

ISSUE NO. 3 JANUARY 2007

# bridges

Receptacle of Young People's Creativity

magazine

**FORWARD'S  
YOUNG  
PEOPLE  
SPEAK OUT  
PROJECT**



Winner of the Skillest Millennium Awards with the Support of BBC  
Funded by John Lyon's Charity

**Reflections**

Suraya Ishag  
Hoby Wahab  
Samah Abdu

4

**Poetry**

Mayada AbdullMannan

7

**Gallery**

Nigerian Artists  
Selected  
Artworks

8

**Fatwa****Services**

13

**Interviews**

Hana Murgani  
Aliow Hassan

14

**FOREWORD**

*Welcome to your third edition!*

I am pleased to introduce to our readers this special issue, which focuses on, and campaigns for the banning of, violent practices carried out on girls. These practices include female genital mutilation (FGM) and child and forced marriages. This issue of Bridges Magazine embraces the role that young people could play in their communities to make changes. It is engaging young people to scale up the campaign and raise awareness among sectors and communities to combat gender-based violence.

FGM and child marriage have been described as the most dangerous practices affecting women's health in their life time. The Young People Speak Out project is a great initiative by FORWARD and its partners. It aims to increase outreach work with students and groups at universities, within and beyond London, and to recruit future young campaigners.

Having this valuable opportunity, Bridges Magazine was honoured to engage its talented buds to express their concerns, beyond 'oneself', to the broader community. Bridges Magazine is also privileged to go beyond its founding group, to bond with other groups from different ethnic communities sharing the same values and traditions, and to work together on embracing diversity and strengthening unity.

I would like to thank the FORWARD team for choosing Bridges Magazine to take part in their innovative project and for offering the Magazine the chance to contribute to their continuous battle against gender-based violence. I also extend my gratitude to the people who helped me lay the base from which Bridges emerged: Carol Jacob from Skilset; Ray Alexander from the BBC; and the Millennium Awards for their encouragement and funding to projects from black and minority ethnic communities. I would like to say to them: that solid base stopped the work fading away.

*Khalda El-Hafiz*  
*Editor/Publisher*



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**FORWARD'S DIRECTOR'S NOTE**

I am very excited about the Young People Speak Out project, the first initiative of its kind being run by FORWARD. We have worked with young people during FORWARD's 23 years in existence, but this is the first systematic programme of initiatives to have at its core the principles of working with and for young people. This focus on youth reflects the direction set out in our Strategic Plan for 2007–10.

The Young People Speak Out project will work with three sets of young people, involving up to 15 people each year for the next three years. The project will be working with these youth on issues of gender-based violence against African girls and women. In particular it will look at female genital mutilation (FGM) and child and forced marriage.

