BOOK REVIEW: MARIA KIMINTA'S *FIGHT AGAINST FGM*

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Maria Kiminta's personal account, *Kiminta: A Maasai's Fight against Female Genital Mutilation*, is a survivor memoir which reveals her genital mutilation and her comprehensive range of vision on FGM in an audacious, argumentative, and persuasive fashion. It lucidly and pragmatically recounts her first-hand experiences as a Maasai FGM survivor; thus, it is an essential memoir on FGM advocating the global movement to eradicate the horrendous practice. The memoir is also significant in that it renders the readers the arguments to realize the violence and depth of excruciating pain on female sex, to understand "loss to development as a whole" (Kiminta 2015: 44), and to support the movement. Her memoir focuses on a pivotal stage of her life, that is, her clitoridectomy and her holistic findings related to FGM as part of her anti-FGM activism in Germany. Her simultaneous placing of arguments and counter-arguments to justify her claims with data enables her to achieve an objective tone in her memoir. In so doing, she indistinctly divides the memoir into seven parts, such as her clitoridectomy at the age of ten in Kenya, causes behind FGM practice, strategies to execute FGM, impacts of FGM, points of claim and counterclaim, hindrances to implementation of anti-FGM Acts, and her recommendations.

FGM "encompasses an inherently and overwhelmingly sexist and racialized discourse with its historical and legitimized exclusion of black women from the center to

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periphery” (Jesmin 2019: 46). It alludes to an “eviction of women’s selves from their bodies” (Levin 2014: 49) and thus purposely deprives one of her sense of self-worth. Kiminta acts in a compensatory manner by means of her socializing altruistic acts (anti-FGM campaign), thereby rendering constructive services to society and securing and increasing her sense of self-worth. She puts forward three reasons for which the Maasai perform FGM (type-1, clitoridectomy) as a rite of passage from immaturity to womanhood. Apart from the “wrong rite of passage” (Kiminta 2015: 15), a wrong blaming of clitoris as unclean, aggressive appendage, a threat to penis, a fatal to a man, and poverty (badly in need of a bride-price) account for the whys and wherefores of FGM. She condemns the price tag which is placed on a girl. She calls valuing girls in terms of wealth an inhumane practice. Using a child as a tool to fight poverty violates that child’s right to freedom. She slams the political biasness behind FGM which labels an uncircumcised girl as immoral and unclean.

Kiminta, drawing on Khady Koita and Hibo Wardere, calls FGM a sexual abuse and a scam and spells out tremendous raging against it both in writing and campaign. To put the scam into effect, two strategies—deception and lying—are being used. These two are not only Maasai community specific but rather common in other FGM practicing communities in the world. Despite the Children’s Act of 2001 outlawing FGM, the Kenyan president having condemned FGM in 1983, and the great efforts of human rights activists, the practice is being secretly carried out by families in Kenya. Girls are deceived by all means possible, tricked into loving a so-called good practice because of its artificial positive change. The circumcised girls are strictly instructed to not reveal their FGM trauma and are exhorted to motivate the uncircumcised girls to boldly face the blade in silence. They assure the initiates lying: “It was fine, [...] Everything’s ok” (Kiminta 2015: 16). They undergo a lifetime of physical and psychological torture because of unethical and inhumane strategies of deception and lying.

Kiminta seems to have been inspired by Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarian philosophy—greater happiness for a greater number of people. She pays particular attention to girls’ wellbeing and by implication serves society as a whole. She uses her own trauma to educate others and to stop the practice. She feels the necessity to write in great detail of the impacts of FGM. Loss of a healthy childhood, loss of adequate development in adolescence, lack of sexual desire after marriage or miserable sexual life, recurrent physical problems, behavioral disturbances, psychological perils, harrowing childbirths,

death of mother and neonatal, and denial of basic human rights including formal education and health and hygiene constitute the ramifications of FGM with her emphasis on the loss to development as a whole from a socio-economic lens. The loss is huge so far as preventive and curative medical facilities to FGM survivors, safety costs of neonates and mothers, the loss of productivity and reproduction, etc. are concerned.

