

An Analytical Approach to Female Genital Mutilation in West Africa

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Abstract: Female genital mutilation in different parts of the African continent is considered as one of the vast territory's social problems. This social problem which is accounted as an old tradition in different countries of the African continent has had so many unpleasant physical and mental effects on urban and rural African women during recent centuries. Throughout recent decades, considerable efforts have been made by United Nations and its dependent organizations and private institutes in order to stop or reduce the young girls circumcision rate in African continent; however, most of the indigenous population insist on this wrong tradition and proclaim that this tradition is a part of their old traditions remaining from their ancestors and its safeguard is quite important for them.

In this article, the way this old tradition is conducted and the reasons underlying the action have been studied. Furthermore, the activities taking place by organizations related to United Nations and African politicians in order to confront female genital mutilation in different countries of Western Africa and their reflection in urban and rural regions have been studied through existing documents and witnesses.

Key words: Western Africa, Women circumcision, International organizations, Nongovernmental local organizations, Sexual discrimination.

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Introduction

Continent of Africa is the land of secrets and mysteries; it has traditions, habits and etiquettes that have been transmitted from generation to generation during the centuries as a great part of their oral culture. However, the indigenous population of different regions of Africa, though surrendering to the religions of Islam or Christianity, always remain loyal to their old traditions and think of the implication of these traditions as an assurance for the dominance of their ethnic tribal culture. One of the traditions of the tribes living under the great Sahara region which has prevailed from old times in this vast area is female circumcision. According to this old tradition, part of the infant or child's genitals is cut in a completely traditional manner without considering the sanitarian conditions. African indigenous population think that in this situation a new horizon opens to the children, when they grow up, bringing many changes to their future lives. Women genital mutilation currently is executed in vast regions of African continent and some Asian countries. However, the highest statistics regarding female circumcision is related to the African countries of the Sub Sahara, among which the countries located in the famous region of Horn Africa (Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti) and the countries of the West Africa (Niger, Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and Equatorial Guinea) have the highest percentage of female circumcision around the world. According to the World Health Organization, female circumcision currently happens in 28 African countries (Gtz, 2009, p.1) and from 100 million to 140 million women around the world has experienced this awful operation out of which 92 million live in Africa. (Who, 2012) Besides, it is estimated that each year, three million girls are subjected to female circumcision risks (Gtz, 2011, p. 1).

This study attempts to observe the main reasons for female genital mutilation action in Western African region and its consequences as the main subject by relying on available information and field studies. Additionally, international organizations and regional NGO's vast activities in different Western African countries also have been illustrated as independent variables. The frame of this article is mainly based on the Western African indigenous population's insistence on protecting this land's etiquettes and old traditions, and also the main question is if the African old traditions must be protected in the same way they have been

inherited from the ancestors, or some of these wrong traditions must be reviewed. The methodology is library studies based on description and analysis logics and the main body of the information is gathered through referring to documents and the most recent books and articles. Parallel to this, some of the information has been gathered by the researcher during trips to countries such as Guinea Conakry, Sierra Leon, Niger and Mali and though he has not included his field studies in different sections of this article; yet, because of his familiarity with Western African countries' culture and traditions, he has been in good contact with the research subject. However, this tradition spans across the world especially in the African continent, and the fact that the United Nations secretary general has appointed representatives to fight FGM in some African countries make it necessary to study and research this subject in local scientific centers.

The Historical Background

Though the exact date of female circumcision and when female genital mutilation has started is not very clear, according to the existing documents and Greek historians and geographers such as Herodotus (425-484 B. C.) and Strabo (64 B. C. – 23 A. C.) female circumcision happened in Ancient Egypt and the time of Pharaohs (Kouba, Muasher, 1985, p.97). As a result, usually Egypt is considered as the source country of female circumcision. Female circumcision has prevailed during the years of 1400 B. C. to 2000 B. C. in Egypt (Drummer, 2010, p.2) and apparently it was done in religious ceremonies and rites (Encyclopedia of Islam, 1993, p.246). Of course, apart from the Egyptians, Herodotus recognizes Phoenicians, Hittites and Ethiopians among other tribes who did female circumcision since old times. According to existing evidences, the Egyptians are considered as the pioneers of this tradition and female circumcision has also moved to other regions of the world – especially Africa. However, female circumcision was present a long time ago and among other nations of the world including the Romans who in order to avoid their female slaves from pregnancy, installed some rings on the two sides of the outer lips of the uterus (Momoh, 2005, p.5).

