

“Framing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): A Critical Analysis of Representations in Danish Media”

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Abstract

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a deeply entrenched practice predominantly found in certain African cultures, impacting the lives of countless girls. In recent years, this practice has also surfaced in Western societies, particularly among refugee communities who adhere to traditional customs. This raises critical questions about how Western societies, such as Denmark in our case, confront and engage with FGM, especially considering varying cultural perceptions and ethical considerations. Specifically, how does the Danish media respond to claims of Muslim leaders that FGM is “good for the girls”?

This MA thesis aims to investigate whether Danish media representations of FGM reflect or contest postcolonial and postmodern discourses, and if so, how these dynamics manifest in practice. To explore this question, I conducted a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of three editorials from different Danish newspapers, selected for their diverse political orientations and approaches to the topic. The analysis employed the theoretical frameworks of Orientalism, postcolonial feminism, and gender performativity to unpack the narratives surrounding FGM. These theories provide a robust context for understanding the implications of media representations on societal perceptions of gender, culture, and identity.

The findings reveal that Danish media largely reflect prevailing discourses surrounding FGM, reinforcing stereotypes and cultural binaries that position Western practices as progressive and non-Western practices as archaic. However, I also identified instances of slight contestation where editorial voices recognize the agency of affected women. These representations contribute to the construction of several patterns.

Additionally, the analysis highlights notable absences in the discourse, such as the lack of voices from affected communities and nuanced discussions around the complexities of cultural practices. These absences indicate potential areas for further research and engagement, suggesting the need for a more inclusive dialogue that acknowledges the lived experiences of those affected by FGM. By illuminating these dynamics, this thesis contributes to ongoing discussions in feminist and postcolonial studies, emphasizing the complex interplay between media narratives, cultural practices, and the ethical considerations that arise in a globalized context.

Keywords: female genital mutilation, Denmark, media, women, critical analysis, representations, power relations, orientalism, postcolonial feminism, gender performativity

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	1
ABBREVIATIONS	3
1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTION	4
2. BACKGROUND	5
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	7
3.1 ORIENTALISM BY SAID	7
3.2 POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM BY CHANDRA MOHANTY	9
3.3 GENDER PERFORMATIVITY BY JUDITH BUTLER	11
4. METHODOLOGY	13
4.1 DATA COLLECTION	13
4.2 RESEARCHER BIASES	15
4.3 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA)	16
4.4 REPRESENTATIONS AND STEREOTYPES	20
5. ANALYTICAL DESIGN	24
6. ANALYSIS	25
6.1 INTRODUCTION	25
6.2 OVERVIEW OF THEORIES AND METHODOLOGY	26
6.3 POLITIKEN, "SLET OG RET: VOLD" (PLAIN AND SIMPLE: VIOLENCE), PUBLISHED IN 12. NOVEMBER 2002	26
6.4 JYLLANDS- POSTEN, "KRIMINELLE IMAMER" (KRIMINAL IMAMS), PUBLISHED IN 10. NOVEMBER 2002	31
6.5 KRISTELIGT DAGBLAD, "OMSKÆRING" ("CIRCUMCISION"), PUBLISHED ON 5. DECEMBER 2002	34
6.6 PATTERNS	37
6.7 DISCURSIVE SHIFTS	38
7. FINDINGS AND RESEARCH QUESTION	39
8. CONCLUSION	41
9. BIBLIOGRAPHY	41

Abbreviations

FGM Female Genital Mutilation

CDA Critical Discourse Analysis

POEM Paraplyorganisationen for Etniske Mindretal (Umbrella Organization for Ethnic Minorities)

VPN Virtual Private Network

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

1. Introduction and Research Question

Female genital mutilation (FGM) affects millions of women and girls worldwide, with an estimated 200 million currently living with its consequences (UNICEF 2024). A simple internet search reveals numerous media outlets—mainly Western—addressing FGM and the efforts to stop this harmful practice. This thesis will specifically focus on the representation of FGM in Western media, with an emphasis on Danish media. According to European Institute for Gender Equality (European Institute for Gender Equality 2021), 11-21% of girls aged 0-18 in Denmark are at potential risk of undergoing FGM. Danish media, including newspapers and online platforms, play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of FGM. Understanding how these portrayals are constructed is essential for a deeper analysis. In this thesis, postcolonial and postmodern theories will be applied to explore key questions: To what extent are these representations influenced by postcolonial and postmodern discourses? Do the media portrayals align with or diverge from these theoretical perspectives? These questions will be addressed by the end of this thesis, potentially revealing new approaches. It is also crucial to acknowledge from the outset that media outlets are not homogenous; they often have varying agendas and approaches.

This thesis aims to critically examine how FGM is represented in Danish media, focusing primarily on newspaper editorials as the key empirical data. Specifically, one editorial from each will be selected from *Politiken*, *Jyllands-Posten*, and *Kristeligt Dagblad*. The methodology chapter will further explain these choices and provide context on the selected newspapers. Using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework by Fairclough (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002) the study will assess whether media representations of FGM align with or challenge established theoretical perspectives. Theoretical frameworks include Edward Said's concept of Orientalism (Said E. W 1978), Judith Butler's gender performativity (Butler J. 1990) and Chandra Mohanty's critiques of postcolonial feminism (Mohanty, C. T. 1984).

The thesis is structured to provide a comprehensive analysis. It begins with a background section where I presented the imams' statements regarding FGM through which I will try to analyze the three editorials that react and reply to these statements. Following this, a detailed discussion of the theoretical frameworks will explain their relevance to media representation analysis and how they inform the research.

In the methodology chapter, I will justify the use of CDA as the chosen approach and reflect on its application in analyzing media portrayals. This chapter will also address potential biases and challenges, ensuring a robust and transparent analysis. Additionally, I will define the concept of “representation” and how it will be understood within this context as well as the concept of “stereotypes”. After that an analytical design will be presented to illustrate how the theories are applied in conjunction with the methodology. The empirical data, including the newspaper articles, will also be detailed.

The analysis will focus on the selected Danish editorials, applying the theoretical frameworks to determine whether the media’s portrayal of FGM aligns with or challenges dominant discourses. The goal is to uncover whether these portrayals reinforce stereotypes, perpetuate cultural biases, or offer a more nuanced understanding of FGM and those affected. Any potential additional findings that emerge from the analysis will be explored. This examination aligns with the research question: "Do Danish media representations of FGM reflect or contest postcolonial and postmodern discourses, and how?"

2. Background

In this chapter, the background for the subject which will be studied in the analysis will be provided. The focus is on statements made by imams, Muslim leaders, who argue that circumcision is "good for the girls." To build a foundation for my analysis, I will gather information from Danish newspapers about this case, as I will later analyze Danish editorials that respond to these statements.

According to Information 8. November 2002 and (Charlotte Aagaard 2002a) with the title *“Imamer opfordrer til omskæring”* (*“Imams encourage circumcision”*), Somali imams in Denmark continue to advise parents to circumcise their daughters, despite it being illegal under Danish law. Imams in Aalborg, Aarhus, Odense, and Copenhagen encourage the practice, stating that while the most extreme form, infibulation, is forbidden in Islam, the so-called *“sunna circumcision,”* which involves the removal of the clitoris, is religiously mandated. This has led activists to express concern over the persistent influence of religious leaders, who hold significant sway over their communities, making the eradication of female circumcision difficult. One such advocate of sunna circumcision is Mustafa Abdullahi Aden, an imam from Aalborg, who advises parents to circumcise their daughters abroad due to the restrictive legal

atmosphere in Denmark. Other imams, including Muhamoud Sheik from Odense, have echoed these sentiments, asserting that sunna circumcision is a religious duty according to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

Continuing with Information 9. November 2002 and (Charlotte Aagaard 2002b) with the title "*Politisk nej til særlov om omskæring*" ("*Political no to a special law on circumcision*"), the public call for circumcision by these imams has sparked widespread political debate. Danish authorities have taken steps to investigate and prosecute imams like Mustafa Abdullahi Aden and Muhamoud Sheik, who have been reported to the police for inciting the practice. The Minister of Justice Lene Espersen reiterated that circumcision is already illegal under Danish law, punishable by up to six years in prison, with more severe sentences in aggravated cases. However, the debate now focuses on whether Danish law needs further revision, particularly regarding circumcisions performed abroad in countries where the practice is legal. A growing political consensus supports amending the penal code to make it possible to punish parents who travel to countries like Somalia to have their daughters circumcised. However, Lene Espersen remains cautious, waiting for the findings of a legal committee set up to review the issue of circumcision and other related matters, such as sex tourism. Jette Bergenholz Baurup from the Social Democrats has pushed for immediate action, proposing the abolition of the "principle of double criminality," which currently prevents prosecution if the act is legal in the country where it was performed. This proposal is supported by activists who believe that without specific legal action, it will be difficult to protect Somali girls in Denmark from being mutilated.

