
The subject matter of this book is captivating and multifaceted, considering a diverse set of issues in relation to female genital mutilation otherwise known as cutting. Pemunta is one of the few writers to focus on this issue in the context of Cameroon. In the book description on the book cover the author notes: ‘Human rights-based interventions against female genital mutilation (Cutting) have increasingly emphasised the need for legislation against such practices with little attention to the consequences. Accordingly, the international community has compelled state parties by connecting international development aid to good governance and human rights- the rights of women and children- through the elimination of genital surgeries and other gender-based harmful and discriminatory traditional practices by adopting appropriate legislation that will deter practitioners.’

Pemunta explores diverse local reactions among the female genital mutilation practicing Ejagham ethnicities in Southwest Cameroon. He highlights the dilemmas inherent towards the eradication of female genital mutilation and legislation against the practice. The book examines several experiences of African countries that adopted anti-mutilation legislation, demonstrating the divided power structures in the postcolonial context and the multiple overlapping authority systems, namely between the national government and traditional village authority system. The work portrays the state's lack of political will as an example of the dilemmas compromising the adoption and implementation of anti-mutilation legislation in Cameroon.

Pemunta's work examines the socio-legal framework that underpins the central practice of what has been described as female genital mutilation, addressing an old contentious and unresolved debate of human rights and socio legal resistance in relation to cultural relativism. This discussion also illustrates how female genital mutilation is rooted in socio-legal resistance and cultural practices that lie at the core of the political, economic structure and social institutions of Ejagham society.

Chapter one opens with a detailed description of female genital mutilation and its context within the Cameroonian society. A portrait of Cameroon is painted, its social structures and the relation of cultures to economic, political, legal and social status. The chapter goes on to define the position of female genital mutilation in the international community, the recent popularity and focus given to human rights in relation to the practice. It also provides a history lesson on the relation of female genital mutilation to colonialism, patriarchy, gender and the competing notions of violence and human rights.
Following on from this foundation, chapter two provides a concise examination of the patriarchal, national and political architecture of women's rights in Cameroon. It demonstrates how customary laws deprive women of sexual reproductive independence, resources and decision-making power in all spheres of social life. It is clear from this discussion that patriarchal ideologies shape the formal institutions of the Cameroon State and that this dominance has resulted in the non-enforcement of international conventions relating to the benefit and well-being of women and children.

Chapter three focuses on the socio-cultural institutional framework within which female genital mutilation takes place among the Ejagham. Pemunta highlights the varying attitudes however overall it remains clear that female genital mutilation is at the centre of gendered personhood and femininity among the Ejagham. The chapter concludes by calling for the need for multi-pronged and universal development to guide women to become their own change agents. It advises that an approach such as this will empower women to make necessary changes to their culture before the law can be enacted or implemented.

The international human rights and the status of women in Cameroon are explored in chapter four. Pemunta provides a detailed analysis of activities undertaken by the State, and civil society at national and regional level towards the abolition of female genital mutilation. It explores the relationship between law and politics, corruption and political will. An overview of the lack of political will, in relation to politics and politicians being the people favourite choice; by not interfering with the ‘peoples’ traditions they are confident of successful political careers.

Following on from chapter four, chapter five considers several aids that have been put in place as a barrier to female genital mutilation such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) activists in the Ejagham area. However, the author argues that the connection of these groups to the society they serve is considered blasphemous and corrupt. The chapter follows the NGOs struggles to educate and integrate as part of the community. Pemunta also highlights in this chapter the cultural conflict between ‘stakeholders’ and the West regarding the practice. This suggests the need for a critical indigenous perspective that reflects local needs and especially the needs of women through non-legal interventions.

Finally, in the conclusions and recommendations Pemunta concludes by arguing that although the rule of law is to bring about social change by putting an end to the practice of female genital mutilation, legislative enactment without community support is counterproductive. As in other countries where there are specific statutory clauses, the laws have proved very difficult to implement because they were mostly imposed on the people/communities.