Girls' circumcision in West Africa and other areas also has a long history and hundreds of years before the entrance of Islam or Christianity to Africa, female circumcision occurred in this continent (Land info, 2009, p.14). Actually, this rite

recognized as a part of old ethnic tribal traditions of Africa, is the token of West Africa from at least two thousand years and the indigenous population of this land insist on maintaining and keeping it in a special manner.

How Female Circumcision is performed in West Africa and the prevalent kinds

Female circumcision has different names in English language including "Female circumcision", "Female genital mutilation", and "Female genital cutting", (Norwegian knowledge center, 2010, p.18) and today it is known as "Female genital mutilation" (UN, 2012).

It is the mutilation of a part of the female genital usually done without sanitary observation and it is often done to obey the old tribaethnic traditions. Female circumcision often takes place in urban and rural regions of West Africa in a completely primary manner, without using sterile and sanitary tools, and as a whole it is a hard, painful and horrible operation. Elder women's memories are full of painful reminders of this practice. Genital mutilation of young girls in rural areas usually takes place without using any anaesthesia, disinfectant, antibiotics and sterile tools.

According to World Health Organization (Cited by UNICEF, 2005, p.2) ranking the girls' circumcision in West Africa is classified into four major types.

Clitoridectomy: 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).

Excision: partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (the labia are "the lips" that surround the vagina).

Infibulation: narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner, or outer, labia, with or without removal of the clitoris.

Other: all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area.

Table 1: FGM Practices in West Africa

| Country | Prevalence | Type |
|----------------------|-------------------|--|
| Benin | 5-50% | excision |
| Burkina Faso | up to 70% | excision |
| Cameroon | local | clitoridectomy and excision |
| Côte d'Ivoire | up to 60% | excision |
| Gambia | 60-90% | excision and infibulations |
| Ghana | 15-30% | excision |
| Guinea | 65-90% | clitoridectomy, excision and infibulations |
| Guinea Bissau | local | clitoridectomy and excision |
| Liberia | 50% | excision |
| Mali | 94% | clitoridectomy, excision and infibulations |
| Mauritania | 25% | clitoridectomy and excision |
| Niger | local | excision |
| Nigeria | 60-90% | clitoridectomy, excision, some infibulations |
| Senegal | 20% | excision |
| Sierra Leone | 90% | excision |
| Togo | 12% | excision |

Those responsible for this operation cut a part of the girl's genital using knife, scissors, ruler, blade or even a piece of glass and after sewing up the operation location with thread, they stop the bleeding using oil, honey, yogurt and tree leaves. In the light kind of circumcision operation, girls rest for a few days, but in the second and third forms of the circumcision, girls and women must at least stay in bed for a week and avoid any movement which causes the operation location to start bleeding (Nour, 2008, p.136).

Female genital mutilation in different countries of Africa usually takes place from ages 1 to 9 in Horn Africa and from ages 8 to 14 in Great Sahara and West Africa (Karmaker et al., 2011, p.1) and is normally accompanied with celebration. However, it is impossible to restrict the girls' and women's circumcision in different regions of Africa to a specific age group, and girls from birth up to maturity are subject to circumcision. Generally, there is no special or specific age for the circumcision in West Africa, hence in some traditional societies of the region the girls are circumcised immediately after birth and in other countries of West Africa it

happens in childhood and prior to marriage (Land info, 2008, p.8). Yet, circumcisions in childhood trend have increased significantly because it results in less social problems (Land info, 2009, p.9). Those who operate the circumcision are usually old women, obstetricians and traditional doctors and even sometimes the barbers. Of course, in recent years, some of the nurses have attempted to circumcise young girls with sanitary observations (Land info, 2009, p.9). Still, in rural regions mainly aging women are responsible for this action nominating them with multiple titles. In some traditional communities in Sierra Leone and Guinea some girls under 10 who have been trained from age 5 are also responsible for this awful operation. In some tribal groups in Benin and Guinea, Fetishist men (individuals who claim having extraordinary and supernatural power and connection to spirits in specific manners) also operate the girls' circumcision. Circumcisers in indigenous communities of West Africa enjoy a highly respected status and besides the income they obtain, the tribe members believe they own scary and horrible powers which provide respect and fear to them in their own villages and neighbors.

