

## **I am not broken: an Interview with Warda**

***By Rania El Mugammar***

Content Warning: Brief mention of personal experiences and feelings regarding FGC. No explicit descriptions.

This interview was conducted on September 9th, 2020. The interviewee is referred to as Warda, in order to protect her privacy. Warda identifies as a woman who has experienced FGC. The interview was conducted in Sudanese Arabic and later translated to English. I asked Warda questions about how she identifies, her experiences, what's important to her, and how she wants to address FGC. She asks me about speaking to me in Sudanese, I agree, she speaks to me from her home in Canada.

Warda: First of all, I *hate* the word "mutilation", English is kind of ugly, but this word especially. You can't deny, when you call someone mutilated, there is something humiliating about it. It makes you feel as if you are broken. I don't mind being called a survivor, I have survived this and even worse. I am a Black Muslim woman who immigrated to the west just days before September 11th, 2001. Everyday is survival.

Don't get me wrong, the experience of FGC for me was violent, certainly. It left me scared and confused, but at the same time it was kind of an ordinary thing for a lot of people around me. I remember when I was young hearing lots of hushed things about circumcision but never really speaking directly about it, we attended parties for those who were circumcised. I know that basically all the women in my family until my generation were circumcised.

When I got older I heard stories of people who suffered complications or experienced a more extreme type of FGC. I respect whatever words people want to use to talk about themselves. My real frustration is with Western Academia and the obsession with saying "wow, look at this thing that Africans, Muslims and Brown people do, look at the backwards cultures they come from" you know what I mean?

Rania: Yes, I do. It's definitely made to be an awful thing that only happens because of people's cultures.

Warda: Exactly! So it makes it very difficult to talk about. To be honest the first time I heard the word mutilation, I felt sick. It was in a social studies class, I can't even remember how it came up. I remember suddenly everyone was shocked and disgusted as some classmates started speaking about the practice in detail. I left and didn't come back to class for 3 days.

Rania: I am sorry to hear that. Can I ask, you're a parent, how has it been navigating pregnancy and childbirth?

Warda: That was the hardest part, I felt like I had to battle everyone, my family doctor, my OBGYN, nurses, CAS, you name it! Everything from whether or not I could become pregnant, how I will have my babies, and if I can even take care of them came into question because of my FGC. People accused my husband of being abusive. I can't imagine that if he really was, that I will feel safe enough to tell the doctors, social workers and nurses who were not listening to me about anything.

People say racist things when you talk to them about your experiences or they think that's your first concern, I even had several unrelated health issues that were not getting attention because of the obsession with my FGC.

I wanted to yell: Hello! Women have been having babies with FGC for a long time, please listen!

Rania: What did you end up doing?

Warda: I talked to my mom, my aunts, my friends who already had kids with FGC and got advice from them. Finally I got in touch with a doctor who is a Black woman and she was a very strong advocate, she really had a compassionate understanding and most importantly she listened.

Rania: What do you want people to learn from your story?

I want people to listen, to stop telling the same story about FGC, it makes it hard to talk about FGC without being afraid, then we can't stop the practice if we can't even talk about it. I want for people to understand that people who live with FGC are not broken, we are full human beings!

We need to be able to talk about FGM/C if we are to end it, we need to be able to say this is how it happened to me, what it looks like for me and here are the consequences. There has to be space for that story to be different from person to person. We can't end a practice that we cannot even talk about because we are afraid that they will use it against us.

I hope people will learn that I have a voice, that people like me have a voice, and that they will listen to that voice. Listening to our voices is the only way to stop young girls being cut generation after generation.