Jyllands- Posten 8. November 2002 (Jyllands- Posten 2002) with the title "*Imamer anmeldt for opfordring til omskæring*" ("*Imam reported for calling for circumcision*"), also engaged with the case and it can be read that several Danish Muslim organizations, including the Muslim National Organization and immigrant groups, have strongly condemned the statements in response to the imams' encouragement of circumcision. Deputy Chairman Fatih Alev emphasized that circumcision is not a traditional Islamic practice but rather a cultural tradition rooted in parts of Africa, practiced by both Muslims and Christians. These organizations have distanced themselves from the Somali imams, arguing that such views perpetuate harmful stereotypes about Islam and damage the integration process in Denmark. Furthermore, the chairman of the organization *Paraplyorganisationen for Etniske Mindretal* (POEM) (Umbrella Organization for Ethnic Minorities), Bashy Quraishy, has called for collaboration with leading religious figures to launch an information campaign clarifying that female circumcision is neither a religious requirement in Islam nor permissible under Danish law. Such initiatives are seen as essential for combating the ongoing support for the practice within certain Somali communities and dispelling misconceptions.

We can see that the imams' statements have sparked the political debate regarding female circumcision. In the analysis section, the three editorials that react and respond to these statements will be explored. The focus will remain on the issue of female genital mutilation as represented in the Danish media.

3. Theoretical Framework

Analytically, postcolonial theories like Orientalism (Said E. W 1978), postcolonial feminism (Mohanty, C. T. 1984), and gender as a social construct (Butler J. 1990) act as a great source of information. This thesis' analysis critically examines the newspaper editorials, focusing on gender and "orientalist" perspectives. This approach highlights the power relations present in the media's portrayal of FGM, particularly regarding gender and the reinforcement of stereotypes. Though these theoretical insights inform my approach, I also search for instances where my empirical material might challenge or complicate them. Let's explore each theory in detail to understand their significance and how they can be applied to this analysis. Along with the theories, some critiques and approaches that challenge our theories have also been included so we can have a clear understanding.

3.1 Orientalism by Said

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism (Said E. W 1978), delves into how Western societies have historically constructed an image of the "*Orient*", or the East, as exotic, backward, and uncivilized. Said examines how Orientalism functioned as a framework that allowed the West to assert dominance over the East, particularly during the height of European colonial expansion in the 18th and 19th centuries. This framework is rooted in a binary "*us versus them*" mentality, where the West is portrayed as rational, progressive, and civilized, while the East is cast as irrational, stagnant, and inhumane

. This dichotomy justified colonial rule by positioning the Orient as inherently inferior, needing Western intervention and guidance. Said argues that this constructed opposition between the West and the East allowed those in power to craft and perpetuate a skewed and often hostile image of the Orient, fostering an ideological foundation for the colonial project. Orientalism thus functioned not just as an academic

field, but as a powerful means of exerting control over the East, as knowledge about the Orient became intertwined with political and material domination.

At the core of Said's argument is the idea that the effectiveness of Orientalism arises from the interplay between knowledge and power. Western knowledge about the Orient, shaped largely by early literary and scholarly texts, was often more reflective of Western desires, anxieties, and fantasies than of the realities of Eastern societies. Said explains how this knowledge, even when it was flawed or based on stereotypes, was presented as objective and authoritative, providing a basis for Western power to dominate the East. Through literature, travelogues, and academic writing, the Orient was framed as "backward" and "less advanced" compared to the West, which positioned Western powers as having a duty to bring "progress" to the East. This notion of a civilizing mission served as a moral and intellectual justification for colonial domination. As a result, Orientalism became a set of representational practices through which the West made the Orient visible, knowable, and ultimately controllable (Said E. W 1978).

In this context, it becomes crucial to question how this theory can be applied to the representation of FGM in Danish media. Edward Said's theory of Orientalism provides a powerful framework for critically analyzing how Western media, including Danish outlets, depict non-Western societies, particularly in relation to cultural practices like FGM. Said, (Said E. W 1978) argues that the West has historically constructed the "Orient" as a place of exoticism, barbarism, and inferiority, which served to legitimize colonialism and ongoing forms of dominance. This binary opposition between the "civilized" West and the "uncivilized" East is particularly relevant to discussions of FGM, where we are going to investigate whether Danish media may frame African and Middle Eastern cultures as inherently oppressive, presenting FGM as a barbaric ritual that symbolizes cultural backwardness. These representations, when examined through Said's Orientalist lens, may reveal whether the Danish media constructs an image of FGM that reinforces Western superiority by framing Western norms of gender and human rights as morally and culturally superior.

Leila Ahmed, in her work *Women and Gender in Islam* (Ahmed, L. 1992) which works as a response to the way Arab women are represented in the West, extends this critique of Orientalism. She examines how women in the "Orient" have been cast as victims of local cultural practices, and the West tried to champion women's rights. We will explore whether this dynamic becomes evident in our analysis of the empirical data.

While Said's theory offers a robust framework for analyzing the power dynamics at play in these media representations, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. One of the critiques of Orientalism, put forth by scholars like Aijaz Ahmad in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (Ahmad, A 1994), is that Said's portrayal of the West risks homogenizing it as a monolithic entity. Ahmad argues that Said's work tends to present the West as uniformly imperialist and Orientalist, overlooking the internal

contradictions, resistances, and diverse perspectives that exist within Western societies. The same argument exists for the East as well in representing it as homogeneous. In the context of FGM, this critique is crucial, as not all Western or Danish media outlets approach the topic from a singular viewpoint. Ahmad's critique reminds us that while Orientalism offers valuable insights, it is essential not to overgeneralize Western perspectives or assume that all Western responses to FGM are uniformly Orientalist.

Moreover, Said's binary framing of East versus West may oversimplify the complexities surrounding FGM, which spans multiple regions, religions, and cultural contexts, many of which are not traditionally part of the "Orient" as defined by Said. Scholars like Lila Abu-Lughod (Abu-Lughod, L 2001) caution against reducing non-Western cultures to a singular "Other" and not focusing on the heterogeneity of these cultures. Applying this critique to the Danish media's portrayal of FGM, we must ask whether these representations consider the voices of the women directly affected by the practice or whether they simplify the issue into a binary of "civilized" versus "barbaric".

Additionally, Sherene Razack (Razack, S 2008), critiques the way that West often deploys a "civilizing mission" narrative to legitimize intervention in non-Western societies. We can say that this narrative simplifies cultural practices like FGM into stark binaries of "good" versus "evil," positioning the West as the ultimate arbiter of human rights and moral authority. While Said's Orientalism is useful in highlighting the power dynamics inherent in such narratives, Razack's critique reminds us of the need to critically examine how even well-intentioned interventions can reproduce colonial logics.

In conclusion, while Edward Said's theory of Orientalism provides a compelling framework for analyzing the representation of FGM in Danish media, it is crucial to engage with its limitations. Said's East-West binary can sometimes oversimplify the complex dynamics at play, particularly in the context of a practice like FGM, which spans diverse cultural, religious, and regional contexts. Furthermore, critiques and approaches by scholars such as Aijaz Ahmad, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Sherene Razack encourage us to approach the analysis with a recognition of the diversity of perspectives, both within Western societies and among the women affected by FGM.

3.2 Postcolonial feminism by Chandra Mohanty

Chandra Mohanty's postcolonial feminist theory provides a crucial framework for analyzing representations of FGM in Danish media, particularly through its critique of

how Western feminist discourses often depict non-Western women. In her seminal work *Under Western Eyes* (Mohanty, C. T. 1984), Mohanty argues that Western feminists tend to homogenize "Third World women," reducing them to a monolithic category defined by oppression, passivity, and victimhood. This perspective often ignores the diversity, agency, and cultural complexity of women in non-Western societies. Mohanty critiques the Western feminist approach for constructing non-Western women as victims of "backward" cultural practices, which overlooks their capacity for agency and resistance. This critique is particularly relevant in the context of how FGM is represented in Danish media, where non-Western women are often depicted primarily as passive subjects of harmful cultural traditions, rather than as individuals with their own voices and forms of resistance.

By applying Mohanty's framework, my analysis will investigate whether Danish media representations of FGM fall into the trap of essentializing African and Middle Eastern women. Often, complex social issues like FGM are reduced to binary narratives of victimhood and oppression, with little attention paid to the broader cultural, political, and economic factors that shape these practices. Mohanty's theory encourages us to question whether Danish media coverage reinforces Western-centric narratives, presenting FGM as a symbol of cultural backwardness while positioning Western norms of gender and human rights as superior. This analysis also aims to uncover how such representations may obscure the diverse responses and forms of resistance among women in the affected regions, as well as how the media might hear or not hear the voices and agency of those directly impacted by the practice.