Physical Symptoms and Problems

Female circumcision has long-lasting symptoms including infection, uterus cyst, awful pain while having sexual relations, childbirth with pain and burden, repetitious urine, consistent bleedings and many physical and psychic problems (Jacobs and Clifton, 2010, p.2).

Painful period, increasing bleeding risk and infection during pregnancy and likelihood hepatitis affection are considered as other symptoms of the circumcision which make women's lifetime laborious (Nigeria, 2005, p.3). On the other hand, female genital mutilation is reckoned as one of the most important factors causing women's death in West Africa. Each year, significant number of infants and young children who go through the circumcision operation die due to infection and miscellaneous illnesses – and sometimes because of severe bleedings. This has raised the world organizations authorities' objections many times (Equality for women, 1992, p.3). Circumcised women experience their infant's death during birth time because their uterus might not open completely (Ham, 2009, p.7). Thus, it might be claimed that about 25 percent of women circumcised in West Africa and other African countries in long term pass away because of urine and uterus

infections, persistent pains and severe bleedings at the birth time (Momoh, 2005, p.8). Additionally, the severe psychic symptoms of female circumcision should be mentioned specifically in some West Africa villages where the awful circumcision operation is executed on young girls without any psychic presupposition which can lead to terrible mental and spiritual consequences (Nour, 2008, p.136).

Female circumcision from the point of view of women living in West African countries has been named as one of their awful agonies which cause severe physical damages to circumcised women at three particular times. The first agony happens during the course of operation, and the next happens at the wedding night, and the third is during the women's first child birth, excruciating them enormously (Fourcrog, 1998, pp.15-16, Ham, 2009, p.9).

Female genital mutilation also affects men indirectly, a part of which is related to weakening family unity. Moreover, sexual relationships between the couples and the affection between husbands and wives are also affected by female circumcision (Sylla&Palmieri, 2011, p.58).

Reasons underlying Circumcision

Regarding the reasons for operating young and juvenile girls' circumcision, it should be said that this is related to different ethnic and tribal cultures, family relations, tribal connections, class, economic and social circumstances, and education and so on in West Africa (Landinfo, 2009, p.9). Among other factors that encourage families to circumcise their daughters is the family's concern about the girl's inability to marry if she is not circumcised. On the other hand, the rejection of circumcision in societies with the majority of women experiencing the awful circumcision operation in their childhood is recognized as a strange action and opposed to the tribal traditions and ceremonies (Land info, 2009, p.13).

An important part of this goes back to the recognition of women who are not circumcised as indecent which has resulted in the fact that African women do strongly support the action of female genital mutilation in spite of the pain and agony and consider it so vital for their daughters' future, especially for their marriage (Barbera, 2010, p.7).

Moreover, based on a kind of traditional perspective inherited from the ancients, people and tribes of West Africa consider clitoris as a part of male characteristics of

women, and do believe cutting it protects female morality (Jacobs, 2009).

Apart from that, some indigenous Africans believe that circumcised girls might control their sexual desires accordingly after maturity and it protects them from sins and faults (Barbera, 2010, p.7).

A great number of Africans also believe that women, who have not gone through circumcision in their childhood, face multiple physical problems at birth. Besides, it is believed that these women have lower fertility powers compared to circumcised women and are not able to control their sexual desires (Landinfo, 2009, p.12). In some cases, a girl that was not circumcised also experiences this awful operation at the wedding time on her husband's and his family's request who think of this as one of the important ethnic and tribal traditions, and through this, they guarantee their future matrimonial lives (Ibid, p.13).

There are poems in indigenous culture of West African countries describing girls' circumcision and the privileges they obtain. The motif of these poems is generally related to the circumcised girls' purity and innocence (Barbera, 2010, p.6). Some of Western researchers also believe that men who marry several women encourage the idea of female circumcision and their sexual desire control due to their fear of inability to satisfy their spouses sexually (Platt, 2001, p.13).