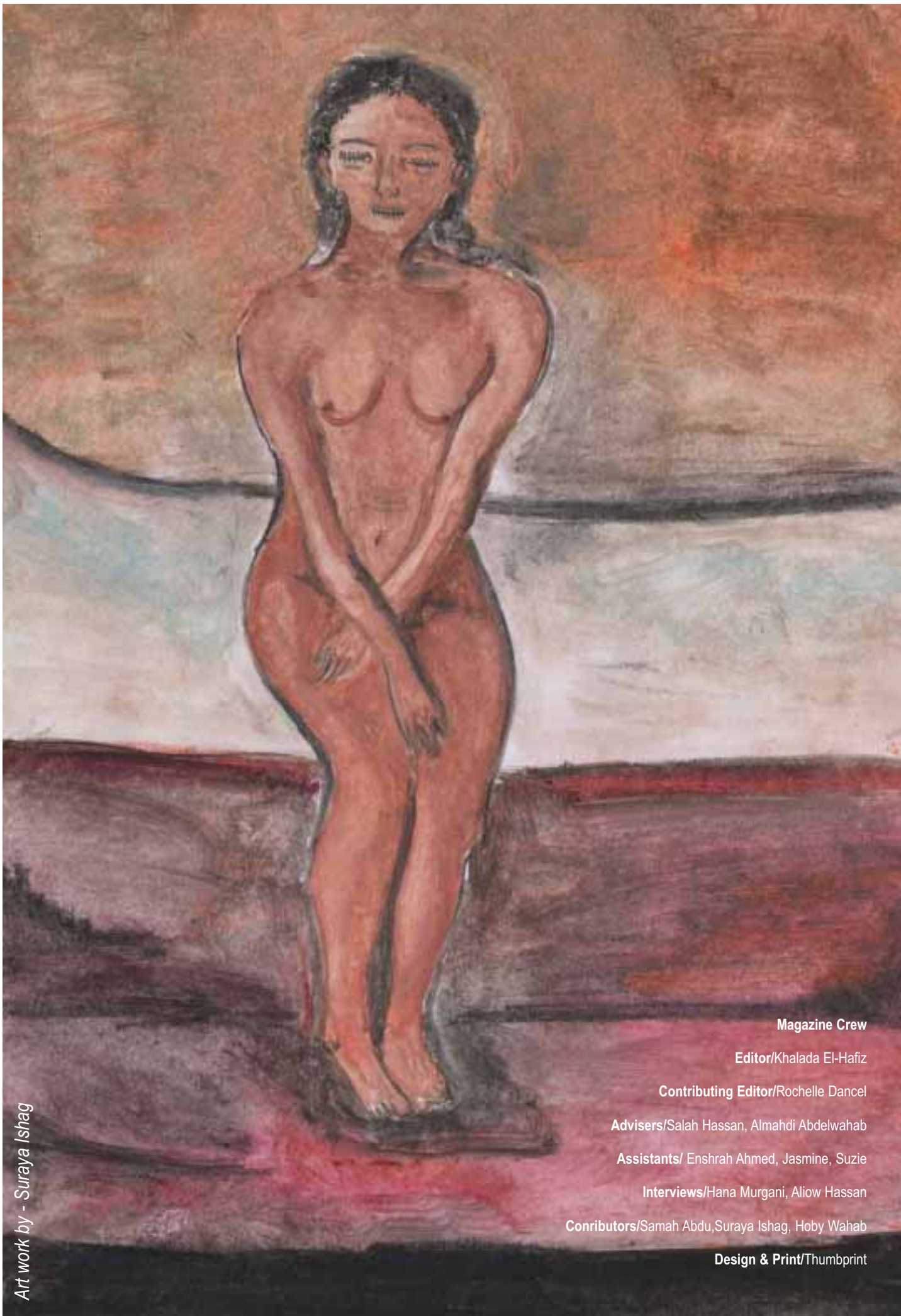
The objective of the project is to have a dedicated cadre of young people who are knowledgeable, skilled and confident to work as young campaigners within their communities against the various forms of gender-based violence. It is critical that young people from communities that practise FGM and child marriage are able to help bring permanent changes to the attitudes and behaviour of their communities.

Although society claims that young people are self-absorbed, I am proud to see African young people committed to working to make the world a better place for African girls and women.

From the inception of the project, I have found it challenging, exciting and rewarding. The young people never fail to surprise and delight me with their insights, clarity of vision and enthusiasm. I have no doubt that training and empowering these young people will have a significant impact on the practices of FGM and child marriage in our communities.

This gives FORWARD hope for the future – a future where all African girls and women are accorded their inalienable rights to dignity, equality and freedom from gender-based discrimination and violence.

*Adwoa Kwateng-kluvitse*  
*FORWARD's Director*



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# Enaam Abdelwahab

By Suraya Ishag

**O**n December 6th 2005 another innocent little girl lost her life to female genital mutilation, four year old Enaam Abdelwahab from Abu Deleeg in Sudan. The Doctor who was on duty at the hospital to which she was admitted reported that her death was caused by “excessive bleeding and blood poisoning resulting from FGM”.

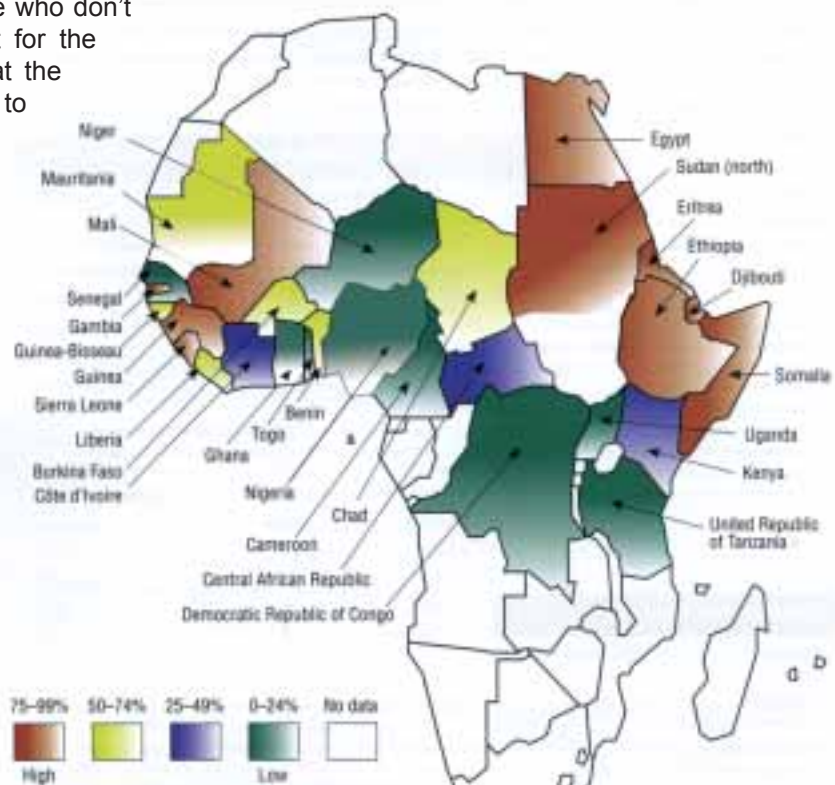
Reading about the loss of an innocent life such as Enaam’s to an unnecessary practice like FGM is truly sad and I cannot bring myself to imagine how much pain she must have felt whilst they were performing it on her.

