

DECONSTRUCTIVE REAPPRAISAL OF MUTILATION: MYTH, REPRESENTATION, AND AGENCY IN ANNOR NIMAKO'S *MUTILATED*

Koffi Gérard KOUADIO
Enseignant-Chercheur
Assistant
Département d'Anglais
Université Alassane Ouattara
koffigerardkouadio217@gmail.com

Abstract

Recognized as a practice deeply rooted in African cultural traditions, female genital mutilation continues to prevail despite the establishment of human rights frameworks intended to protect all individuals. Within the African context, this practice has historically been regarded as a taboo or even a myth, rendering its eradication particularly challenging. In an effort to highlight the detrimental health consequences of female genital mutilation on African women, Ghanaian author Annor Nimako endeavors to raise awareness through his literary creation *Mutilated*. Employing a deconstructive perspective, this study explores how Annor Nimako advocates for the unequivocal emancipation of African women from the constraints imposed by traditional norms.

Keywords: human rights, mutilation, myth, taboo, tradition

Résumé

Considérées comme une pratique ancrée dans les traditions africaines, les mutilations génitales féminines continuent d'être pratiquées de nos jours nonobstant l'existence des droits de l'homme qui visent à protéger tous les êtres humains. En Afrique, cette pratique a toujours été considérée comme un sujet tabou ou un mythe difficile à éradiquer. Pour dénoncer les effets néfastes des mutilations génitales sur la santé des femmes africaines, l'écrivain Ghanéen Annor Nimako tire la sonnette d'alarme à travers son œuvre *Mutilated*. À travers une démarche déconstructive, cette étude examine comment Annor Nimako revendique une libération totale des femmes africaines du spectre des considérations traditionnelles.

Mots-clés : droits de l'homme, mutilations, mythe, tabou, tradition

Introduction

Relatively less prominent in the domain of African literature compared to eminent figures such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ayi Kwei Armah, Annor Nimako is a Ghanaian author, journalist, and educator born circa 1957. His literary creation includes *Mind Your Language: Educate Ghanaian English* (2004), *The River's Power* (2012), and *Mutilated* (2001). As a representative of the emerging generation of African writers, Nimako's primary objective is to foster re-education among his compatriots to achieve heightened social consciousness. In pursuit of this aim, he authors *Mutilated* to critically challenge and demystify female genital mutilation (FGM)¹, which is often regarded as an ancestral tradition. It is significant to acknowledge that FGM persists in certain African societies due to their enduring adherence to traditional norms and values.

This practice, both painful and restrictive, profoundly disrupts the identity of women by inflicting lifelong physical and psychological consequences. The eradication of FGM proves challenging for two principal reasons: firstly, affected girls and women are reluctant to oppose the practice out of fear of contravening deeply ingrained ancestral customs; secondly, they hesitate to discuss their experiences due to apprehension about societal rejection. Moreover, those who perpetuate FGM frequently present themselves as innocent actors despite the harm caused. This work thus seeks to expose and condemn the traumatic realities endured by African girls and women subjected to female genital mutilation.

Focusing on the specific case of Sarah in his novel, the Ghanaian author endeavors to establish a link between his fictional narrative and the historical experiences of his community. Nimako portrays Sarah as an intellectual who nonetheless grapples with liberating herself from the constraints imposed by her cultural traditions. For Sarah, female genital mutilation is perceived as a sacred practice and an essential element of cultural identity deserving preservation. Within this context, the present study seeks to analyze how Annor Nimako contrasts his characters in an attempt to challenge and deconstruct the practice of mutilation, which distorts women's identities. This investigation raises pivotal questions: How does Annor Nimako represent African women through the prism of female genital mutilation? To what extent does this practice threaten women's identities? Is it possible to transcend African cultural frameworks to achieve the emancipation of women from mutilation? The answers to these questions warrant the application of deconstruction as an analytical approach. For clarity, this study initially investigates the perception of female genital mutilation (FGM) within traditional African societies to identify the factors perpetuating its persistence to the present day. Subsequently, it examines the adverse impacts of this practice on

¹ Within this article, the term female genital mutilation is abbreviated as FGM.

the representation of African girls and women. Finally, the study underscores potential strategies aimed at eradicating FGM.