Female Circumcision Status in Urban and Rural Regions of West Africa

As mentioned earlier, as a noble and ancient tradition, female genital circumcision holds a specific status among the West African tribes. Hence, in spite of international organizations and women rights advocate groups' activities in different West African countries, many of the urban and rural people of the region still insist on maintaining this ancient tradition. In fact, circumcision in the tribal culture of West Africa and especially among the women of the region is considered as a symbol of loyalty, respect, virtue and virginity (Orshan, 2007, p. 232).

According to some research conducted by international organizations, among the urban and rural families of West African countries, more than 90 percent of rural families and 65 percent of urban families recognize tradition, culture and social rules subjugation as the main reason for girls' genital mutilation (Land info, 2009, p.22).

On the other hand, in the majority of West African countries, female circumcision represents their purity and innocence (Erllich, 1986, p.193). Female genital

mutilation among countries of this region has multiple names which refers to purity and innocence (Rahman and Toubia, 2000, p.4). Moreover, the indigenous population usually recognizes this action as a prologue for girls to enter the maturity phase and preparation for marriage and starting a family (Barbera, 2010, p.6). Along this, one should also consider the public opinion in West African societies about female circumcision. In many West African countries, there exists a direct relation between the female circumcision and the status and place they occupy, and the circumcised girls often enjoy a better status compared to girls who were not circumcised (Berg and Denison, 2010, p.12). Female circumcision in West African countries also has a close relationship with the maturity ceremonies and celebrations which familiarize the girls with their responsibilities as future women of the society; (Joseph, 2003, p.73) and the natives cherish the girls' circumcision ceremony in West Africa – which is usually accompanied with celebrations joint with dancing and singing and cooking special dishes – as a part of their oral culture. Female circumcision is also highly important regarding the young girls' marriage and apart from many young males that avoid marrying girls who are not circumcised, the dowry for girls who are circumcised is more than others not circumcised (Berg and Denison, 2010, p.12). Another factor for the West African people's resistance against abolishing female circumcision is their concern about putting away their ancient traditions ex parte the modernism waves and modernity (Land info, 2009, p.13). Along that, in spite of the public opinion awakening in different countries of West Africa, since the main part of animus activities against female circumcision originate from the West, West African nations and tribes consider it the continuation of Western cultural Imperialism against their own habituates and traditions and respond to it with a highly defensive reaction (Castledine, 2004, p.2). On the other hand, not following this tradition is still considered as a tribal taboo in urban and rural societies of West Africa, they think of it as one of their family secrets and personal issues (Landinfo, 2009, p.9). In many cases, families also express their opposition to their girls' circumcision continuation but recognize the surroundings' pressure as the reason behind doing it (Landinfo, 2009, p.10).

The roots of this tradition are so deep in West African tribes that in spite of Western governmental punishment regulations regarding genital mutilation, many of the West African immigrants in countries such as France, Germany and Italy also

circumcise their girls confidentially through small ceremonies or they send them to their families in Africa at the time of summer vacations to go through the circumcision operation (Nigeriandoctor.com, 2008) According to the existing information, female circumcision is common among the West Africans immigrants who live in Canada, Australia, USA, Norway, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland and Great Britain (Norwegian knowledge center, 2010, p.19).

International and Nongovernmental Organizations' Role in Struggle against Female Circumcision

During the recent decades, international and nongovernmental organizations in different countries of West Africa have played the most important role in preparing the public basis and motivating the governments and local communities to take a stand against the girls' circumcision tradition. The first struggles against the female circumcision started in East Africa from the early 1920s by missionary commissions; however, the different African tribes' severe opposition prevented the colonial governments from adopting basic decisions and this important social matter was forgotten for decades up to the early 1970s. The first organized protests against female genital mutilation started since the early 1970s by groups of doctors from Sudan, Somalia and Nigeria. This process was accelerated in 1980s along with the World Health Organization and United Nations Population Fund attention to this subject which broke the taboo of talking about this ancient tradition led to its internationalization. Enlightenment wave against female genital mutilation of women and young girls in West and some of African countries also continued into the early 1990s and after the publication of a few books on female circumcision risks and representing the issue in General Convention of United Nations; finally the World Human Rights Conference in Vienna for the first time in 1992 described female genital mutilation against human rights (Toubia, 1994, p.612). Hence, though at the beginning international communities recognized female genital mutilation just as a health and educational issue, from the early 1990s the female circumcision phenomenon was introduced officially as a social cultural problem among different African communities (Gtz, 2009, p.1). United Nations statement in 1997 on condemning female genital mutilation (Toubiam, Nahid, 1998) also helped in stabilizing this approach and provoking more and more public opinion against this tradition. International organizations' activities such as World Health Organization,