Those people who carry out the circumcision are ignorant, heartless and very cruel people who don’t even know if having it has any benefit for the young girl they just mutilated; but yet at the same time could stand there and listen to little girls as young as four years old screaming from the top of their lungs because they are in so much pain.

Unfortunately, for those girls who survive it the first time, they could only look forward to a life of more pain both physically and mentally. We are in a time where practice such as FGM, which has nothing to do with religion, culture or tradition should be abandoned.

For those who continue to carry out the circumcisions, personally, I believe they should be classified as criminals because what they are doing is a crime against young girls’ human rights.

Bled to death  
**WHY**



**This map reflects mainly FGM type 1-3**

This Map reflects FGM as only an African practice.

This is not so.

WHO 1997& Figures updated by UNICEF April 2006

# what is Child Marriage?



Hoby Wahab

After I took part in the young people's consultation meeting organised by FORWARD last August, I got very curious to find out more about child marriage – because no marriage I know about (according to British law) happens before a certain age, and that is after everyone finishes their basic education and stuff like that. I asked my mum if I can discuss the subject with her. She sat down and talked to me about it, then she directed me to the Internet in order to find more about child marriage. What attracted me was the research done by UNICEF and the map showing the countries that practise child marriage.

To my surprise, I found that it only happens in countries from the developing world, particularly in Africa, Asia and parts of Latin America. The map shows no country in the northern hemisphere doing this. My question is: why only these countries? Is it culture? Is it religion or something else?

[Editors note; although the map does not show the Northern countries practising child marriage there are countries like the USA where the marriage of under 16's is common / legal in some states.]

The definition given by the UNICEF is: "Child/early marriage refers to any marriage of a child younger than 18 years old. While child marriage affects both sexes, girls are disproportionately affected as they are the majority of the victims. Their overall development is compromised, leaving them socially isolated with little education, skills and opportunities for employment and self-realisation. This leaves child brides more vulnerable to poverty, a consequence of child marriage as well as a cause".

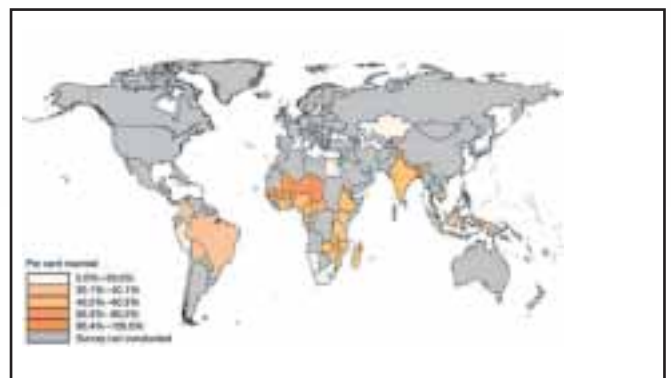
The map shows the countries in the world where child marriage is practised and gives an indication of the percentage of girls affected by child marriage in each country.



I found out that FORWARD, with other organisations working in the field of children's and women's rights, have developed programmes aimed at eradicating this practice and realising the rights of the girl child. In Northern Nigeria, FORWARD has established clinics to treat girls and women with obstetric fistula (a common consequence of child marriage and pregnancy), and has run income-generating schemes and other initiatives to improve their social and economic status and well-being.

Lessons learned from this programme have highlighted the importance of a holistic approach to addressing child marriage. They show the need for integrated education, health, economic and participatory community development programmes.