Mohanty's critique is vital because it shifts the focus away from oversimplified narratives that portray non-Western women as powerless victims of patriarchal and oppressive cultures. Instead, her postcolonial feminist lens encourages a more nuanced analysis that recognizes these women as active agents who navigate complex social realities, often resisting oppressive practices like FGM in their own ways. This is especially important when examining how Danish media covers FGM, as Western feminist perspectives, we should see whether they reproduce Orientalist tropes by framing African and Middle Eastern cultures as uniformly oppressive or if it is something completely different. Mohanty's theory thus pushes us to look beyond surface-level representations and question whether Danish media engages with the political, historical, and economic conditions that shape FGM practices, as well as the diverse perspectives of the women involved.

Despite its strengths, Mohanty's postcolonial feminist theory has been critiqued for its focus on the divide between Western and non-Western feminisms. Some scholars, such as Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (Grewal, I. and Kaplan, C. 1994), argue that we should not see the feminist work as "First World" and "Third World". It may risk reinforcing an oppositional binary between "Western" and "non-Western" feminist narratives. This binary can oversimplify the complexities of feminist solidarities across cultural and national boundaries. The feminist work should be done spanning cultural

differences. In the context of analyzing Danish media representations of FGM, this critique is particularly important because not all Western perspectives are homogeneous, nor are they necessarily Orientalist or ethnocentric. In fact, many Western feminist voices critically engage with FGM in ways that resist reductive and colonial narratives. Therefore, when applying Mohanty's framework to this analysis, it is essential to account for the diversity within Danish and Western feminist discourses, recognizing that there are multiple ways in which feminists approach the issue of FGM.

In addition, scholars like Gayatri Spivak (Spivak G.C 1988) have pointed out through her approach and not directly to Mohanty, another limitation of her framework, arguing that the voices of subaltern women should not be overlooked. Spivak's work emphasizes the importance of considering how non-Western women's experiences are shaped by local forms of patriarchal and class-based oppression. In the context of FGM, this means recognizing that the women affected by the practice are engaging with complex internal dynamics, including local power structures and gender relations.

Ultimately, Chandra Mohanty's postcolonial feminist theory offers a powerful tool for analyzing how FGM is portrayed in Danish media, particularly in highlighting the potential dangers of essentializing non-Western women and reducing their experiences to simplistic narratives of victimhood. However, it is also crucial to recognize the limitations of this framework, particularly in terms of its potential to reinforce a binary between Western and non-Western feminism. My analysis will strive for a more nuanced understanding of how FGM is represented, ensuring that both Western and non-Western feminist perspectives are considered, and that the agency of women in FGM-affected regions is not overlooked. This approach will allow for a more comprehensive critique of Danish media representations, one that accounts for the diversity of voices and experiences surrounding the issue of FGM, both within and beyond Western feminist discourses.

3.3 Gender Performativity by Judith Butler

Judith Butler's feminist theory, particularly her concept of *gender performativity*, offers a profound challenge to traditional understandings of gender as a fixed, inherent trait. In her work *Gender Trouble* (Butler J. 1990), Butler proposes that gender is not something one *is*, but something one *does*. According to Butler, gender is constructed through repeated social performances-behaviors, gestures, and actions that are

enacted over time, rather than being biologically predetermined. These repeated performances, which are socially and culturally regulated, create the illusion of a stable and coherent gender identity. By emphasizing that gender identity is not innate but rather a product of these performative acts, Butler destabilizes the binary understanding of gender (male/female) and highlights the fluidity and mutability of identity.

Butler's framework is deeply aligned with poststructuralist thought, as it positions identity as something continually shaped by discourse and power relations, rather than as something natural or fixed. In this view, gender norms are produced and reinforced by society, and it is through the repeated performance of these norms that the categories of "man" and "woman" appear stable and natural. Importantly, Butler also emphasizes that these performances are not neutral; they are dictated by societal norms and enforced by power structures. This insight reveals how power operates through the regulation of gender norms, and it opens the door to subversion. By consciously performing gender in non-normative ways, individuals have the potential to resist and disrupt traditional gender roles, exposing the constructed nature of these categories (Butler J. 1990).

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity provides a valuable lens through which to analyze the representations of FGM in Danish media. By framing gender as a social construct that is enacted through repeated performances, Butler's theory challenges the binary and essentialist conceptions of gender that often underpin discussions of FGM, which is frequently framed as a practice rooted in cultural and gendered oppression. In addition, women who undergo FGM are often depicted as passive victims of patriarchal traditions. Butler's theory invites a critical analysis of how these representations may reinforce or challenge normative ideas of femininity, victimhood, and the intersection of race, gender, and culture. Her focus on the performativity of gender allows for an exploration of how gendered bodies are constructed within media narratives, particularly in relation to cultural practices like FGM that are viewed through a Western lens.

By applying Butler's framework, we can ask whether the media representations of FGM contribute to a binary understanding of gender, portraying non-Western women as constrained by culturally constructed and performative gender norms, rather than recognizing the fluidity and complexity of their identities.

However, Butler's theory has faced significant critique, particularly from scholars who argue that its emphasis on performativity might overlook the material realities of the body and the lived experiences of individuals subjected to oppressive practices. Scholars such as Nancy Fraser (Fraser, N. 1997) have critiqued Butler for downplaying the structural inequalities that shape people's lives. Fraser argues that while Butler's focus on performativity highlights the fluidity of gender identity, it does not adequately account for the socio-economic, political, and embodied dimensions that impact women's lived experiences. In the context of FGM, this critique is relevant,

as the practice is deeply rooted in cultural, economic, and patriarchal structures that shape the realities of women's lives in specific regions.

Thus, while Butler's theory of gender performativity offers a powerful framework for analyzing how gender and cultural identities are constructed in media representations of FGM, it is important to complement this analysis with an understanding of the material and realities that shape women's experiences. For instance, we can explore if women are portrayed as victims of patriarchal systems with little room for resistance or do the newspaper editorials describe acts of challenge such systems. This allows for a more comprehensive critique of how FGM is represented in Danish media, one that considers both the performative nature of gender and the socio-political contexts that underpin practices like FGM.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data Collection

The data for this study consists of Danish newspaper articles and specifically editorials discussing FGM. Media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception, making it a valuable source for examining how FGM is represented in Denmark. For this master thesis, I selected articles from three prevalent Danish newspapers: *Politiken* (center-left wing), the Christian newspaper *Kristeligt Dagblad*, and the conservative *Jyllands-Posten*. Specifically, I will analyze one editorial from each. These newspapers were chosen to provide a broad perspective on the topic, as they represent different political spectrums and ideologies. By including both liberal and conservative publications, the aim is to conduct a comparative analysis of how various political and ideological standpoints within Danish media reflect or contest postcolonial and postmodern discourses related to FGM. This selection offers a small but representative sample of the different ways in which FGM is portrayed, contributing to a nuanced understanding of its representation in Danish media.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: Articles were selected based on a set of criteria to ensure relevance to the research focus. The inclusion criteria included editorials published in November-December 2002 that mentioned the imams' case. This timeframe was chosen because, as already presented in the background chapter, there was a debate regarding the female genital mutilation that was ongoing, and we can see that became more intense after the imams' statements regarding female genital mutilation for the girls. The debate continued for a long time after that. The data

collection for this study focuses on newspaper editorials to address the research question of whether Danish media representations of FGM reflect or contest postcolonial and postmodern discourses. Media is a key platform where dominant ideologies and narratives are both reinforced and challenged, making it an appropriate site for investigating how FGM is framed.

Through postcolonial discourses like Orientalism and postcolonial feminism, the aim is to determine whether Danish media frames FGM through a colonial lens that views non-Western cultures as backward and primitive, or whether there are alternative representations that challenge this framing. By analyzing articles from both conservative and liberal newspapers, this study seeks to capture a range of perspectives that may either perpetuate or resist colonial discourses.

To explore how Danish media engages with postmodern discourses like gender performativity (gender as a social construct), articles will not be examined if they represent FGM as a cultural 'other' but as a complex issue involving gender, identity, and agency. Postmodernism's critique of fixed identities and grand narratives provides a lens to examine whether the media challenges simplistic portrayals of FGM like victimhood and femininity, offering more nuanced perspectives that recognize the diversity of experiences among women affected by the practice.

Search Strategy and Database: The data collection process involved searching through Danish media database, like newspaper websites, using keywords such as 'FGM', 'Female Circumcision' and 'imams' statement for girls' circumcision'. In fact, the main Danish phrase used in search algorithms was: "*kvinder omskæring*" and "*imamer/omskæring af piger*". The search was not the easiest part because it is a very sensitive and political topic and some of the articles and their links did not work after some time. In that case, it should be noted that some of the links might not appear as active anymore but at the time of the writing all the links were active.