United Nations Population Fund and UNICEF in struggle against female genital mutilation in 1990s and 2000s in different African countries including West Africans resulted in magnificent achievements (UNICEF, 2010); particularly since 2003 and after entitling February 6th as "International Day for no Concession with any Kind of Female Genital Mutilation" by United Nations Human Rights Commission, a decrease in the general ratio of female circumcision in about 12 West African countries has been noticed (Feldman, 2009). During the recent years, because of the European Union's participation in some of the confronting guideline plans against female genital mutilation from 2008 to 2012 in five African countries including Senegal in West Africa (Ghananewslink.com), the World Health Organization declared the struggle against female circumcision issue in 2010s as one of the most important issues in its agenda, The World Health Organization(WHO) in 2010 also compiled a guideline document under the title "World Strategy for Struggle against Female Genital Mutilation" with the help and corporation of other organizations dependent on United Nations and European Union. Thus, it strengthened the consistent and multi-dimensional struggle against female circumcision in different regions of the African continent. Similarly, the World Health Convention in 2008 has published a statement for the complete abolishment of female genital mutilation, insisting on women's health, educational, financial and judiciary rights, which is considered as a part of the World Health Organization guideline document (Factsheet, 2012). In addition to these solid activities, the activities of some African women as representatives of the United Nations Secretary-General in struggle against female circumcision in Africa should be mentioned (Dirie& Miller, 1999, p.1) which have been effective in creating public hatred around the world including Africa against this tradition (Nnaemeka, 2005, p.30).

Nongovernmental Organizations and Institutes' Activities in West African Countries

Along the international organizations activities, during the recent decades and since the early 1980s, nongovernmental organizations and institutes in West African countries have made the struggle against female circumcision tradition their priority. The first nongovernmental organization active in this field was "Inter African Committee against Harmful Practices" which was founded in 1984 during the summit of Tens of African women organizations in Senegal (Drummer, 2010, p. 2).

Subsequently, numerous local organizations were founded in West African countries including Mali, Gambia, Conakry Guinea, Niger, Sierra Leone, Cote d'ivoire (Ivory Coast), Burkina Faso and Liberia, with the goal of fighting against female circumcision. During the past decade, these nongovernmental organizations have started vast activities in order to increase the urban and rural people's public knowledge about the girls' circumcision risks and damages, and by utilizing mass communication tools, poster publication, holding public gatherings and lectures at schools, to affect the popular culture in this area to stop this tradition among urban and rural families, gradually and step by step (Land info, 2009, p.16).

Additionally, the African Union (Au, 2012), as the largest local organization which covers all countries of this continent, after its foundation included female circumcision in its agenda and in 2003, published the Maputo Protocol toward protecting women's rights and women and girls' circumcision prohibition. This protocol was declared to all members of the African Union in 2004, and up to 2012, 27 countries – including 9 West African countries – have approved it or are approving it in their national assemblies. African Union is trying to abolish the female genital mutilation phenomenon in West Africa (and other regions) completely up to 2020 and protect the next generation of these countries from the risks and consequences of this action.

Hence, by holding tens of international seminars and educational workshops in different countries of West Africa, African Union has played an important role in the gradual decrease of female circumcision in this region and also in guiding the activities of local organizations working on this subject.