(To find more about child marriage, please visit both UNICEF and FORWARD websites on [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org) & [www.forwarduk.org.uk](http://www.forwarduk.org.uk))



Countries practising child marriage (UNICEF, 2005)

# Female Genital Mutilation



(Is too horrible to be told about said my mum)

by Samah Abdu

I was invited by FORWARD to attend a consultation meeting for young people on female genital mutilation (FGM) and child and forced marriage. It was a great opportunity to learn about things I hadn't given attention to before.

When I got home, I felt I wanted to talk more with my mum who had also been at the meeting, because I know that she came from one of the countries known as the worst for practising FGM. My mum never told me about FGM, or about her experience, and she kept silent until that particular day when I decided to talk to her. I felt very sympathetic to what she had been through when she was a child. I asked her to tell me exactly about the physical act carried out on the girl's body.

She started: "We call it (circumcision) in our country, it is widely practiced, despite the repeated campaigns run by various women's groups against the practice". She added: "The term 'FGM' is used to refer to the removal of part, or all, of the female genitalia. The most severe form is infibulation, which is the common one in Sudan; the whole clitoris, labia minora and labia majora are removed and the labia majora is cut to create raw surfaces which are then stitched together in order to cover over the vagina when they heal. A small hole is left to allow urine and menstrual blood to escape".

I then went mad questioning her about the consequences when she got married and when she had my brother, her first child. She said to me "FGM has adverse consequences on women's health and psychology. Girls usually undergo pain, shock, haemorrhage and damage

to the organs surrounding the clitoris and labia. Afterwards, urine may be retained and serious infection develops. Girls also develop chronic urinary tract infection, stones in the bladder, kidney damage and reproductive tract infection as a result of obstructed menstrual flow. They are also subject to pelvic infection, infertility and dermoid cysts. Sexuality of girls and women has serious implications. For all girls' experiences, and my personal experience, FGM can make the first sexual intercourse an ordeal for women – painful and dangerous". When giving birth to my brother back in Sudan, mum said she was in pain for two days until she delivered him. The only good thing is that midwives in Sudan are familiar with the practice and almost all are trained to deal with women who are circumcised.

Then I asked her why this horrible thing is practised. Mum said: "One answer from many is that FGM is often deemed necessary in order for a girl to be considered a complete woman. It is thought to enhance the girl's femininity, docility and obedience to her man. The hidden agenda is to control women's sexuality and reproductive system functions. It is also believed among some communities that FGM guards young girls from sexual frustration by lessening their sexual appetite".

I felt that day I wanted to stay and talk with my mum longer, but I had to leave for Southampton where I study at University. So I asked her to accompany me to Victoria station where we sat in a café talking until my travel time.

## Mind Tricks

By: Mayada Abdulmannan - Washington

Color me blind  
Color me blind  
So no one can see me  
or judge me  
So I cant be defined

Color me blind  
so that I am not aware  
of the reminisce  
colonization left behind

Color me blind  
So that I don't feel  
the repercussions of not  
being a protestant  
white male

no sexism  
no racism  
or prejudices  
on my shoulder

Color me blind  
so my children  
never know the day  
of the roles  
society will assign

Color me blind  
from the stratification  
slavery left behind  
so I don't perpetuate  
the stereo type  
that have been underlined

Color me blind  
so that one day  
there would be no  
limits to expand my mind

Color me blind  
so there can be  
no such thing as..  
Redistricting and being red lined

Mind Tricks  
Mind Tricks play  
deep within these misty  
gray skies  
there lies  
a ghostly presence in  
disguise

Our perceptions of  
where every smile  
Sparks a cry  
as thoughts dwell and  
begin to fly

Vanity the weakness of  
the wise  
power becoming the  
crack addicts prize  
our perception of life  
is the assumption of the  
mind  
their our allusions of the  
world  
becoming the hardships  
of mankind