Sample Size and Justification: A total of three newspaper editorials were selected for analysis, along with three more newspaper articles mostly opinions and news to help us with the background story/chapter. Given that CDA focuses on the detailed, in-depth analysis of language and discourse, a smaller sample size is appropriate to allow for a thorough examination of each text. The three editorials chosen to represent a range of perspectives from different Danish newspapers, ensured that the analysis captures diverse viewpoints and probably discursive patterns. This sample size is feasible for a rigorous CDA, as it allows for a deep engagement with the language, representations, and underlying discourses in each article without being overwhelming.

Challenges and Limitations: One of the key challenges encountered during the data collection process was navigating paywalls and limited access to certain newspapers, which restricted the availability of a wider range of articles or editorials. Some websites were even outdated or their servers were down. Some publications, particularly major

national newspapers, required subscriptions or institutional access, which limited the scope of articles that could be analyzed. The access was restricted even though connection was established through the university network or through the university's library virtual private network (VPN).

To mitigate this, I focused on newspapers and their articles that were accessible from other publicly available sources.

4.2 Researcher Biases

It is important to acknowledge the potential biases that may shape both the selection of data and the interpretation of findings in this study. Given the sensitive nature of FGM and its representation in Danish media, several biases may influence the way the topic was approached and how the CDA was performed. These biases primarily stem from cultural, gendered, ethnocentric, and political perspectives, as well as issues related to the selection of media sources and the framing of FGM as a human rights issue.

Cultural Bias

My understanding of FGM is inevitably shaped by my own cultural background, which is influenced by Western values that often regard FGM as a harmful and oppressive practice. This cultural bias could lead to favor media representations that align with these views, reinforcing postcolonial stereotypes that depict FGM-practicing cultures as "backward" or "uncivilized."

Gender Bias

As I draw on the concept of gender performativity in the analysis, it is important to recognize that my perspective may be more in alignment with certain branches of feminism, particularly liberal feminism, which emphasizes individual autonomy and body integrity. This bias could lead to the dismissal of alternative feminist perspectives, such as those grounded in local or indigenous contexts, which may frame the issue of FGM differently.

Ethnocentrism

There is a risk of adopting an ethnocentric perspective, where Danish media might be perceived as more objective or enlightened compared to media from FGM-practicing regions. Such a view could subtly reinforce the narrative of Denmark as a progressive nation in contrast to "backward" non-Western cultures. This could influence the analysis by overlooking postcolonial underpinnings in Danish media that perpetuate ideas of Western superiority.

Political Bias

Political ideologies play a significant role in how FGM is represented, particularly in relation to immigration, multiculturalism, and national identity. My own political views could influence how I interpret these media portrayals, especially when they align with or contradict my preexisting beliefs about these broader issues.

Selection Bias

The selection of articles for analysis poses another potential bias. While I have carefully chosen three editorials from famous Danish newspapers that reflect a range of perspectives, there is a looming possibility that these sources may not fully capture the diversity of discourses on FGM in Danish media.

Human Rights Framing Bias

Although I intentionally avoid framing FGM solely as a human rights issue in this study, it is challenging to completely detach from this dominant global narrative. My prior exposure to human rights discourses may still shape how I interpret representations of FGM in Danish media, particularly in relation to feminist theory.

By acknowledging and reflecting on these biases, I aim to conduct a more rigorous and self-aware analysis. Throughout this process, I will employ reflexivity, actively questioning how my own perspectives may shape my interpretations.

4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Drawing on (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves as both a theoretical framework and a methodological tool for examining how discourse interacts with and influences social and cultural processes. Rather than merely reflecting social structures, CDA views discourse as actively shaping them, emphasizing a reciprocal relationship between discourse and other social forces.

In this study, I adopt (Fairclough, N. 1995b; 1995a) approach to CDA through the work of (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002), which investigates how media discourses not only reflect but also construct social and political realities. This approach underscores the role of non-discursive factors, for example the political system and media institutions, in shaping discursive practices. While language use is closely analyzed, CDA goes beyond text to include broader societal structures that affect how discourse is produced and consumed. In this part, I have to add that I also draw on other works of Fairclough to support my methodology.

A key principle in CDA is its focus on power imbalances-whether related to class, gender, or ethnicity-revealing how these imbalances are ideologically sustained through discourse (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002) (Fairclough, N. 1995a). The

“critical” aspect of CDA aims to expose these dynamics, with the goal of contributing to social change and promoting more egalitarian power relations (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002).

Furthermore, Fairclough distinguishes between three senses of "discourse": First, as language in social practice; Second, as specific forms of language within domains, such as political or scientific discourse; And third, as ways of speaking that shape how individuals experience and interpret the world from ideological standpoints (Jørgensen M & Philips L. 2002).

Research Design and Methods

(Fairclough, N. 1992) through (Jørgensen M & Philips L. 2002) research design starts with the choice of research problem, formulation of research question/s and then choice of materials. We have already taken these steps so we can proceed and explain the next steps, which constitute the analysis, which includes the discursive practice, the text, the social practice and then the results. A clarification of the steps taken will take place since we might not need to use all the steps to proceed.

Analysis

Fairclough's three-dimensional model separates discourse analysis into three interconnected levels: discursive practice, text, and social practice. Each level provides a distinct analytical focus (Fairclough, N. 1992).

Discursive Practice

The analysis of discursive practice revolves around how texts are both created and interpreted. There are several ways to approach this. For example, when working with newspaper articles, the researcher can investigate the production process of the text, by looking at how it develops from the initial draft to the final version that is published. This might involve examining an *intertextual chain* of related texts to see how the structure and content shift throughout the process, thus offering insight into the conditions and influences on the production (Fairclough, N. 1995b). By tracing these changes, one can form hypotheses regarding the social or institutional factors that shape the text's production. In short, discursive practice focuses on the processes that surround the text and how power, ideology, and social structures influence and are reinforced through these practices.

On the consumption side, researchers could conduct audience studies to understand how readers perceive and interpret these texts. Few critical discourse analysts take this step, and we will not take it as well. Often, Fairclough's analyses do not involve a sociological investigation into how texts are either produced or consumed. Instead, he frequently focuses on identifying which discourses are drawn upon in the text (*interdiscursivity*) and how other texts are referenced (*intertextuality*) (Fairclough, N. 1995b) (Fairclough, N. 1992) (Jørgensen M & Philips L. 2002).

Through detailed linguistic analysis, researchers can uncover how discourses are embedded in the text and develop a well-supported interpretation. Fairclough offers various tools for text analysis, several of which may be familiar to those with a background in linguistics:

- **Interactional control** – examining the dynamics between speakers and determining who sets the agenda in conversation (Fairclough, N. 1992).
- **Ethos** – exploring how identities are formed through language and non-verbal aspects like body language (Fairclough, N. 1992).
- **Metaphors** – identifying symbolic language that frames meaning (Fairclough, 1992).
- **Wording** – how specific words are chosen to reflect and construct meaning (Fairclough, N. 1992).
- **Grammar** – studying sentence structure and its role in shaping meaning (Fairclough, N. 1992).

These linguistic features help illustrate how texts portray social realities and shape identities and relationships. Two critical grammatical elements Fairclough highlights are *transitivity* and *modality* (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002).

Transitivity involves analyzing how subjects and objects are connected to actions. Similarly, *nominalization*—turning verbs into nouns, can obscure agency and focus only on the outcome, emphasizing effects over causes (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002).

Modality, on the other hand, relates to the speaker's commitment to their statement. Different expressions of modality demonstrate varying levels of certainty. The degree of certainty conveyed by the speaker impacts how social relations and knowledge are constructed within the text (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002).

Modality also plays a role in social relations. Different discourses use different types of modalities. The media, for example, often present interpretations as facts by employing categorical, objective modalities. This choice not only reflects but also strengthens the media's authority by reinforcing their statements as objective truths (Fairclough, N. 1992) (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002).

Social Practice

After analyzing the text both as a text and as a discursive practice, the focus now shifts to the broader social practice that encompasses these dimensions. This analysis involves two key aspects. First, it is essential to examine the relationship between the discursive practice and its *order of discourse* (Fairclough, N. 1992; Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002).

Second, it is crucial to map out the social, cultural, and sometimes non-discursive relations and structures that form the wider context in which the discursive practice

operates-what Fairclough refers to as the *social matrix of discourse* (Fairclough, N. 1992). It is necessary to integrate other theoretical frameworks, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the broader social practice under examination.