1. The Myth surrounding Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation also known as female genital cutting or female circumcision is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “all procedures involving the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female organs for non-medical reasons” (World Health Organization, 2010, p.1). In African communities, this practice has always been considered a taboo subject that people avoid discussing openly. The central myth of female genital mutilation in Annor Nimako’s novel is that this practice is perceived as a rite of passage that enables young girls to be considered women among people living in northern Ghana. In other words, FGM preserves young girls’ cultural identity, curbs their sexual desire and purity as well as their social acceptance within their community. In the narrative, Dr. Blankson’s wife Sarah who is from the north is constrained by her mother to be circumcised as she decides to attend the Dembas Festival in the north of Ghana with her friend Alhaji Nuhu. For Sarah’s mother, the practice of FGM is an honor for a woman whatever her social rank. When she claims “I have joy in my heart. My daughter will soon be counted among women” (A. Nimako, 2001, p. 86), Sarah’s mother is aware that mutilation ensures womanhood and acceptance within her community. Furthermore, she sustains that getting married without being mutilated is a dishonor, not only for her family and friends, but for the whole community:

‘You have shamed me all these years; you have shamed your family and friends; you have shamed the community and that will send me to my grave’. [...] “If you don’t submit yourself to be circumcised during this two-week period that you are going to be here, when you die, your dead body will be brought to this village before it is buried. That will shame your body (A. Nimako, 2001, p.86).

In this passage, Sarah’s mother tries to convince her daughter to be circumcised in order to avoid being rejected by her community. This supplication which is similar to a threat is justified by the fact that Sarah’s mother plans, on the one hand, to erase the shame of seeing her daughter not circumcised and, on the other hand, allow her daughter to be buried with dignity and honor in her community if she passes away. In *Mutilated*, Annor Nimako specifies that Sarah was not circumcised when she was a young girl because she was taken away to Accra by her aunt Dora in order to escape this harmful traditional practice which causes physical and psychological pains. The narrative insists on the fact that apart from Sarah’s mother, her sister Amina also tries to convince her to be circumcised minimizing the consequences young girls are undergoing after this practice:

We are aware that some deaths occur among children from time to time,” [...] “but that does not mean the practice is bad in itself. I am sure you know the advantages. You’ve been in favour of circumcision all along, so what has come over you? Everybody in this village knows that you were taken away to escape it. They do not respect you. You are not counted among women (A. Nimako, 2001, p. 88).

The above passage underscores the considerable challenges associated with eradicating the practice of FGM. Notably, Amina acknowledges that this practice results in significant loss of human life. Nonetheless, she intends to persuade her sister Sarah to disregard the severe consequences of FGM in order to fully embrace the status of ‘a woman’ within their community. From Amina’s perspective, encouraging Sarah to undergo circumcision constitutes a form of social redress for an injustice she herself endured during childhood. Consequently, both Amina and her mother share the conviction that convincing Sarah to be circumcised is essential for her to attain womanhood and maintain dignity within their societal context. This steadfast determination parallels the depiction by Ngugi wa Thiong’o in his novel *The River Between*, wherein genital mutilation is regarded within the Gikuyu community as a requisite rite of passage “to be a woman” (N. wa Thiong’o, 1965, p. 29).

As an intellectual, Sarah tries to reject the proposals of her sister and mother claiming that she must preserve her marriage with Dr. Blankson : “Allow myself to be circumcised and break up my marriage ?” (A. Nimako, 2001, p.88). This question sheds light on Sarah’s determination to preserve her marriage by refusing to be subjected to mutilation. As she indicates:

I’ve just been telling our mother that my husband is not one of us and that he is very much against the practice. We’ve argued violently about it on more than one occasion. He has described the practice as barbaric and our people primitive for continuing an outmoded traditional practice (A. Nimako, 2001, p.87).

The aforementioned explanations by Sarah aim to convince her mother and sisters to spare her from the practice of female genital mutilation. Here again, her sister Amina’s reaction is not different from that mentioned above when she avers: “your husband is not the only man in the world. We shall remarry you to someone from our own ethnic group.” (A. Nimako, 2001, p. 88).