colour me blind



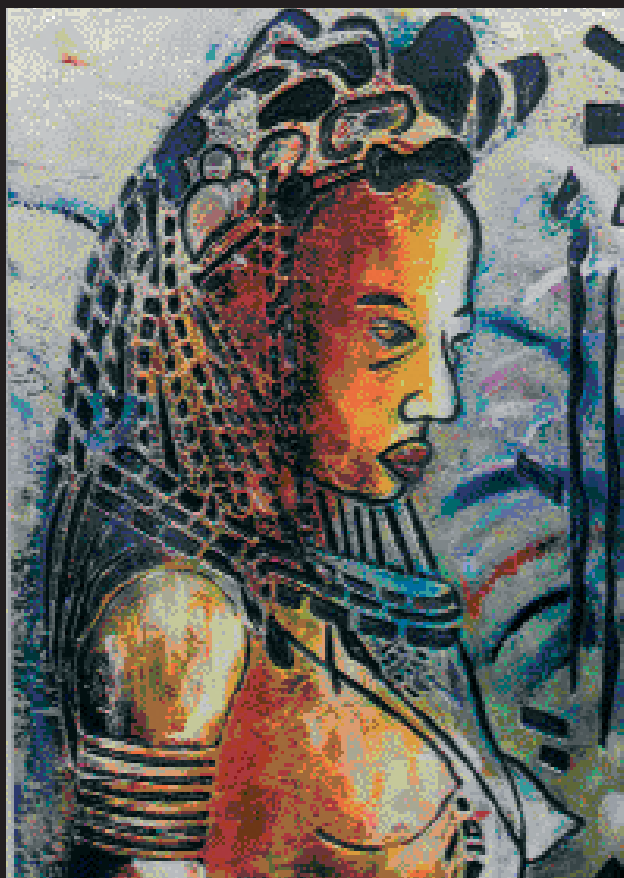
Wande George *'The Child Weeps'*



Helen Idehen *'The Unfulfilled'*

# Female Genital Mutilation

Through the Eyes of Nigerian Artists



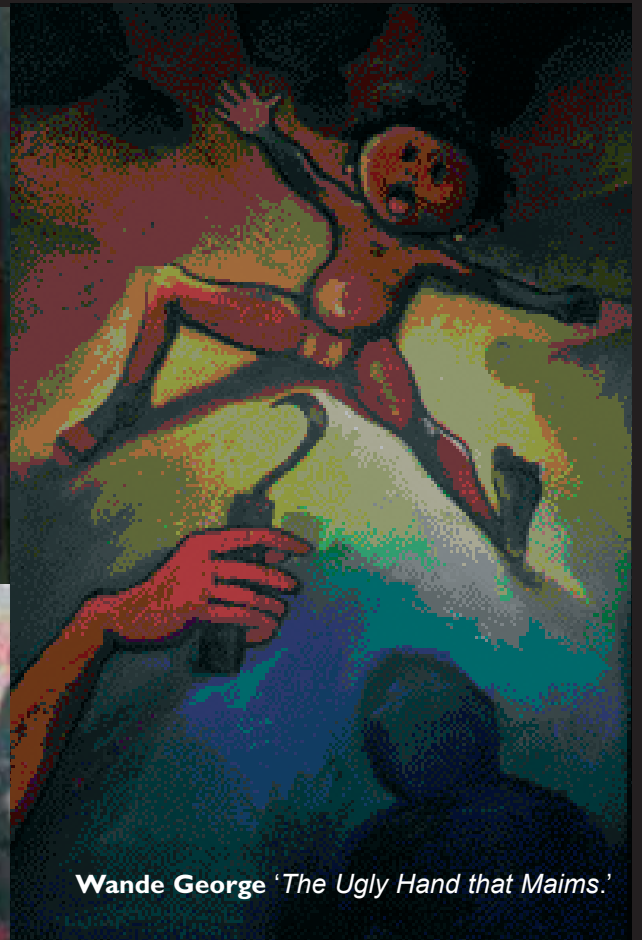
Dele Campbell *'Untitled'*



Emmanuel Ekpeni *'The Victim'*



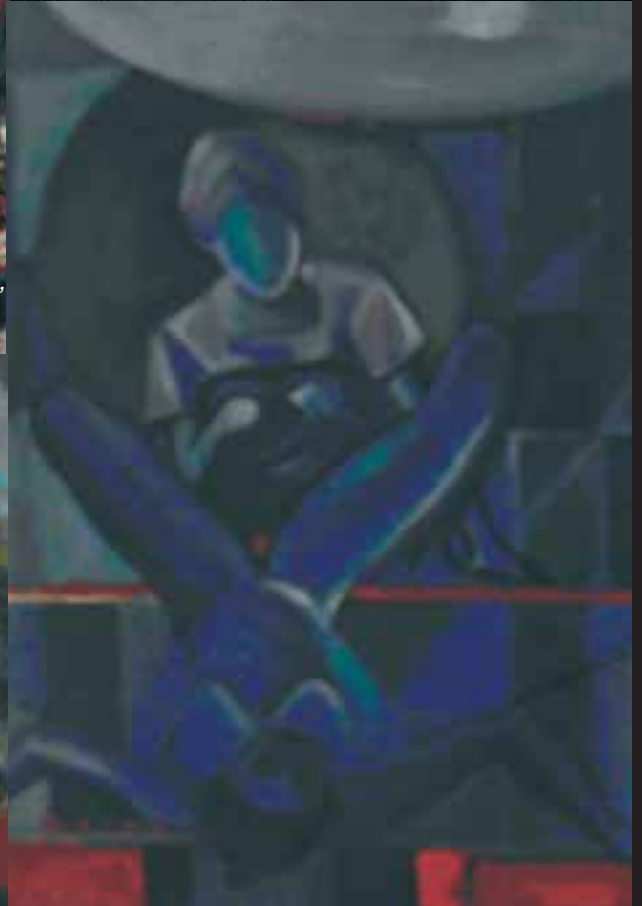
Juliet Ezenwa Nze *'Silence?'*



Wande George *'The Ugly Hand that Maims.'*



Ufuoma Onobrakpeya *'Female Genital Mutilation'*



Wande George *'Barbaric Act'*



Menassah Imonikebe *'What if I Refuse?'*

# Young People SPEAK OUT Project

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

In August 2006, FORWARD organised a youth consultation meeting. This marked the first step towards the implementation of the Young People Speak Out project, funded by the John Lyon's Charity. The aim of the project is to provide a safe space for BME (black, minority, ethnic) youth to articulate their views and concerns, and to receive interactive training and culturally sensitive education on gender-based violence, particularly female genital mutilation (FGM) and child and forced marriage. The project will train a cohort of youth, who will play an active role in the campaign. They will act as young campaigners speaking out about gender-based violence, including FGM and child marriage, in their communities.

The three-year project focuses primarily on the promotion of the health, well-being and human rights of young girls and women at risk of gender-based violence within FGM and child marriage practising communities. The training sessions take place in a youth-friendly and culturally sensitive environment. They include activities such as discussions, debates, video and film screenings (including the award-winning film *Moolaadé*), and group video-making workshops with the film company Banyak.

The project works in partnership with various organisations and agencies to develop an innovative youth-led campaign, drawing on the knowledge and expertise FORWARD has gained through more than 20 years of working with BME communities in the UK. These organisations include the Westminster Refugee Consortium who will assist FORWARD in reaching BME youth from FGM-practising communities, the Brent Centre for Young People and the Sudanese Youth Club,



**Enshrah Ahmed**  
FORWARD UK Programme Manager



who will publish creative works by the youth in their magazine, Bridges. This added publicity will ensure that the project reaches a wider audience within BME communities.

The consultation meeting was facilitated by FORWARD and various professionals representing FORWARD's project partners, as well as non-governmental organisations working with BME youth in London. The meeting used interactive and participatory methods, group discussions, debates and brainstorming.



Adwoa Kwateng-kluvitse, the Director of FORWARD, opened the discussion by setting both FGM and child marriage within their socio-cultural contexts. She explained why these practices discriminate against girls and women, placing their health and general well-being in jeopardy. She also informed the youth about the extent of the two practices. She then asked them to voice their views on FGM and child marriage. The young people expressed different views which formed the basis for a stimulating debate.