According to (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002): *“Engaging in critical discourse analysis, therefore, necessitates the transdisciplinary incorporation of various theories within a research framework of multiple perspectives”*. Linguistic analysis on its own cannot account for the non-discursive aspects of the phenomenon being studied. Chouliaraki and Fairclough argue that combining social and discourse analysis can be very beneficial, as they can enhance each other. Theories that aren’t directly related to discourse can still be used in a discourse analysis framework. However, it’s important to bring these different perspectives together in a way that fits the goals of the research (Chouliaraki, L. and Fairclough, N. 1999).

According to (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002), at this stage of the analysis, the relationship between discursive practice and broader social practice comes into focus, allowing the study to draw its final conclusions. This is where the questions of change and ideological impact come into play. By addressing the questions, the research takes on a critical and political dimension. (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002).

Results

According to (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002): *“the aim of critical discourse analysis as explanatory critique is to promote more egalitarian and inclusive discourses. A crucial step in this process is raising awareness about how discourse functions as a social practice that both reflects and reinforces unequal power relations. To achieve this, Fairclough refers to a technique as critical language awareness”* (Fairclough, N. 1992) (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002).

Critical language awareness is about how language is used, how texts are explained and how power relations are shaped and shape by the language. With this technique the limitations are visible and we can consider any possibilities for change.(Fairclough, N. 1992) (Jørgensen M. and Philips L. 2002).

In our analysis, we will adopt Fairclough's three-dimensional model along with the critical language awareness for the results, tailoring it to suit our specific needs and objectives, as well as our theoretical framework. This approach will provide us with the critical perspective we require.

4.4 Representations and Stereotypes

In this section of the methodology chapter, I will try to give a definition of what a *representation* and a *stereotype* is and why it is important for this thesis and its role.

First, according to Stuart Hall, (Hall S. 1997a) (Stuart Hall 1997b) in his works *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* and *Representation and the Media*, *representation* respectively, is the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged through language within a culture. It involves how members of a culture use language to represent objects, people, and events in the world, thereby creating and sharing meaning. Hall explains that language, broadly defined, includes any system that uses signs to communicate meaning—this encompasses spoken and written words, as well as electronic languages, body language, musical instruments, gestures, and even clothing. These are all systems of communication that convey meaning within specific cultural contexts. Language plays a crucial role in externalizing our mental representations, transforming them into social facts that allow us to share meanings with others (Stuart Hall 1997b; Hall S. 1997a).

Representation operates through two interrelated systems. The first is the conceptual system, in which we correlate objects, people, and events with a set of mental representations or concepts that enable us to interpret the world. Without this system, we would not be able to make sense of our surroundings. However, having a shared conceptual system is not enough to create meaning. The second system, the language system, is necessary to express and exchange these concepts with others. Language allows us to correlate our concepts and ideas with signs-words, sounds, or images—which carry meaning and together make up the meaning system of our culture (Hall S. 1997a) (Stuart Hall 1997b).

These signs are not universally understood but are subject to cultural relativity. Different cultures have their own codes or systems for interpreting signs, and these codes may not be equivalent across cultures. This means that meanings can vary significantly from one culture to another, as cultures classify and assign meaning to the world in unique ways. To explain how meaning is produced, Hall presents three approaches to representation. The reflective approach suggests that meaning lies in the object, person, or event itself, and that language merely reflects this meaning like a mirror. The intentional approach argues that meaning is imposed by the speaker or author, who uses language to express their intended meaning. Finally, the constructionist approach, which Hall supports, asserts that meaning is not inherent in things or fixed by individuals, but is constructed through social and cultural practices using representational systems like language (Hall S. 1997a) (Stuart Hall 1997b).

Representation is a social process that depends on shared codes and conventions. These codes allow us to translate between the conceptual and language systems, making communication possible. However, these codes are not fixed rules but social conventions that can shift and change over time. The construction of meaning involves both encoding (the creation of meaning using codes) and decoding (the interpretation of meaning), a process that is constantly evolving within different cultural contexts (Hall S. 1997a) (Stuart Hall 1997b).

Hall also distinguishes between two theoretical approaches to representation. The semiotic approach, developed by thinkers like Saussure and Barthes, focuses on how language and signs produce meaning through systems like the signifier (the form of the sign) and the signified (the concept it represents). Meaning in semiotics often arises through binary oppositions and the marking of difference. The discursive approach, influenced by Foucault, looks at how discourse, a system of knowledge and meaning, produces subjects and knowledge through power relations. Discourse shapes how the world is understood, defining what is considered true or false within a given society (Hall S. 1997a).

Hall emphasizes that meaning is never fixed across cultures or time periods. Different cultures "carve up" the world differently, assigning meanings to things based on their own codes and systems of classification. This cultural relativity means that meaning in one culture might not directly translate to another, and translation between cultural systems of meaning is often necessary. Representation is not a static process but a dynamic one, where meanings are constantly being negotiated and changed (Hall S. 1997a).

Finally, Hall notes that representation is closely linked to power because those who control dominant representations can shape how the world is understood. This makes representation particularly significant in discourses around identity, knowledge, and culture. In sum, for Hall, representation is the active process of making and exchanging meaning within a culture, using various systems and signs. It is not a simple reflection of reality but a complex, ongoing social process shaped by language, cultural codes, and power relations (Hall S. 1997a) (Stuart Hall 1997b).

In this thesis, representation plays a critical role because it directly influences how FGM is depicted in Danish media. Representation is important to understand because it shapes the way we interpret and make sense of complex social issues like FGM, especially in a postcolonial and postmodern context. By examining how FGM is represented, my thesis can explore the underlying cultural, political, and ideological forces that influence these depictions, and how they either reflect or challenge dominant discourses about gender, race, and cultural practices.

The concept of representation, as Stuart Hall explains (Hall S. 1997a), is not simply about mirroring reality. It is a social process that constructs meaning using language,

signs, and cultural codes. In my thesis, representation allows me to analyze how Danish media portrays FGM, not just in terms of what is said, but how it is said—what language, images, and discourses are employed to describe FGM. This helps reveal the deeper ideological assumptions and power structures behind these depictions.

Understanding representation will also help to critique whether Danish media's portrayal of FGM reinforces or contests postcolonial and postmodern discourses. For example, FGM might be framed within certain stereotypical or Orientalist narratives, which depict non-Western cultures as inhumane or inferior. Alternatively, the media could challenge such views by representing FGM in a more nuanced or culturally sensitive way, thus contesting simplistic binaries between the West and "the Other."

During the analysis, but also before when we tried to outline the theories, we might meet some "*stereotypes*". Sometimes when we talk about representations it is also wise to talk about stereotypes for us to have a better overall view and idea.

Again, according to Stuart Hall (Hall S. 1997a), stereotypes are a form of representation that simplifies and exaggerates the traits of individuals or groups, reducing them to a few recognizable characteristics. Stereotyping involves the process of essentializing, naturalizing, and fixing differences in ways that are rigid and unchanging. Richard Dyer distinguishes between "typing" and "stereotyping." Typing is necessary for making sense of the world; it helps us categorize and understand things by assigning them to broader classifications. Typing is essential to producing meaning in our daily lives (Hall S. 1997a).

Stereotyping extends further by selecting a few striking and easily remembered characteristics of an individual or group and distilling their entire identity down to these features. It locks these traits into place, preventing any room for evolution or growth, resulting in rigid and unchanging portrayals. According to Hall, this process simplifies individuals by amplifying certain traits, freezing distinctions in a way that overlooks their complexity (Hall S. 1997a).

Stereotyping also uses a technique of "splitting," which categorizes the world into "normal" versus "abnormal" and "acceptable" versus "unacceptable". It creates divisions between individuals who are considered part of the group and those who are not, effectively marginalizing anyone who deviates from the norm. In contrast to social types, stereotypes are more rigid and serve as tools for enforcing these boundaries. They symbolically establish these separations, reinforcing the social and symbolic order by highlighting the differences between the "normal" and the "deviant," as well as the "acceptable" and the "unacceptable." This mechanism plays a significant role in the symbolic exclusion of the "Other," effectively relegating those who are different to a form of symbolic exile (Hall S. 1997a).

Stereotyping contributes to the preservation of social and symbolic structures by establishing a symbolic divide between those on the inside and those on the outside,

essentially drawing a line between "us" and "them." It fosters a sense of cohesion among individuals classified as "normal," creating an "imagined community" that effectively excludes those viewed as different. The feminist theorist (Kristeva J. 1982) refers to these excluded or expelled groups as "abjected" (from the Latin, meaning "thrown out"). Stereotyping operates through symbolic violence, classifying people according to a norm and constructing those who are excluded as the "Other" (Hall S. 1997a).

