in all cultures to mould it to the accepted “shape” of femininity.

Additionally, the findings of this study make evident that the members of the Somali and other migrant communities in Norway need to be involved in creating the policies towards practices that concern them. Women in this study voiced their rejection of the way the authorities ordered the migrant communities to follow the rules without any form of dialogue as well as their feelings of stigma and discrimination with the Norwegian FGC policies. Here it is important to note that the Norwegian Contact Committee for Immigrants and the Authorities (KIM), was eliminated in 2014 by the new government.

In its place the government holds annual conferences with similar purposes (EMN, 2014). However, drawing from the views of the women interviewed, it does not seem that migrant communities are involved in any form of dialogue with the authorities at all. Thus, this paper shows that the Norwegian authorities need to re-evaluate their approach towards the abandonment of the practice. As suggested by the women in this study, the following measure should be implemented for a more efficient and ethical approach to tackling FGC in Norway. The first step that was highlighted was the need to stop the victimisation and the scrutiny around the migrant communities regarding the practice. Moreover, members of the Somali community already living in Norway for long should be involved to help newcomers with the laws and the policies, as they would be more respected than members of the Norwegian community since they had undergone the same process themselves when arriving to Norway. As a strategy to make those that still have positive views about FGC, it was suggested that to convince them to abandon the practice, either religious or health related arguments could be used. Additionally, authorities could work with local mosques and religious leaders to eradicate the practice since they are respected figures by members of the Somali and other communities.

This study has some limitations due to time and resources, since it only has interviewed ten women from the Somali and Eritrean community in Norway. Yet, it would be a point of further research to carry out a larger study, a large survey among the communities with origins in countries with high prevalence of FGC. Yet, the survey would be rather difficult since it would be asking either whether those taking part are going to practice FGC on their daughters or wish to or they have already done so in Norway. This would mean they have broken or will break the law in the future, hence it would be unethical to do such a survey. Nevertheless, the survey could be developed with such ethical issues in mind and pose questions such as: What are your opinions/attitudes about FGC? And also it could ask: What is your opinion about the Norwegian policies on FGC? On top of that, surveys could be done anonymously and not with the aim to trace those that have broken the law but rather to really know at a larger scale what are those communities' attitudes towards the practice. Since the findings of this study have shown strong aversion towards the Norwegian FGC policies and the media discourse around them, there is clearly the need do further research on this issue for it to reach the Norwegian authorities and bring their attention to it. Moreover, a way for this to not only reach their authorities but also actually make them implement some changes in the policies is by bringing the issue into the public arena, by having public debates and bringing it up in the media. Furthermore, more research may be carried out regarding the ways that migrant communities want to and can be involved in the decision-making process of the

countries policies that affects them, since as seen earlier the body that held the dialogue between the migrant communities and the authorities was dissolved in 2014.

Furthermore, since we have seen earlier, the influence of the anti-FGC discourse, highlighting the dangers to health and of sexual dysfunction may have led women having very negative views about their bodies, which may affect not only their relationships, marriages etc. but also their mental health. Hence, there would be a need to further undertake research targeting this issue in Norway to find out the extent of the issue and also to improve or provide the required psychological services to women who have undergone FGC.

All in all, this study shows that there is still much to improve and to discuss regarding the issue of FGC and the policies around it in Norway since there is such a big incongruence between the numbers of the government and the attitudes of the supposedly practicing communities and their testimonies about how many may be actually performing FGC in Norway. Moreover, there should be more awareness regarding cultural disciplinary practices and social norms, which exist in every society and not just in the non-western.

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Annex I: Interview Guideline

Thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview, your experience and answers are of great value to me so thank you very much for sparing some time. I am aware that some of these questions may be personal and of sensitive nature, therefore if you ever feel like you do not wish to share it with me, feel free to restrain from answering the question. Also feel free to share with me any extra details or experiences that you feel could be relevant to the topic. Thank you very much again for your time.

- 1) *When did you leave your country and how long have you been living in Norway?*
- 2) *How did you feel when you arrived first to Norway?*
- 3) *Do you feel like there are many cultural differences between your culture and the Norwegian culture?*
- 4) *Have you changed some of your cultural practices since you migrated?*
- 5) *Have you changed the way you think about your cultural practices of your society of origin since you came to Norway? What are some of these practices?*
- 6) *If so why do you think you have changed you attitude toward them?*
- 7) *Is FGC practiced in your community of origin? If so could you tell me a bit about the context for me to understand?*
- 8) *Did you feel you could talk about FGC and other cultural aspects such as sexuality more openly in Norway?*
- 9) *Do you see a conflict between the cultural norms in Norway and the cultural norms in your country of origin? And when referring to FGC in particular?*
- 10) *Do you sometimes feel pressure from one of these sides? Why? And How?*
- 11) *What are your thought on the ban on FGC in Norway?*
- 12) *Does this affect your cultural identity? And if so in what way?*

Annex II: Declaration of Authenticity

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted is my own and that all passages and ideas that are not mine have been fully and properly acknowledged. I am aware that I will fail the entire dissertation should I include passages and ideas from other sources and present them as if they were my own.

Name: Zubia Willmann Robleda

Date and Place: _____ Stavanger, June 2016 _____

Signature:



Annex III: NSD Approval

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Vår dato: 13.01.2016

Vår ref: 45878 / 3 / MHM

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 28.11.2015. All nødvendig informasjon om prosjektet forelå i sin helhet 12.01.2016. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

45878	<i>Migration of cultural disciplined practices. Migrant women's experience with FGC in Norway</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	Universitetet i Stavanger, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Nils Olav Østrem
Student	Zubia Willmann Robleda

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 30.06.2016, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim

Marianne Høgetveit Myhren

Kontaktperson: Marianne Høgetveit Myhren tlf: 55 58 25 29

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

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