These were the general views of the participants:

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)	CHILD MARRIAGE (CM)
FGM is practiced in parts of Africa irrespective of culture or religion	CM takes place because some men want to marry virgins
Religion is used as an excuse to practice FGM	CM may be attractive to parents in the West because they believe Western culture is too liberal
FGM is wrong, disgusting and prevents sexual pleasure for women	CM is often practiced when parents are poor and have limited options
FGM is encouraged by older generations who are reluctant to stop the practice as it is believed to ensure a good marriage	CM is practiced when it is seen as a way to ensure a better life for girls. Yet it prevents girls from attaining many things e.g. education
FGM is used to ensure chastity and perpetuates inequality	CM is not only practiced by Muslims
FGM is preferred by men in some cultures, but not all, and sustained by women due to social pressure	CM was a common practice in Europe in the past
FGM can be eradicated through education resulting in attitude and behaviour change	CM can be eradicated through education resulting in attitude and behaviour change
FGM should be challenged by youth	CM should be challenged by youth

**Adwoa** informed the youth of the following points:

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)	Child Marriage (CM)
FGM is performed to ensure chastity and virginity and is different to male circumcision	CM is defined as any marriage performed on a child under the age of 18 years. It is illegal and against the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which every country has signed except Somalia and U.S.
FGM differs according to where it is practiced e.g. West Africa the clitoris is removed (type 1 & 2) and in parts of East Africa the whole external genitalia is removed and vulva is stitched (type 3)	CM is practiced because some countries believe it is sanctioned by religion
FGM affects women throughout their lives, during menstruation, urination, intercourse, childbirth and after childbirth when a woman may be re-circumcised	CM is practiced in order to protect girls from rape and pregnancy and is seen as a way to increase the family income and bride price
FGM does not prevent sexual pleasure because it is not located in the genitalia but in the mind. However, the sole purpose of the clitoris is for pleasure.	CM also affects young boys but it mainly affects young girls with negative effect on their health, life chances and education, unequal power balance within marriage which may lead to domestic violence and marital rape, problems in pregnancy and child birth due to girls' physical underdevelopment resulting in fistulas
FGM affects over 140 million women worldwide (WHO report).	CM was performed in the past because life span was much shorter e.g. at 15 a girl would be halfway through her life.
	CM has many negative outcomes and therefore FORWARD campaigns against marriage of anyone under the age of 18 years