Stuart Hall links stereotyping to larger concerns regarding power, representation, and difference. He posits that power encloses more than just economic exploitation or physical force; it also involves the authority to depict individuals in specific ways within a "regime of representation." This symbolic power, enacted through various representational practices, plays a crucial role in the operation of stereotypes. Consequently, the process of stereotyping acts as a form of symbolic violence, supporting established power dynamics by consolidating and perpetuating social classifications (Hall S. 1997a).

In this thesis on the representation of FGM in Danish media, understanding stereotypes is crucial because they play a central role in shaping how FGM and the people associated with it are portrayed. Stereotypes reduce complex social issues and cultural differences to a few exaggerated and simplified traits, often reinforcing negative or biased perceptions. In the context of postcolonial and postmodern discourses, stereotyping is not just about oversimplification but about maintaining power dynamics by reinforcing cultural hierarchies between the West and the non-West.

In this analysis, stereotypes can serve as a tool to explore how Danish media may construct representations of FGM as something that belongs to "Others"—those who are non-Western, different, and outside the cultural norm. By doing so, these representations could reinforce binary oppositions such as modern versus traditional, civilized versus uncivilized, or progressive versus backward. This connects directly with my focus on postcolonial feminist theory, as stereotypes can reflect deeper issues of cultural domination, power, and exclusion, presenting non-Western women as oppressed victims within a Western narrative that places itself as morally superior.

Furthermore, as we said above, stereotypes are linked to the practice of "splitting," which Hall (Hall S. 1997a), describes as a mechanism for dividing society into insiders (those who are "normal") and outsiders (those who are "different"). In this thesis, it is explored how FGM might be framed in Danish media as something abnormal or deviant, reinforcing stereotypes of non-Western cultures as inherently "inhumane" or "uncivilized." This would support the postcolonial critique of how Western media narratives often frame issues like FGM within a context of "Othering."

5. Analytical design

In this chapter, we will translate our theories into words which means that we will connect each theoretical concept to the practical aspects of the analysis. The goal is to clearly articulate how the theories I'm using will guide my methodology and shape the way I analyze the media texts.

The purpose of each theory has already been explained before so let us continue further and define how the theories will shape our analysis.

Gender performativity helps us focus on how gender is constructed through media discourse. Through CDA, we can examine the ways in which media reinforces or subverts traditional gender roles linked to FGM. For example, does the media frame FGM as an intrinsic part of African women's femininity, or does it allow for diverse expressions of gender identity?

Postcolonial Feminism will direct us to question how power dynamics between the West and non-West are reflected in FGM narratives. With CDA, we will look at if or how media discourse racializes non-Western women and portrays their cultural practices. Are they depicted as inferior, or is there a recognition of their agency? We will explore whether the media coverage is centered on Western perspectives or offers space for women's' voices.

Orientalism will help us examine how FGM is framed as an "Other" practice, separate from "Western" norms. Using CDA, we will analyze the metaphors, imagery, and language that construct African cultures as exotic, backward, or dangerous. For example, we might analyze how the media sets up a dichotomy between the "modern" West and the "traditional" East, reinforcing stereotypes of African societies as uncivilized.

Then, we will continue with specific elements that we might try to find in our media texts that our theories will guide us to examine.

For the gender performativity theory, we could focus on women's' identity and traditional gender roles and how the media reinforce or challenge them. For the postcolonial feminism, we could examine how race, culture, and power intersect in the media's portrayal of FGM. We are going to look for stereotypes or representations that either reinforce or resist colonial views of non-Western cultures. Finally, with Orientalism, we will pay attention to how non-Western cultures are depicted, whether they are presented as "Other", exoticized, or backward. We will look for language that sets up a dichotomy between "us" (the West) and "them" (non- West).

6. Analysis

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the central research question: *Do Danish media representations of FGM reflect or contest postcolonial and postmodern discourses, and how?* Through a critical examination of three selected editorials, this chapter aims to explore how FGM is represented within Danish media, analyzing whether these portrayals reinforce colonial narratives or engage in more complex, postmodern critiques that challenge stereotypes and gender norms.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the language, and discursive strategies employed in the editorials, using CDA as a methodological approach. By focusing on postcolonial (Orientalism, postcolonial feminism) and postmodern (feminist theory and gender performativity), the analysis will assess how the media constructs representations of FGM, and whether these representations uphold or contest Orientalist perspectives and stereotypical depictions of non- Western cultures.

The three editorials chosen for this analysis were selected due to their prominence in Danish media and their engagement with FGM and more specifically the way that these editorials approach the FGM after the case that we already presented fully in the background chapter about the imams' opinion regarding the FGM that is "good for the girls". These editorials offer different perspectives, allowing for a comparative analysis that highlights recurring patterns and discursive shifts in the portrayal of FGM, women, and cultural practices. By analyzing these texts, this chapter seeks to uncover how Danish media navigates the intersection of culture, gender, and power in its representation of FGM.

I will structure the analysis by briefly reiterating our theories and methodology. Next, I will analyze each editorial individually using CDA as proposed by Fairclough. During this analysis, it will be examined whether each editorial aligns with or challenges this study's theoretical frameworks. This will involve selecting sentences from the editorials to connect with this study's theories. After analyzing all three editorials, common key patterns and discursive shifts among them will be identified. Finally, the findings will be presented through critical language awareness and this study's research question will be addressed.

6.2 Overview of Theories and Methodology

It has already been presented, in the analytical design above, how the theories are going to be translated into words to help us with the analysis. Here, we are going to briefly remember our theories and reiterate our use of CDA as a method and explain its relevance in dissecting media texts.

In a brief manner, Said's *Orientalism* explores how Western discourses construct non-Western cultures as inferior, exotic, and "Other". Mohanty's postcolonial feminism critiques the portrayal of "Third World women" as oppressed victims in need of saving by the West. Butler's concept of gender performativity argues that gender is not innate but performed through repeated behaviors shaped by cultural norms. It will be investigated whether the media analysis will reinforce these theories or challenge them and how.

CDA, as framed by Fairclough (1995) and Jørgensen & Philips (2002), is our methodological tool that allows for a detailed investigation of how discourse influences and is shaped by social and cultural processes. It recognizes discourse not just as a reflection of social structures but as actively shaping them, making it particularly suited for this master thesis's analysis of Danish media representations of FGM.

6.3 Politiken, "*Slet og ret: vold*" (*Plain and Simple: violence*), published in 12. November 2002

Politiken, a center-left wing newspaper gives a direct point of view here regarding the FGM after the imam's statement that "circumcision is good for the girls".

To start with, I will examine the text itself using words, metaphors etc.

Key words like "*vold*" (violence), "*undertrykkende livsmønster*" (oppressive life pattern), and "*radikale*" (radical) construct a moral binary. The phrase "*vold mod barnet*" (violence against the child) personalizes FGM as an act of abuse, stripping away cultural context and presenting it as morally wrong from a Western standpoint.

The sentence:

"Forældre - dvs. faderen - er den autoritet, som afgør pigernes fremtid." ("Parents - i.e. the father - is the authority that determines the girls' future.")

The active voice here ("*faderen er den autoritet*") places blame on the father figure, highlighting perhaps patriarchal control. This positions Somali men as patriarchal power, perpetuating gendered oppression, and preventing women from expressing their agency.

The categorical modality of the editorial, with sentences like:

"Indgrebet er slet og ret vold," ("The procedure is simply violence"),

presents the argument as fact, creating an authoritative position of the media. The use of certainty in this statement emphasizes the moral authority of Danish society, which contrasts sharply with the uncertainty and passivity attributed to Somali culture. This framing aligns with (Said E. W 1978) Orientalist discourses, where Western knowledge is framed as definitive and "Other" cultures are deemed inferior.

The editorial uses metaphors like:

"Det er en kulturvane, som skal brydes," ("It's a cultural habit that must be broken").

This metaphor positions FGM as a negative cultural practice that binds women, presenting a Western liberation narrative. It implies that Somali women's bodies are sites of oppression, a common Orientalist trope, where non-Western practices are framed as uncivilized.

For the discursive practice, the editorial draws upon discourses of human rights, cultural oppression, and gender violence, as seen in the sentence:

"Omskæring af piger er en yderst ubehagelig vold mod barnet." (The circumcision of girls is an extremely unpleasant violence against the child.)

This positions FGM as a form of violence and sets the stage for how Danish society should interpret it—as something unacceptable. The interdiscursivity here seems to connect to global debates on violence against women and women's rights, aligning itself with the discourse of Western intervention in practices seen as harmful.

Regarding the social practice, the sentence:

"Volden er ikke antageligt i den danske kulturkreds." ("Violence is not acceptable in the Danish cultural sphere")

demonstrates the social boundary between the Danish "civilized" culture and Somali "uncivilized" practices. The use of binary oppositions (civilized vs. uncivilized) ties back to Orientalism, where Western culture is positioned as the standard against which non-Western cultures are judged (Said E. W 1978).