A Decreasing Trend

During the last two decades, while United Nations dependent international organizations' activities soared; some activities were also started by the West African governments against stopping or gradually decreasing female genital mutilation tradition in cities and villages which also led to significant results. In this regard, countries such as Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cote d'ivoire (Ivory Coast), Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Togo and Guinea Conakry recognized female circumcision as officially illegal and those who attempted to perform such cruel act were treated as guilty. According to these countries' laws, those who circumcise girls are sentenced

to prison from six month up to a few years and should pay significant amounts of fines (Aidos, 2009, p.2). Apart from these countries, countries such as Niger, Mali, Benin, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Liberia and Mauritania are also prohibiting the female genital mutilation; however, female genital mutilation is not declared officially illegal in these countries, the courts and forums confront those who commit this action or force their girls to go through circumcision. In this regard and in order to increase the legal activities against those who operate female genital mutilation on their own girls, the first ladies in seven countries of this region have started vast activities during recent years in order to organize and solidify the struggle against this ethnic tribal tradition (AFP, 2008). Including some materials into the students' school books for primary and guidance levels, holding seminars and meetings in cooperation with international organizations, encouraging local artists to create masterpieces about female circumcision risks and providing some facilities for international and local organizations are among other useful actions the West African governments have taken.

Except governments, national assemblies for 20 African countries – including a few West African countries – also are trying to cooperate with the United Nations and the African Union Parliament to encourage their own nations to stop female circumcision by expanding the educational activities. During the last decade, National assembly presidents of these countries have specified that some of the ancient ethnic tribal traditions of the African continent, female circumcision in particular, must severely be reviewed and some reforms should take place in the oral culture by insisting that this tradition is not validated by the heavenly religions (United Nations. 2006, p.23). In the 2010 Summit of Dakar, African National Assemblies officially requested from the General Convention of United Nations to declare female circumcision illegal all over the world by publishing a statement and announcing the struggle form stopping female circumcision in Africa as one of the important issues of this decade (Karmaker et al., 2011, p.2).

In addition to these activities, governments, traditional societies and local communities in different West African countries have also played an important role in the gradual decrease of female circumcision. These communities which mainly consist of small and large villages are under their Chiefs' or Leaders' deep influence. Hence, as a result of the international organizations' and nongovernment institutes'

activities in persuading many tribal chiefs in West Africa during the recent decade, a considerable number of local communities (villages) of this region have officially declared their agreement with stopping female circumcision in their own communities. In this regard, during the last few years, chiefs of 8,000 villages in West Africa have announced their agreement with stopping female circumcision (Policymic.com, 2012).

The Religious Approaches

In spite of some conceptualizations in Africa and a few western researchers' approaches regarding the deep influence of Abrahamic religions – Islam and Christianity – on this ethnic tribal tradition; there are no documents and evidences supporting that female circumcision originates from the Islamic or Christian principles and laws. Actually, one can say that although Islam and Christianity have tried to coexist peacefully with some of the traditions of the African tribes, yet they do not confirm female circumcision and on the contrary, clearly and directly confront it. Regarding this, different Christian sects during their local and regional meetings have frequently discussed the risks and harms of female genital mutilation. Furthermore, Muslim communities' leaders in West African countries also have frequently declared their opposition with female circumcision and have identified it inconsistent with Islamic doctrines. During the recent decade, Muslims from Mauritania, Cote d'ivoire (Ivory Coast), Burkina Faso and clergies from Mali, Niger, Senegal, Guinea Conakry and others have frequently insisted on this tradition's inconsistency with Islamic laws (Landinfo, 2009, p.21) and have reminded that there is no viewpoint about female circumcision in the holy Quran and Prophet's tradition and there is no insistence on it (Momoh, 2005, p.1); hence, though today female circumcision is common among the West African Muslims, Christians, Jews and other traditional religious believers (James & Robertson, 2002, p. 19). The Islamic and Christian leaders, yet, have not considered female circumcision mandatory in different countries of West Africa and have even declared their explicit opposition to it.(Gruenbaum,2001, p. 63). However, traditional religious believers in West Africa still do emphasize on circumcising their girls and consider it in complete agreement with their tribal traditional laws (Gruenbaum, 2001, p.63).