**Margaret Sesay**, an African activist, also raised the point that as Africans we should respect our traditions and understand that they had a purpose. Parents believed FGM and CM were the best thing they could offer their daughters to ensure that she had a good marriage. However, times have changed and traditions should be retained but the negative and dangerous aspect of our cultures replacing them with livelihood skills to teach

assertiveness, self-awareness, self-confidence, decision-making, negotiating, and communication, problem-solving and refusal skill. Life-skills will empower youth to become proactive peer educators and advocates for prevention of the FGM and CM.

### Activities

Participants were divided into two groups, giving them the opportunity to discuss various ways and means to maximise their participation in various activities in the campaign against GBV.

GROUP A	GROUP B
<b>Internet</b> - use of chat rooms to discuss issues on FGM & CM	<b>Internet</b> – use chat rooms to discuss and raise awareness on issues of FGM & CM
<b>Media</b> – use of radio, newspapers, magazines to bring issues to community and national interest	<b>Media</b> – use of radio stations e.g. Choice FM and other community radio stations
<b>Performance</b> – use of drama, plays, poems, CDs and DVDs to highlight issues	<b>Advertising</b> – Speakers' Corner (Hyde Park), flyers, posters, wristbands (e.g. black b/ground with red footprints – "Moving Forward Against FGM)
<b>Logos</b> – use of wristbands (e.g. black b/ground with red footprints –"Moving Forward Against FGM), t-shirts sold to raise funds for campaign	<b>Schools &amp; Colleges</b> – talking to young people about GBV including FGM and CM
<b>Education</b> – to teach youth about GBV sex education and reproductive health and livelihood skills	<b>Youth Advocates</b> – speaking out about FGM and CM within communities, at local, national and international levels
<b>Peer Education</b> - to pass on knowledge to peers within community so that they too can join the campaign and spread awareness of the issues throughout the wider community	<b>Peer Education</b> - engaging with youth about issues of FGM and CM to recruit more members and participate with adults in the community a youth-led campaign to end GBV
<b>Project Length</b> – 10 weeks training – youth to meet every other Saturday (11-3m). Venue to be confirmed.	<b>Project Length</b> - 10 weeks training – youth to meet every other Saturday (11-3m). Venue to be confirmed.

### Youth evaluation of the Meeting

25 participants (male and female) attended and took part in the meeting and 15 of them completed the evaluation form.

## Islamic Fatwa

### Female genital mutilation is not Islamic, say top Egyptian clerics

FORWARD and the London Central Mosque Trust and the Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC) welcome the breakthrough announcements by top Muslim clerics to dissociate Islam from female genital mutilation (FGM). The declaration was announced on 22nd November 2006 during an international conference on FGM in Cairo, Egypt.

The Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar, the highest Sunni Islamic institution in the world, Sheikh Mohammed Sayyid Tantawi, categorically stated "FGM has neither been mentioned in Quran nor Sunnah". This statement was reaffirmed by the top official cleric and Grand Mufti of Egypt - Sheikh Ali Gomaa, who said "Prophet Mohammed didn't circumcise his four daughters". Sheikh Yousif Algaradawi, a prominent Islamic figure, also addressed the conference avowing that "FGM is not an Islamic requirement". These statements have come from the highest Islamic figures in the world, which should be binding for all FGM-practising communities who are Sunni Muslims.

On the eve of the International Day of the Elimination of Violence Against Women, FORWARD and ICC call upon all religious and non-religious institutions to take up their moral and religious responsibility and actively work to end this abuse of girls and women.

### REGIONAL SERVICES THAT CAN OFFER HELP AND SUPPORT

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is prohibited by law in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, whether it is committed against a UK national or permanent UK resident in the UK or abroad. FGM is an abuse of the human rights of girls and women and is therefore a child protection issue.

If you are worried that you or a young woman under 18 is at risk of FGM, you can call the agencies below.

Call the **NSPCC's** Child Protection Helpline on **0800 800 5000**

Each borough has a Social Services department. You can contact your local council (usually based within a Town Hall) or Google 'Social Services + borough name' to find their contact details.