Applying the theoretical framework:

In *Orientalism*, Said presents how Western societies often depict Eastern or non-Western cultures as cruel, uncivilized, and in need of intervention. This editorial reflects these themes by categorizing FGM as a "brutal" practice, especially targeting Somali girls, while emphasizing that such violence is unacceptable in Danish society. The sentence:

“Indgrebet foretages især på somaliske piger, og det har i øvrigt intet som helst med Koranen at gøre.” (The procedure is mostly performed on Somali girls, and it has nothing to do with the Quran.)

This statement distances the practice from religious roots and emphasizes its association with "Somali" culture. It fits with Said's concept of Oriental and how the West constructs non-Western societies as irrational and savage. By explicitly stating that FGM has *“nothing to do with the Quran,”* the editorial reinforces a view that Somali culture is inherently flawed or cruel. At the same time, it is interesting here to consider the fact that the editorial challenges the overly simplistic binary of “West vs. Other” by separating the Koran and religion in general. In that way, the editorial acknowledges that cultures are more complex.

The editorial continues right away with the statement:

“Det er en kulturvane, som skal brydes” (“It is a cultural custom that must be broken”)

Which reflects the West's mission to “rescue” non-Western societies from their own customs, which are perceived as dangerous and regressive. This aligns with (Said E. W 1978) argument about West's “civilizing mission”, where the role of the West is to save and guide the “Other”. The idea here that African culture, and more specifically the Somali one, must be “broken” denies its complexity, making these societies appear monolithic and static. In a broader way, this idea highlights (Mohanty, C. T. 1984) critique that Western discourses often do not recognize the complexities of local cultures.

The editorial continues with the sentence:

“Omskæringen hænger sammen med et kvindeundertrykkende livsmønster, hvor forældre - dvs. faderen - er den autoritet, som afgør pigernes fremtid.” (Circumcision is linked to a woman-oppressing way of life, where the parents—i.e., the father—are the authority who decides the girls' future.)

This statement frames Somali girls as subjects of patriarchal violence, with no agency over their own lives. The portrayal echoes (Mohanty, C. T. 1984) critique, where non-

Western women are often cast as victims of oppressive traditions. The editorial emphasizes the paternal control in these societies (*"faderen er den autoritet"*). Mohanty's framework would also encourage a critique of how the editorial homogenizes Somali women, reducing their experiences to a narrative of victimhood without acknowledging any form of resistance or agency within their own communities.

In a similar way like before, the editorial here argues that:

"Kvinden er i nogle afrikanske kulturer stadigvæk undergivet mandens vilje." ("In some African cultures, the woman is still subject to the will of the man.")

Depicts women as subordinate to men, reinforcing views of gender identity. Such representations shape Somali women as victims who lack agency, while implies that Danish women are more autonomous and empowered. The repeated association of Somali women with victimhood and passivity reflects fixed gender roles which are critiqued by (Butler J. 1990) and the theory of gender performativity, implying that these women are culturally and inherently oppressed.

However, Butler's framework also allows us to question whether these fixed roles can be disrupted. The editorial does not present Somali women as having the power to resist or perform their gender identity differently.

While much of the editorial presents traditional views of Somali women as passive victims, it does suggest awareness of cultural complexity and challenges the rigidity of gender roles in some instances. For example, the sentence:

"Kvinderne er ikke selvstændige i nogen europæisk forstand, de har ikke deres egen vilje." ("The women are not independent in any European sense; they do not have their own will.")

This sentence recognizes that in Somali cultures, women are not viewed as autonomous agents in the same way as in the West (Europe). However, the editorial implies that this autonomy can be achieved and that these women are not inherently passive. This links with (Butler J. 1990) critique of gender being performatively fixed in traditional roles. We can see an implication here that women could resist and reclaim agency if societal structures change. The recognition that autonomy can be developed suggests the possibility of gender breaking free from traditional structures—women might be able to perform gender differently if societal norms evolve.

The editorial continues saying that:

"Meget af den kvindeundertrykkelse er vi vant til at se stort på, fordi virkelige reformer forekommer os udsigtsløse på kortere sigt, og fordi de tiltag, som skal selvstændiggøre kvinden, er diffuse og vidtspredte. Med omskæringen har vi et konkret tilfælde, som kalder på handling. I Danmark er indgrebet forbudt - indgrebet er slet og ret vold. Og vold er ikke antageligt i den danske kulturkreds." ("We are used to taking a big view of much of the

oppression of women, because real reforms seem hopeless in the short term, and because the measures to empower women are diffuse and widespread. With circumcision, we have a concrete case that calls for action. In Denmark, the intervention is prohibited - the intervention is downright violence. And violence is not acceptable in the Danish cultural circle.”)

Here the editorial tries to emphasize the fact that, FGM is a practice that Danish society does not accept, and they must act immediately. If the practice is not allowed and therefore is violent, violence is not accepted in Denmark. Through (Said E. W 1978) framework, it is possible here to identify the “Us” vs. “Them” binary and therefore the “uncivilized” vs. “civilized” dichotomy.

Though the editorial leans toward portraying Somali women as victims of their culture, it critiques Western interventionism, as reflected in the critique of Dansk Folkeparti’s proposal to remove Somali girls from their families:

“Der er ikke brug for dobbelte familietragedier i denne sag, som Dansk Folkeparti med vanlig kynisme udvikler til at handle om generel ulydighed i stedet for tragisk lydighed over for en uacceptabel kulturnorm.” (“There is no need for double family tragedies in this case, which the Danish People’s Party, with usual cynicism, develops to be about general disobedience instead of tragic obedience to an unacceptable cultural norm.”)

Here, the editorial suggests that the solution should not be imposed from the outside through drastic measures like forcibly removing girls from their families. It recognizes that solutions (like forced removal) can sometimes create “*dobbelte familietragedier*” (double family tragedies). This reflects (Mohanty, C. T. 1984) critique of how Western discourses tend to ignore the nuances and complexities of non-Western women’s lives.

The *Politiken*’s editorial “*Slet og ret: vold*” reflects mostly Western-centric perspectives, reinforcing both *Orientalist* and *postcolonial feminist* critiques. It positions Somali culture as backward and atrocious, reinforcing Said’s concept of *Orientalism* (Said E. W 1978) by depicting the West as the moral and cultural authority. It homogenizes African women’s experiences, presenting them as passive victims, which aligns with Mohanty’s critique of Western feminist discourse that fails to recognize the agency of “Third World women” (Mohanty, C. T. 1984). Lastly, the editorial’s portrayal of gender roles as fixed and oppressive within African societies ignores the potential for resistance and subversion (fluidity) that Butler highlights in her theory of *gender performativity* (Butler J. 1990). However, the editorial implies that the traditional gender norms can change if the socio-cultural structures change, and also forced and drastic measures are not the best solution to stop FGM.

6.4 Jyllands- Posten, “Kriminelle imamer” (Kriminal imams), published in 10. November 2002

Two days before the *Politiken*, the conservative *Jyllands- Posten* editorial gave its position regarding the imam’s case directly from the title. The newspaper examines the same subject as *Politiken*, which is FGM.

To begin with, the editorial uses emotive language and specific word choices to present Muslim imams as violent, irrational. The phrase:

“Disse afskyvækkende udtalelser” (“These disgusting statements”)

immediately sets a tone of moral outrage, discrediting the imams’ opinions before engaging with them rationally. And,

“Det er lige, hvad de gale imamer gør, når de opfordrer forældre til at gennemføre grov legemsbeskadigelse på deres døtre.” (“It is exactly what the mad imams do when they encourage parents to inflict grievous bodily harm on their daughters.”)

uses a mental health metaphor to delegitimize their actions, suggesting irrationality. This mirrors Orientalist discourses of the irrational “Other” as outlined by Said (Said E. W 1978).

“Der er den skærpende omstændighed ved imamernes bestialske opfordringer, at de er religiøse ledere...” (“There is the aggravating circumstance of the imams’ bestial calls, that they are religious leaders...”)

With this phrase: “bestial calls”, the editorial continues the dehumanization, turning the humans into animals. We could see here an example of framing the Eastern “Other” as innately savage, aligning with Said’s Orientalism (Said E. W 1978).

After locating words and metaphors, we are able here to locate an example of intertextuality so we can continue with the discursive practice. The editorial refers to *Information*, the Danish newspaper, to lend authority to its claims, creating a chain of intertextuality. More specifically:

“Disse afskyvækkende udtalelser er citeret i dagbladet Information” (“These disgusting statements are quoted in the daily newspaper Information”)

By referencing another media source, the editorial reinforces the dominant societal discourse against FGM, framing it as something generally condemned.