Kiminta justifies her stance by creating logical arguments and counter-arguments at the same time. Among many, she brings five major points of arguments to the fore. Firstly, circumcised girls are no longer viewed as little kids. Despite continuing to behave like youngsters, they are forced to adopt an adult mien. This makes FGM “an ineffective rite of passage” (Kiminta 2015: 16) that merely marks the child’s body as grown-up while she remains both physically and psychologically a minor. Secondly, considering FGM as a means of preserving sexual morality of the girls is truly short-sighted. She argues that genital mutilation can temper sexual urge. No one, however, admits that FGM intends to make her sexual experience within marriage miserable. An early marriage of a girl denies her right to education and the right to enjoy sex. Thirdly, she vehemently criticizes the belief that female genitals are ugly and malodorous and in need of enhancement by blade. At this, she contends that it is unethical to think that a girl is born ugly and that beauty emerges only when her genitals are cut. By means of a rhetorical trope (synecdoche), Kiminta argues: “Where female genitalia are demonized, so is the female, and slander of this type is degrading” (39). Every body part plays a role and removing one means certain malfunction. One can comfortably clean her genitals without resorting to torture. FGM is clearly a case of violation of children’s rights and an intergenerational violence on girls. It does not guarantee maturity, responsibility, and wifeliness. Obtaining an education, nurturing skills, and cultivating mind should be encouraged. Kiminta rails against the belief that female genitals are unclean and questions the “lack of hygiene” (Kiminta 2015: 26), such as cutting tools like unclean razorblade, broken glass, rusty metal object, an absence of surgical gloves, sanitary hands, etc. As such, FGM poses a clear threat to victims’ lives. Fourthly, she holds trickery in contempt. She condemns the elders as they hide the truism of FGM or how brutal it is. She admits that they do so to prevent initiates’ objections. “But if they feared we would bolt, then something wasn’t right, was it?” (Kiminta 2015: 33). Fifthly and most importantly, Kiminta puts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) before the readers to show how FGM breaches the articles, such as Article 3, 5, 16.1-2, 25.1 and 26.1 laid down in the convention. FGM also violates

a number of rights as laid down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). To sum up, a girl's welfare, right, dignity, and life must not be jeopardized by FGM.

Kiminta opens up about five major hindrances to implementation of the Children Act. Community leaders, religious beliefs among people, privatization of FGM, a shift in the FGM process (medicalization of FGM), and law enforcing agencies hamstringing the Act. In the last part of the memoir, she provides twelve convincing and effective recommendations to implement the law, thereby eradicating FGM. She recommends interrogating government's role in ending FGM by reviewing the Children's Act of 2001 to seal loopholes in theory and examine hindrances to application. Since the Act is a long and comprehensive document, government should provide unambiguous rules for easy understanding and implementing clauses in the Act against FGM. The Act should be translated into native languages for people at the grassroots to understand. Government should develop specific protocols to train and monitor provincial administrators, thereby enabling them to implement the Act at community level. FGM should be integrated into the curriculum especially in primary schools. Locally acceptable Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) might also be encouraged to abandon cutting without sacrificing the appeal of pageantry. She recommends increasing community education on FGM including its illegality. Working more closely with religious institutions, such as church, may improve the sustainability of abandonment programs. Opinion leaders and influential committees at community level should be trained to support implementation of the Act.

Kiminta's memoir effectively stimulates readers to become agents of social changes. She brilliantly establishes her point that education is the most important thing. She denounces FGM as diabolical and marks it as catastrophic to the development of civilization. Not FGM, it is only education that can render a girl her "elevated social status" (Kiminta 2015: 12). Kiminta, like Waris Dirie and her Desert Flower Foundation, prioritizes education which should be directed to the full development of human personality and society as a whole. She insists on strengthening respect for human dignity, rights, and fundamental freedoms. She debunks the "false sense of pride" (Kiminta 2015: 41) in FGM and draws attention on education, children's rights, human rights, and implementation of the anti-FGM Act to combat FGM.

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