This passage suggests that, irrespective of circumstances, Sarah is unlikely to remain without a husband, as her family commits to securing a new spouse who conforms to her cultural traditions should her current marriage end. Given the pressures exerted by her mother and sister to reconsider her decision, it is apparent that Sarah faces a profound dilemma: choosing between undergoing female genital mutilation (FGM) and preserving her marriage to Dr. Blankson. Although the decision is fraught with difficulty, Sarah recognizes the sanctity of her tradition. Furthermore, she is aware that FGM was the direct cause of death for Barbara Aseke, a ten-year-old girl forced by her grandmother to endure this

harmful practice during a visit to northern Ghana. Despite this tragic incident, Sarah advocates for the significance of FGM as an essential criterion for being acknowledged as a woman, asserting, “I think it’s good in a way” (A. Nimako, 2001, p.90). Consequently, without informing her husband, she clandestinely resolves to undergo the procedure, as indicated in the subsequent excerpt:

Having followed the old woman to the disused barn where the operation was to take place, she was horrified to see the filth that engulfed them. She saw blood stains on the bare floor. Blood stains left by previous victims of genital mutilation. Was she not a doctor’s wife used to seeing a clean environment? She could even have tetanus for the same reasons or from the application of infected herbal dressing which she saw in a bowl. [...] She certainly knew much more about the deadly consequences than the old traditional surgeon who ordered her to lie down on a piece of cloth spread on the floor. [...] At the first cut, she screamed with pain, but after that she bore it bravely (A. Nimako, 2001, pp.119-120).

The above passage notably highlights Sarah’s conduct, which parallels that of a rural inhabitant who minimizes the considerable dangers associated with the use of unsterilized instruments during her mutilation. Despite her status as the spouse of a medical practitioner and her consequent awareness of the potential transmission of fatal diseases, she consents to undergo the procedure employing tools contaminated with the blood of previous patients. This decision emphasizes her prioritization of cultural tradition over personal health and safety.

The myth surrounding female genital mutilation is also a source of division between Sarah and her aunt Dora. As a matter of fact, Aunt Dora struggles to accept that Sarah, whom she brought up, engages in the practice of FGM “so you let that bastard of an Alhaji deceive you into being circumcised? All these years of protection have come to nothing, haven’t they? You have shamed me, Sarah. Why did you have to do such a terrible thing?” (A. Nimako, 2001, p.123). In this context, deconstruction can be viewed as an intrinsic contradiction within a text that inadvertently exposes the tension between rhetoric and logic, as well as between the explicit content and the intended meaning of the text (Norris, 1987, p.19). Moreover, Barthes (1977, p.77) further contends that deconstruction liberates the text entirely from the authoritative control of the author.

The preceding analysis unequivocally demonstrates that FGM is deeply entrenched and revered within traditional Ghanaian society due to profound cultural and ethnic influences that perpetuate its practice. In accordance with the discussion presented earlier in this paper, it is pertinent to note that Annor Nimako is among the African novelists who “have made serious efforts to use the medium of their creative works to debunk many of the myths and taboos that inferiorise women, degrade their status and stunt the growth of their capabilities and potentials” (R. Acholonu, 1993, p.106). Consequently, what are the

implications associated with the practice of female genital mutilation as depicted in *Mutilated*?

2. Analyzing the Consequences of Female Genital Mutilation in *Mutilated*

In Annor Nimako's narrative, the repercussions of FGM are depicted as both physical and psychological trauma endured by female characters. The opening chapter of the novel addresses the death of Barbara Aseke, a ten-year-old girl who suffered severe hemorrhaging following the procedure: "Barbara had bled profusely throughout the night and it was in the morning that they had realized the seriousness of the little girl's condition. They had then rushed her to the hospital in a taxi" (Nimako, 2001, p. 2). Despite medical intervention by Dr. Blankson, who faced considerable challenges in attempting to save her life, Barbara ultimately succumbed to her injuries. The primary cause of her sudden demise is attributed to the excision of both the clitoris and labia minora during mutilation, which resulted in severing the clitoral artery along with other bleeding vessels caused by defensive movements from the victim. This situation underscores that such mutilations are performed within traditional contexts that neglect fundamental respect for human life. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assert that those performing these procedures lack sufficient training necessary to manage potential life-threatening complications affecting young girls subjected to this harmful practice. Specifically concerning Barbara Aseke, Nimako notes that she was circumcised by her own grandmother, whose intention was to uphold their tradition. The narrator writes:

Barbara Aseke was a class four pupil at St. Theresa Catholic Primary School at Mataheto in Accra. [...] Her family had moved South to the capital from Mongasi, a village near Bakwu in the north of the country. [...] Only a month ago in October, her grandmother had come down on a visit. With her was an old-time friend, a traditional birth attendant and traditional surgeon. It was time to circumcise their granddaughter just as they had done to her older sisters. They had both survived, but had developed complications at the early stages. The grandmother was not deterred. It was tradition and they had pursued their granddaughter right to the South (A. Nimako, 2001, p. 2).

The preceding passage underscores the significant role tradition plays in shaping the social identity of young girls, as female genital mutilation (FGM) not only infringes upon their rights but also detrimentally impacts their psychological well-being and social standing due to the severe trauma inflicted during the procedure. Despite Barbara Aseke's elder sisters experiencing early-stage complications as sequelae of FGM, the practitioners nonetheless subjected her to the same practice. From this viewpoint, an undeniable reality emerges that "women are indeed the scapegoats of tradition" (L. Tobin, 1986, p. 218).

Contrasting with Barbara Aseke's tragic death following prolonged hemorrhaging, Annor Nimako's novel highlights an alternative consequence of FGM through the character Sarah, who is depicted as fearing urination because of her awareness of Barbara's ordeal. The narrator portrays:

Barbara's tragedy was fresh in her mind. But now her worst fear was welling in her. Her bladder was bursting with urine. It was now a clear case of urine retention. She remembered she was terribly afraid to urinate the previous day after the circumcision, a reflex action she knew was the result of her lacerated urethral opening. She feared the stinging effect of her own acidic urine on the raw wound. But she had to and she did so into a bedpan with her mother holding her. It was as she had expected, sharp and stinging even minutes after she had squeezed it out (A. Nimako, 2001, p.121).

The above passage highlights that Sarah appears to be profoundly traumatized following her conscious decision to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM). Such trauma may result in enduring psychological consequences, as she is likely to experience persistent fear associated with the act of urination. Furthermore, this trauma has the potential to precipitate various health complications, including a diminished sense of autonomy within societal contexts.

As previously discussed, the practice of FGM is primarily rooted in the preservation of cultural traditions. However, it is essential to recognize that "the essence of female circumcision is to enforce female restraint in sexual relationships so that the woman gains an advantage over the sexually deranged man who must worship her in order to gain access to her treasured vagina" (I. Ede Egbung, 2021, p. 7). This assertion suggests that beyond cultural homage, female circumcision is also intended to enhance sexual pleasure for women. In Sarah's particular case, however, the procedure failed to yield the anticipated sexual satisfaction, as evidenced by her husband's disappointment upon discovering that she had undergone FGM, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

He resumed his kisses and his hands began to probe. She got tensed up. She could feel his hardness as he pressed his body against hers. As his fingers explored the area between her thighs, he received a rude shock. Something was missing. His practised fingers immediately detected a deformity. A mutilation! His erection froze suddenly and died (A. Nimako, 2001, p.149).

The discovery of the excised part of Sarah comes as a shock in her husband's mind. As a matter of fact, Dr. Blankson has difficulty recognizing his wife who had once brought him so much pleasure during their sexual intercourses. The sudden 'freezing and dying' of his erection proves that this practice is not necessarily appreciated by everyone in society. In the same way that Sarah was traumatized when she felt the urge to urinate after her genital mutilation, Dr. Blankson also experiences psychological shock while discovering his wife's genital mutilation. The paradox is that Sarah underwent female genital mutilation in order 'to be a woman' and be accepted by her traditional community. However, her husband who

considers this tradition as an “obsolete tradition” (R. Maran, 1972, p.23), struggle to see her as a woman. This binary opposition of their perceptions of African tradition is the root cause of their misunderstanding at home:

As week after week slowly went by, the Blankson family realized it was going through the most traumatic period ever. There was tension all the time. Dr Blankson and Sarah went in and out of the house as they liked for long hours without bothering about the other. While Sarah made an effort to keep up some semblance of a marriage, her husband had not been that communicative. He was sometimes disconcerted by the glint of amusement he caught in the eyes of his wife when she returned from town. [...] Dr Blankson was now firmly entrenched in the guest room (A. Nimako, 2001, p.158).

