The Preservation of Minority Female Customs

- An Annotated Bibliography

Working Thesis: The minority female cultures should be considered from a more objective, holistic and rational perspective. When the organizations decide to provide help to the local population, it is crucial for them to respect the traditional female customs.


- Summary: The general background of this study is that the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is widespread in Nigeria. The study proves that even though the majority of the mothers perceive this ritual as something harmful and also excoriating to their daughters, they still bend their will to the power of deep-rooted tradition. Nearly a third (30.5%) believed that FGM promotes a woman’s faithfulness to her husband. About a quarter (26.3%) reported that women who have undergone FGM are not at any risk of gynecological complications. However, the study also illustrates the relation between education level of the mother and the chance of her daughter being uncircumcised.

- Analysis: This is a scholarly source. It mainly demonstrates the question through a more intimate perspective, which correlates the problem with the direct participants. This study utilize data and interviews to enhance its credibility and reliability. What have been shown in this study reflected the
true thoughts of the local mothers. Combine this study with the previous article written by Fedorak, it is rather obvious that the prominent problem here is how should the volunteers or organizations help the local society. Due to these sophisticated factors, it is important for the society to look at this tradition in a more rational way. The study also emphasizes the importance of education. Thus, the underlying solution probably is to improve the general education rate.

Althaus, Frances A.. “Female Circumcision: Rite of Passage or Violation of Rights?”. *International Family Planning Perspectives* 23.3 (1997): 130–133. Web

- **Summary:** This is a scholarly source. The title of this article is rather self-explanatory. It covers from the origin of the problem to the future prediction about it. It specifically focuses on the two most prominent questions regarding the discussion of female circumcision. The article cited from quite a few of authoritative sources to support its argument such as the Fourth World Conference on Women. It also uses personal examples as well to make this article more persuasive.

- **Analysis:** Although this source is fairly short compared to other sources I have found, it is rather comprehensive. The author’s attitude towards female circumcision was rather rational. Althaus analyzes the solution to prevent female circumcision as well as the important meaning about this custom in some parts of this world. It is rather clear to see that the author made some effort to eliminate her biases and personal opinions. Instead of using westerners’ stereotypes, she
takes the approach from the people that are directly involved in this ritual. She substantially weighs the loss and gains resulted from practicing this ritual. Thus, it is more objective and reliable for a scientific research.


- Summary: This article mainly focuses on the social effects that purdah has brought to women’s daily lives. The primary example that was used in this article are women in Pakistani Baluchistan region. It gives a rather thorough analysis with the society’s structural problem, which is one of the most crucial contributing factor towards the inconvenience that could be brought to women by purdah. Another important factor is the relationship between men and women in the societies where people have the custom of practicing purdah.

- Analysis: This is a scholarly source. This article talks about purdah from a holistic point of view regarding its strong social effects. Even though the author held an relatively negative opinion towards this tradition, the discussion was quite thorough. This article also touches on another significant factor of purdah’s influence on women, which is male’s character in this custom. It talks about not only the causation of the issue, but focuses more on the long-lasting effects. It has the same problem as the previous scholarly journal since it was published in 1974. Overall, it is a fairly objective resource.

- Summary: Throughout this chapter, Fedorak generally talks about the origins and cultural factors behind the ritual of Purdah at first so that people can get an adequate amount of knowledge regarding this topic. After the introduction, she gets deeper and more profoundly into the problem. The overall argument is that this ritual is not a violation to human’s rights. However, there does exist some circumstances that the practice of this ritual can hinder a person’s proper rights. Fedorak uses the example from the past and the situation nowadays in the middle-eastern countries to support her argument, such as ISIS is forcing all women who live in their territory to wear hijab disregarding the women’s own wills.

- Analysis: This is a scholarly source. Fedorak looks problem from a more objective and holistic way compare to other studies. How she clarifies the misunderstanding about Purdah at the beginning of this chapter makes more people to look at this problem in a more levelheaded point of view. In her words, she shows sufficient amount of respect and understanding to both parties that are involved in this issue, especially to the party that is experiencing it in a more direct way. This eliminates the biases in her study. Her analysis regarding this issue is detailed with the support from previous
studies and news reports.


- Summary: People generally take female circumcision as something grievous and devoid of humanity. So usually without any further thinking, they would start to resist this kind of action and try to “civilize” the region that practice it. Even though most of people’s motivation is out of kindness, Fedorak argues that blindly dissuade and categorize female circumcision can actually cause a counter effect. Again, she gives detailed explanation to this culture and lists the harmful side of it as well as its cultural significance in order to allow the readers to have a general knowledge.

- Analysis: This is a scholarly source. Fedorak openly states the biasness of some studies toward the issue of female circumcision at the beginning of this chapter. She put a lot of effort to eliminate her own biases as well. Instead of trying to hide her disapproval towards female circumcision, she openly admits that she disagrees with this practice and will treat it with respect as well. Her approach to this issue comes more from a caring perspective since she promotes the idea of to truly concern about people instead of merely adding the mainstream point on to them. The alternative solution she brings up is more subtle and suitable for current situation since there are many people in
those regions who are afraid of not to follow the tradition but resist the idea of female circumcision. That is, to expound the question clearly and let people choose on their own albeit the main purpose is still to stop this but with more respect to the local people.


- Summary: This webpage provides an official definition and general explanation for female circumcision, which is referred as female genital mutilation (FGM). It emphasizes on the harms that could be done to a woman by implementing FGM. It also talks about the causation of FGM and the cultural factors behind it. Overall, the WHO takes a negative stand regarding this issue.

- Analysis: Although WHO is a fairly huge world-wide organization, most of its main dominant members are western countries. However, as Fedorak mentioned in her book, “mutilation” is a judgmental term and does not belong in an intellectual discussion of this topic. The naming issue already demonstrates the bias the westerners brought with them when they first approached this topic. Despite for the scientific and authoritative facts the website provided, it indicates the stereotyping on this kind of problem as well. It also suggests that people would most likely to unconsciously bring in their western standards while looking at question like this.
Summary: Papanek argues that purdah has caused seclusion for the women, both economically and socially. This article generally talks about women’s working situations in Pakistan, especially regarding the modern occupations. Due to the restriction of purdah, it has caused much trouble for women to find jobs. The selection of jobs are extremely restricted. According to the data for 1951 to 1961 that was summarized in the article, only 14.5 of all women over fifteen are classified as being economically active.

Analysis: This is a scholarly source, which contradicts with my opinion in some degree. Overall, the author disagrees with the practice of purdah. She stated rather clearly at the beginning of the article that purdah would cause female seclusion in the societies. This may leave some readers with biased impression against the tradition of purdah. Usually, first impressions are firmly entrenched into the readers’ minds. Thus, I disagree with this author’s way of approaching to this problem. Another issue with this article is that it was from 1971. Hence, it might be somewhat outdated. On the other hand, it can also provide a contrast of the changes that had been made within these 40 years.
Summary: This article is a general and comprehensive introduction to the custom of purdah. It explains the significance of this culture and its historical meaning. It includes views from different perspectives regarding this issue as well as the problems caused by purdah. It also discuss the harm that could be done by some blindly solutions such as enforce unveiling in those countries.

Analysis: This is a scholarly source. Compare to other articles that mainly talk about the negative aspect about purdah itself, this article is more objective and thorough. For example, it neither denies the harm that purdah could have done to women nor it promotes the idea of abolishing this custom. On the other hand, the mention of counter effect on enforcing unveiling made the whole source more comprehensive. This source is rather useful as a basic but also informative reference to my paper.