

Coming out twice: in conversation with Fode

By Rania El Mugammar

In this short article, I document my conversation with a trans identified FGM/C survivor who is referred to as Fode, in order to ensure their privacy. Fode speaks to me from his home in Quebec.

I speak to Fode on a misty summer morning, he has a pleasant voice and a calm, humorous demeanor. After we introduce ourselves, we discuss our childhoods in our respective home countries, and Fode speaks to me about what he calls “coming out twice”.

He tells me that as a trans man, he has many experiences of “coming out” in different contexts, and at different times in his life with regards to his gender identity. He feels a palpable and justifiable fear as a trans person in the world, he tells me he also feels like he has to “come out” about his status as a survivor of FGM/C in healthcare contexts and to potential intimate partners especially. This time, he fears racism, rejection, dehumanization and additional discrimination.

For Fode, his experiences of FGM/C are traumatic, in an otherwise serene childhood, and within a family that is accepting of his transition and his gender identity. He makes sure to remind that he loves his family, and that they too, love him. “They did what they knew, and yes, they should know better,” he says.

I empathize with his desire to portray a fulsome reflection of his family, particularly as dominant culture narratives paint FGM/C as a “barbaric” practice, and those who perform it or facilitate it as irredeemable abusers. Fode is noticeably relieved at my understanding.

He jokes about winning “discrimination bingo”, where his experiences as a trans Black man survivor of FGC in dating and accessing healthcare mean that even the language of “female” genital cutting does not encompass his identity and his disclosure renders healthcare providers and would be lovers hesitant, confused or at times outright discriminatory.

In LGBTQ communities Fode navigates anti-Blackness and a lack of cultural safety. In Black communities he navigates transphobia. In both communities, and their many intersections, he fears sharing his experiences of FGM/C. In spaces that work towards addressing gender-based violence, shock, shame and a clear lack of cultural awareness and anti-racist practice, means that Fode rarely accesses these spaces. An apparent and painful lack of intersectionality across spaces and contexts has a tremendous impact on Fode's healthcare outcomes, love life and sense of belonging. He tells me that he has connected with other queer and trans survivors and feels that only in spaces led by people who share these experiences, can he be whole.

In these spaces, Fode explains, he doesn't have to be as guarded, he can share everything from excitement about meeting a new love interest, to fears around navigating healthcare as a

trans FGM/C survivor. He says the way they keep in touch most is through social media and messaging apps, where they are able to share self advocacy advice, provide mutual aid and mental health support for one another, and generally exist in a safer space.

“I used to be very frustrated that there is not a log of good social services for someone with my experiences, now, I feel that I have taken the matter into my own hands. It’s still the responsibility of everyone who works to eradicate cutting, who writes about or anything really, to have these anti-racist, trans inclusive lenses at the very least. At the end of the day, I will support my community and my community will support me.”.