Contact your local Police Child Protection Unit. You can either visit or telephone your local police station for information.

Call **FORWARD** on **020 8960 4000**, Monday – Friday, 9.30am – 6.00pm. FORWARD provides support, counselling and access to specialist health services for women and girls at risk of FGM or who have already experienced FGM.

# What do they think about Female Genital Mutilation?

## Vox Pop

By Hana Murgani (Young People Speak Out project)



Painting by Sam Ovrati

*How much do people actually know about FGM?  
Let's find out....*

**Hana:** Hi there, I am conducting a study on public awareness of female genital mutilation and I would like to know if you can tell me anything about it.

**Response 1:** It's like circumcision for girls.

**Hana:** Do you know where it happens?

**Response 1:** In the developing world mostly.

**Hana:** OK, can you tell me anything more about it?

**Response 1:** Umm, I don't know, it's just like a culture thing and I think it has some religious connotations. But I think it's mostly the culture of the background where you are brought up and they see it as a tradition thing.

**Hana:** OK then, thank you very much.

**Response 2:** [laugh] I heard of things but not much. [Would not elaborate.]

**Hana:** OK, thank you.

**Response 3:** What's female genital....what, what...wait what's the question again?

**Hana:** Female genital mutilation, FGM, do you know anything about it?

**Response 3:** Nah.

**Hana:** OK, thank you.

**Response 4:** [laugh] Ummm, I don't know what that is.

**Hana:** You don't know anything at all?

**Response 4:** No, what is it?

**Response 5:** I think it's a bad practice because it doesn't give way for a woman to be a woman because her genitals, clitoris is being cut off so when she grows up and gets married she doesn't have the satisfaction of sex. [Other girls are making sounds of encouragement.]

**Hana:** So you know quite a bit.

**Response 5:** Yeah.

**Hana:** Do you mind me asking what country you are from?

**Response 5:** Ghana

**Hana:** OK, thank you.

**Response 6:** You are beautiful, that is the way God created you, do not change anything, the Lord is your creator, and you cannot change what he gave to you. He wanted you to be the way you are. Human beings have no right to play the part of God, that is all I have to say. Amen, brap brap.

**Hana:** Thank you very much.

**Response 7:** I think in some tribes in the Middle East or Africa or Asia they mutilate women as a sign of female domination or something. That's all I know about it really.

**Hana:** OK, thank you very much.



# الله

Interview with a Somali religious Leader, Sheikh Abdelrahman Musa, Leyton mosque.

**By Aliow Hassan**

**I asked Sheikh Abdelrahman to tell me about the issue as an Islamic leader and he gave this account:**

"The practice goes back to the time of the pharaohs, who opposed God anyway. It originally started from Egypt in Africa. It was after the time of the messenger Mohammed (pbuh) and it was performed at the time when there were uneducated people, who did not consider the health and psychological problems. From this time on, it became a tradition that embedded and followers never asked why it is performed".

**What evidence is there to prove that it is not religious?**

**Sheikh Abdelrahman added:**

"The evidence we have got is that, many religious leaders opposed the practice and many agreed with the idea that, it was a Sunnah, as it was debateable. Hadith relates to the words and deeds of messenger Mohammed (pbuh), but there is no Hadiths that covers this subject, while the compulsoriness male's circumcision is covered in detail".

"FGM is neither religious obligation nor Sunnah, however, the religion says that God created human

beings in the best form and wanted them to keep the nature in which they were created. It is forbidden to make changes in God's creation unless there is a compelling reason i.e. for a medical reason.

**What are the reasons behind this practice in your opinion?**

"It was believed that FGM would ensure cleanliness of the women. It is also and most importantly, thought of as reducing the women's sexual appetite, so she doesn't fall on to any man other than her husband. This is also thought of as reducing the chances of bringing shame to the family".

**Can you tell me about the consequences of this practice?**

"Various infections will occur in the long run. FGM reduces the pleasure of a woman with her husband. God has created the clitoris for that purpose. The Qur'an promotes the concept of a husband and wife giving each other pleasure during sexual intercourse. An example for that; "It is lawful for you to go in unto your wives during the night preceding the (day's) fast: they are as a garment for you and you are as a garment for them." (2:187). Other problems are occurring when a woman gives birth which come in forms of severe pain and shock, difficulty to pass urine and psychological damage". "Islam is a religion that promotes, ease, comfort and cleanness, but Female circumcision does not meet these criteria. Therefore it should not be associated with Islam"

**TOGETHER**

**WE**

**MAKE**

**FGM**

**HISTORY**