Through this passage, the reader can attest that FGM can be a source of division within a couple. Here, Dr. Blankson feels betrayed by his wife, who chose to give more credibility to her tradition than to her marriage. The last sentence “Dr. Blankson was now firmly entrenched in the guest room” testifies that Dr. Blankson no longer intends to share his marital bedroom with his wife Sarah who, in reality, no longer possesses the intrinsic qualities of a woman in his eyes. The misunderstanding between Dr. Blankson and Sarah will ultimately lead to divorce because “The marriage that was once the envy of many had turned sour, so sour that both husband and wife could taste it and the taste was exceedingly bitter” (A. Nimako, 2001, p. 160). Moreover, the divorce between Dr. Blankson and Sarah had negative impact on their daughter Sheila, who, like her father feels traumatised when she paid her a visit at school. The tone she uses when speaking to her mother shows her bitterness vis-à-vis the practice of FGM:

Do you realize what you’ve done to yourself, mummy? Barbara was murdered by her parents because of this stupid traditional practice. It was a traumatic experience for me.” [...] “You’ve survived it perhaps because you are an adult, but do you realize that there are immediate and long-term effects of this female genital mutilation? The practice is paganistic; it is useless (A. Nimako, 2001, p.182).

From the above passage, the reader observes that Sheila experiences profound disappointment in the aftermath of her parents’ divorce. Despite her young age, she vehemently opposes female genital mutilation (FGM) and demonstrates a clear understanding of the significant ramifications associated with this traditional practice, which she characterizes as “paganistic” and “useless.” Her anger is so pronounced that she struggles to contain it, when consecutively asking her mother “Why did you do such a terrible thing? Who persuaded you to do it? Why was it so important to you? Why have you...?” (A. Nimako, 2001, p.182). These inquiries are justified, as Sheila poignantly asserts, “Our once home is now a broken one” (A. Nimako, 2001, p.182). The metaphor of a “broken house” reflects Sheila’s concern regarding potential ridicule from peers who live with their mothers at home. Moreover, Sheila may be experiencing

psychological trauma resulting from her mother's genital mutilation, which ultimately contributed to the dissolution of her parents' marriage.

Another critical consequence of FGM highlighted by Nimako pertains to Sarah's future life following her divorce. Notably, after remarrying Alhaji Nuhu, Sarah was renamed Salamatu and reportedly derived no pleasure from their sexual relations, as indicated in the subsequent excerpt:

My world has turned topsy-turvy these past few months as you know. I have been reflecting on the quality of life i have been living, stuck up with that bastard of a husband – unloving, uncaring, egoistic and always making sexual demands on me.” [...] “I couldn't stand his sexual demands anymore. Our sexual encounters had become sadistic. I couldn't make love to him. I had dyspareunia, whether real or imaginary (A. Nimako, 2001, pp.267-268).

From the above passage, the narrator avers that Sarah's new marital situation bears similarities to her previous one. It is pertinent to remember that she is leaving a monogamous household to enter a polygamous one in order to have the expected happiness. Here again, she will end up divorcing because she is always complaining about her husband's excessive demand for sex and is unable to give birth to a child for him.

A paradox emerges in Annor Nimako's analysis of FGM in northern Ghana, where the practice is traditionally regarded as conferring dignity upon women and preparing them to become fulfilled wives within their households. However, Sarah's experience reveals that she was unable to fully partake in conjugal life following her genital cutting. This case underscores the notion that “the woman can be her own oppressor just as the man can be his own subjugator” (R. Aboh, 2018, p.123). The detrimental consequences of FGM illustrate the oppression experienced by women within the traditional society of northern Ghana. In light of these observations, it is imperative to contemplate effective strategies to combat this enduring ancestral practice that has persisted for an extended period.