The Challenges and Problems

In spite of the vast governmental, international and local organizations' activities, eradicating female circumcision tradition in West Africa is facing numerous problems. A part of which goes back to ethnic and tribal traditions of West Africa. Illiteracy, low level of education, religious and social bias and commitment to traditions and etiquettes inherited from their ancestors are considered as the most important problems in urban regions and specifically in West African villages; standing as a severe obstacle before activists. Moreover, female circumcision is still considered a taboo in different countries of West Africa and people (especially villagers) avoid talking about it (Nnaemeka, 2005, p.35). Apart from that, in spite of announcing female circumcision as illegal in many of these West African countries; the people of these nations still continue to commit female genital mutilation on their girls and the lack of police force austerity also encourages them to continue this tradition (Ham, 2009, p.47). Severe reaction of urban and rural women in different countries of West Africa against individuals and organizations which are after stopping female circumcision and calling them anti-tradition, religion, nationality and culture (Equality for Women, 1992) are among the other problems of the anti-circumcision movement in West African countries that sometimes ends in the physical punishment of women organizations' and NGOs' members and movement activists. Moreover, during recent years with increasing governmental activities in prohibiting the action of circumcision in urban regions of West Africa, some families have committed circumcision on their girls by sending them to the neighbor countries where circumcision is not declared illegal yet (Gosse, 2008). Furthermore, during recent years the risks and consequences of female circumcision have been included in the school books of some countries; thus, those families who still insist on the continuation of this tradition prefer to circumcise their girls before they enroll for school. The reaction of the traditional communities (those who believe in performing female genital mutilation) against the girls who avoid the circumcision operation is also very harsh and sometimes leads to severe punishment– such girls are considered as delinquents from the African tribes' point of view (Drummer, 2010, p.2).

Conclusion

As mentioned before, during recent decades, important activities took place

regarding the stop or decrease of female circumcision in West Africa that are considered promising for a good future in the struggle against this social cultural tradition. According to UNICEF and United Nations Population Fund joint report in 2011, because of governmental and West African NGOs' vast activities, international organizations' support and the patronage of hundreds of indigenous communities' chiefs and regional tribes' religious leaders, the general ratio of young girls circumcision in West African countries has experienced a significant decrease. If this trend continues, it seems that female circumcision in some countries such as Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso will completely finish by the end of 2010s, and in countries such as Conakry Guinea, Nigeria, Niger, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Benin, Togo and Mauritania will considerably decrease. Moreover, considering the activities executed by governments and international and local organizations, it can be predicted that in the near future, female circumcision tradition will be stopped in vast regions of West Africa or it will be gradually recognized as a wrong and malice tradition; hence, it will take refuge into faraway West African regions. Nevertheless, according to the researches carried out by international organizations, in order to remove this social disaster, a strong base is required for change in the African ethnic and tribal behaviors and values and the best solution is close cooperation with the African people and local leaders. Hence, the World Health Organization, as the main authority of this project, believes that since this tradition has deep roots in West African countries; its eradication is only possible in the long term and during three generations (Brunner, 2007, p.2).

Meanwhile, although the international organizations' activities have had higher cultural influence in the urban regions, in the West African villages there is still a kind of public distrust regarding the NGOs' movements against the girls' circumcision, which in its own way causes obstacles in struggle against this tradition. In this regard, the activists in the struggle against female genital mutilation try very hard to assert the theory that although they try to prevent female genital mutilation; they do not have any conflict with the ancient ethnic tribal traditions of the African nations (Land info, 2009, p.16). Although the elites of the West African countries have welcomed such activities, for the indigenous villagers to accept it, a long time is needed.

As a general conclusion, one could say that the female circumcision phenomenon

in West Africa (and other regions) is one of the ancient traditions of the African continent which has faced hard challenges during the last three decades at the world and regional levels; yet, many West African tribes still insist on keeping this tradition. What is apparent is that the struggle against female circumcision needs unity, and the statesmen, politicians, culturally significant characters, artists, health centers, journalists, religious leaders, universities and education centers, women groups and communities' cooperation; so that it could inform both the urban and rural people in West Africa of this social disaster and guide them to stop this tradition. On the other hand, during the last two decades, while including some training in the schools' curriculum, these countries have also started cultural programs among teenagers and young urban and rural people about the girls' circumcision consequences and its future irrecoverable physical and psychic results on their future. Additionally, educational centers authorities in West African countries have run a vast attempt to familiarize girls with their individual and social rights. Meanwhile, the struggle against female circumcision must take place gradually and step by step, and during all of the stages, peremptory activities and any kind of offence against the traditions and etiquettes of the West African indigenous people should be avoided since they construct an important part of the West African oral culture.

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