3. Exploring potential solutions to address female genital mutilation

One of the primary aims of Annor Nimako in publishing his novel is to encourage the readers to recognize that imperfections do indeed exist within African traditions. In other words, he wants the readers to take a stand against FGM instead of accepting it as an immutable practice or considering women as “mere appendages to the society” (N. Okoye, 2009, p.334). To deal with the solutions likely to put an end to female genital cutting, Nimako focuses first of all on the victims' experiences. Deconstruction centers on the quest to preserve the outdated tradition and the harm caused to young girls and women. Indeed, the victims intend to break silence and reclaim voices in order to save the sexual health of the coming generations. A typical example of victims of FGM is Sarah, who voluntarily decides to join the religious foundation established by the Dutch

missionary Father Van Ruisdael, known as ‘Haarlem Foundation,’ in order to lead an awareness campaign about the dangers of mutilation among young girls and women. By emphasizing Sarah’s statement “Father, I’m returning to the North to join the campaign, the campaign to eradicate female genital mutilation” (A. Nimako, 2001, p.302), the narrator intends to show that FGM deserves to be eradicated in northern Ghana forever.

Through the participation of both local and international organizations in awareness campaigns addressing FGM, Annor Nimako endeavors to demonstrate that this practice is not only antiquated but also constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights. In his capacity as a healthcare professional, Sarah’s former spouse, Dr. Blankson, has been actively involved in initiatives aimed at educating the public about the health risks associated with FGM. Concentrating on the Upper East Region of Ghana, Dr. Blankson primarily targets young girls at Bolgatanga Girls School to raise their awareness. Together with his team and supported by Paulina Abilba from the organization GAWW, they initiated their campaign by screening a documentary intended to elucidate the detrimental effects of FGM on young girls. The subsequent explanation provided by Dr. Blankson regarding the risk of hemorrhage effectively exemplifies the severity of these dangers. The narrator informs the reader that:

Excessive bleeding from the clitoral artery and vessels surrounding the labia minora could cause death if immediate attention is not sought. Several infants and children have died as a result of this. [...] I’m sure some of you have lost sisters or know of such deaths elsewhere (A. Nimako, 2001, p. 315).

The reader realizes that this statement enables young girls to comprehend the severity of the threat posed by this ancestral practice to their lives. Consequently, they recognize that uncritically adhering to tradition may jeopardize their well-being. The awareness campaign, augmented by visual materials, has the potential to act as a catalyst, motivating these young girls to assume roles as advocates within their families, endeavoring to convince their parents to permanently discontinue the practice of female genital mutilation. To enhance the credibility of the film presented, Paulina Abilba ensured to provide the following declaration:

I’m sorry if you found it horrifying. But this is not fiction; it’s real. This is what our grandmothers and our mothers have been doing to their grandchildren and their children, sometimes with the full knowledge and acquiescence of fathers. It is harmful, it is totally unnecessary (A. Nimako, 2001, p.315).

The aforementioned declaration underscores the responsibility of women, and above all men, who remain passive vis-à-vis the violation of the rights of young girls. The screening of the film is followed by detailed explanations of certain diseases likely to cause complications in girls subjected to FGM, such as “keloid formation, vulva cysts and abscesses, acute and chronic pelvic infection causing

infertility, and painful menstruation” (A. Nimako, 2001, p.316). Aware that there are young girls who are victims of female genital mutilation among the students, Dr. Blankson decides to support them by arranging free medical examinations and treatment when he tells them “Starting next Monday, your teachers will arrange to send all circumcised girls to the hospital in batches for examination and treatment if necessary. It will be absolutely free” (A. Nimako, 2001, p.319).

In contrast to Dr. Blankson and his team, who focus on increasing awareness among school-aged girls, Sarah opts to return to her village with the aim of convincing the practitioners about the health risks linked to FGM. The narrator accounts the reader for this visit as follows:

It was in her village, Mongasi, where she had begun her work, meeting traditional surgeons, traditional birth attendants, opinion leaders and others. At one such meeting with traditional surgeons and traditional birth attendants, some of who doubled as traditional surgeons, she told them a few home truths. They had been invited from surrounding villages as well and they included some men (A. Nimako, 2001, p.320).

From the above excerpt that Sarah’s advocacy is not confined solely to women but also encompasses men because she intends “to educate women and girls, men and boys, about the hasardous effects of genital mutilation” (A. Walker, 1993, p.285). In doing so, Sarah duly acknowledges that the engagement of men in the effort to eradicate female genital mutilation could indeed become a reality. As a survivor of this practice and its detrimental consequences, Sarah possesses compelling arguments to persuade the villagers to irrevocably abandon this shameful practice that disfigures women. Her mission among the villagers of Mongasi is primarily to put an end once and for all to the perpetuation of FGM by using her own experience as a mutilated woman:

My experience is unique,” [...] “Several years ago my aunt took me away as a child to avoid being circumcised. I grew up in Accra, studied later in Britain, married a medicine Doctor and had two children by him. [...] “It was when we returned to Ghana that my life changed completely as a result of pressure from my people that I should come home, submit myself to tradition and be counted among women. [...] I can assure you that there is absolutely not useful about the practice. It is harmful, it is barbaric, it is crucial, it is shameful. We women are our own enemies. Stop doing this to your daughters, stop killing the infants and little girls. Most of you here have suffered for long periods just to satisfy your husbands sexually. Don’t let your daughters go through the same miserable life. They will never know what sexual enjoyment is (A. Nimako, 2001, pp. 320-321).

From this statement, Nimako avers that Sarah is opposed to the villagers’ preconceived ideas, which consider FGM as a vital practice for preserving the cultural identity and the marital suitability of women. Sarah’s personal experience may serve to discourage old women excisors as well as the men who endorse this disgraceful practice, particularly since, beyond raising awareness, she also

informed them that a three-year prison is now enforced against any offender engaging in this practice.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, it is imperative to acknowledge that FGM constitutes a pervasive misconception that has historically marred the representation of African women. Employing a deconstructive methodology, this study has demonstrated that FGM constitutes a profound violation of the rights and dignity of African women. By elucidating this longstanding practice and its myriad adverse effects on the health of African women within his novel, Annor Nimako compels readers to reconsider prevailing perceptions of women in contemporary society. This research contributes to expanding the discourse on the capacity of literature to serve as an instrumental medium for social transformation by critically engaging with detrimental traditional practices and advocating unequivocally for the eradication of female genital mutilation.

Bibliography

ABOH Romanus, 2018, *Language and the Construction of Multiple Identities in the Nigerian Novel*. Grahamstown: African Humanities Program.

ACHOLONU Rose, 1999, "Women in the African Novel and the Quest for Human Rights," *Beyond the Marginal Land: Gender Perspectives in African Writing*, Ed. Chioma Opara, Port Harcourt: Belpot, pp. 93-109.

BARTHES Roland, 1977, *Image- music- text*, London: Fontana Press.

EGBUNG Itang Ede, 2021, Patriarchal Limitations Imposed on African Women: A Deconstructive Reading of Chinweizu's Anatomy of Female Power. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(9), pp.79-91. Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss9/6>. Accessed 12 July 2025.

MARAN René, 1972, *Batouala. A True Black Novel*, Washington D. C.: Black Opheus Press, 1972.

NGUGI wa Thiong'o, 1965, *The River Between*, London: Heinemann, 1965.

NIMAKO Annor, 2001, *Mutilated*, Ghana: Ronna Publishers, 2001.

NORRIS Christopher, 1987, *Derrida*, London: Fontana Press, 1987.

OKOYE Nneka, 2009, Cracking the Eggshell, Infiltrating Patriarchy: Nafissatou Diallo's *De Tilène au Plateau* and Aminata Sow Fall's *La Grève des Battu*. In Joy Eyisi, Ike Odimegwu & Ngugi, Ezenwa-Ihaeto Eds. *African Literature and Development in the Twenty-First Century*. 2009, pp. 333-341. Available at: <https://www.feministafrica.net/Feminist-Africa-April-2024-vol5> . Accessed 11 June 2025.

TOBIN Levin, "Women as Scapegoats of Culture and Cult: An Activist's view of female Circumcision in Ngugi's *The River Between*." *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. Eds. Trenton: Africa World Press.

WALKER Alice, 1993, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, 2010, "Global strategy to stop health-care providers from performing female genital mutilation", WHO Team, Editors, 27 pages, WHO/RHR/10.9, Switzerland, 28 May 2010.