The editorial builds on legal discourse by calling for legal action against the imams, portraying Danish law as moral framework:

“Samfundets tilkendegivelse bør komme til udtryk i straffesager mod de imamer...”
(*“Society’s statement should be expressed in criminal proceedings against the imams...”*)

This aligns with Fairclough’s notion of how discourse reinforces power relations (Fairclough, N. 1995a), with Danish law portrayed as the authority, requiring even religious leaders to submit.

Continuing with the social practice, the editorial present a power hierarchy between the West and non-Western religious practices:

“De som alle andre har at rette sig efter dansk lov” (“They, like everyone else, have to comply with Danish law”)

presents a legal dominance, reflecting a colonial power dynamic where the Western (Danish here) legal system is positioned as superior.

This sentence frames FGM as an inherently non-Western practice that threatens Danish societal values, thus showing the power structure of Western hegemony over Eastern traditions.

By applying the theories and starting with the first part of the editorial:

“Omskæring er påbudt af profeten Muhamed og derfor en religiøs pligt for muslimer. Disse afskyvækkende udtalelser er citeret i dagbladet Information, og de er fremsat af religiøse ledere, muslimske imamer. Man må ikke fremsætte trusler og ærekrænkende ytringer, og man må især ikke opfordre til kriminalitet.” (“Circumcision is commanded by the prophet Muhammed and therefore a religious duty for Muslims.” These disgusting statements are quoted in the daily newspaper Information, and they are made by religious leaders, Muslim imams. Threats and defamatory statements must not be made, and crime must not be encouraged.)

Here the editorial replies directly to the imam’s statement regarding FGM that is commanded by the prophet. The editorial recognizes the statement as unacceptable and therefore crime should not be encouraged. FGM is recognized here as a crime and the statement is “disgusting”. Through Said’s concept of Orientalism, the statements of imam’s are “ruthless” as the procedure itself. By recognizing the statements as such, the editorial places Denmark on the other side which is the “civilized” one.

In the line of “male’s authority”, the editorial argues that:

“De opfordrer forældre til at gennemføre grov legemsbeskadigelse på deres døtre” (“They encourage parents to inflict grievous bodily harm on their daughters”).

This sentence portrays women and girls as passive victims, with their agency completely erased. Mohanty's critique aligns here where non-Western women are presented in that way by Western narratives (Mohanty, C. T. 1984).

And the editorial continues saying that:

***“Da der her i landet efterhånden er skabt opmærksomhed om den barbariske tradition”
 (“As awareness has gradually been raised in this country about the barbaric tradition”)***

Here there is the perspective of Said's Orientalism (Said E. W 1978), where the use of the word *“barbarisk”* (*“barbaric”*), is a classic example which frames non-Western culture practices as violent. The East is constructed as a site of savagery and backwardness, while the West is positioned as rational, progressive, and morally superior. By claiming that “awareness has gradually been raised” in Denmark, the statement positions Danish society as the enlightened observer.

The editorial presents that:

“at man ikke skamferer de ydre kønsdele totalt, men kun fjerner klitoris. påfører dem ubeskrivelig smerte og ødelægger deres senere kønsliv som voksne.” (“As if it should be a mitigating circumstance that you don't mutilate the girls completely, but only remove the clitoris. Cause them indescribable pain and ruin their later sex lives as adults.”)

This sentence highlights the victimization of women, focusing solely on their suffering. Mohanty's framework (Mohanty, C. T. 1984) would align here that this type of narrative strips these women of agency, casting them as helpless victims of male-driven, patriarchal violence.

“Det danske samfund har her en oplagt mulighed for at gøre disse imamer begribeligt, at de som alle andre har at rette sig efter dansk lov. Samfundets tilkendegivelse bør komme til udtryk i straffesager mod de imamer, der er den direkte årsag til, at piger og kvinder lemlæstes. Vi afstår fra at anbefale en straf, der ellers var nærliggende og i pagt med deres egen tankegang. Vi er humane: I fængsel med dem.” (“Danish society has an obvious opportunity here to make these imams understand that they, like everyone else, have to comply with Danish law. Society's statement should be expressed in criminal proceedings against the imams who are the direct cause of girls and women being mutilated. We refrain from recommending a punishment that was otherwise close and in accordance with their own thinking. We Are Humane: In Prison with Them.”)

The sentence reflects Said's Orientalism by positioning Danish society as morally superior and the enforcer of laws, while portraying the imams as dangerous. The editorial suggests a punishment but not at the same level as the imams' statement. So Danish society is presented as superior.

6.5 Kristeligt Dagblad, "Omskæring" ("Circumcision"), published on 5. December 2002

A month after the *Politiken* and the *Jyllands- Posten* editorials, the Christian *Kristeligt Dagblad* editorial gave its position regarding the debate that has started for about a month regarding the circumcision after the imam's statements. The newspaper examined the same subject as *Politiken* and *Jyllands- Posten* but also decided to examine the male circumcision in comparison with the female one. In the editorial we also find the same phrases as "devout Muslims" which *Jyllands- Posten* used to present the imams' statement. So, across the three editorials there is the same context and even the same sentences. If my examination includes only the FGM, I will not refer to the male circumcision just if I have to support and justify my examination.

Regarding the text analysis, the editorial begins by framing FGM and male circumcision as completely different practices, using strong language to differentiate them and emphasizing that comparisons between the two are "grotesque":

"Sammenligningen af mandlig og kvindelig omskæring er grotesk"
(*"The comparison of male and female circumcision is grotesque."*)

This sentence sets up the foundation for the editorial's argument, creating a sharp contrast between the two types of circumcision. The choice of the word "grotesk" (grotesque) signals a moral judgment, positioning the comparison itself as offensive or irrational. The editorial continues with this distinction throughout, justifying male circumcision while condemning FGM.

Later, the text moves into a reassurance of condemnation against FGM, using highly emotive language to reinforce barbarism and cultural backwardness:

"En tradition, der i høj grad trives blandt somaliske flygtninge."
(*"A tradition that thrives among Somali refugees."*)

The lexical choice of "trives" (thrives) implies that FGM is flourishing within specific migrant communities, implying that these groups are failing to integrate into modern Danish values. This fits into a larger discourse of othering, situating non-Western cultural practices as problematic and dangerous within the context of Danish society.

The editorial frames FGM within a narrative of violence:

"Lemlæstelsen af hovedsageligt afrikanske kvinder."
(*"The mutilation of mainly African women."*)

The use of the word “lemlæstelsen” (mutilation) emphasizes the physical violence inherent in FGM, and by highlighting its association with African women, it further marginalizes these communities and their practices as “cruel” in comparison to Danish values. This language situates FGM as a dangerous, foreign tradition that needs to be eradicated.

In terms now of discursive practice, this editorial relies on intertextuality, referring to previous debates in Danish media, particularly in newspapers like *Kristeligt Dagblad* and *Politiken*:

“På kultursiderne i Kristeligt Dagblad i dag, hvor en ny rystende dokumentarfilm om de afrikanske kvinders kamp mod de tunge traditioner anmeldes.”
(“In the cultural pages of Kristeligt Dagblad today, where a new shocking documentary film about African women's struggle against heavy traditions is reviewed.”)

The editorial draws on a broader narrative about African women's struggle against FGM, using the documentary genre as a legitimizing source to support its viewpoint. The documentary acts as a “Western” lens, reinforcing the portrayal of African women as victims of regressive traditions. The editorial uses these references to strengthen its argument. The tone here is authoritative, speaking as the moral judgment.

In terms of social practice, the editorial presents a power relation frame, framing FGM as a product of primitive traditions that are incompatible with modern values:

“Den kulturelt betingede lemlæstelse af hovedsageligt afrikanske kvinder.”
(“The culturally conditioned mutilation of mainly African women.”)

This reinforces the idea that African culture is to blame for the oppression of women and implies that might Danish society having the moral duty to condemn and outlaw FGM.

By examine the editorial through the lens of the theories,

“var vi her i landet nogenlunde enige om en ensidig fordømmelse af den barbariske tradition med at skamfere små piger - en tradition, der i høj grad trives blandt somaliske flygtninge og som ligefrem blev rost af en herboende imam, der afslørede sine manglende teologiske kundskaber ved at fastslå, at de omskårne småpiger var »rettroende muslimer«”. (*“we in this country pretty much agreed on a one-sided condemnation of the barbaric tradition of molesting little girls - a tradition that largely thrives among Somali refugees and which was even praised by a resident imam, who revealed his lack of theological knowledge by establishing that the circumcised little girls were "devout Muslims".*)

The tradition is described as “barbaric” and specific to Somali refugees, an example here of othering. By emphasizing the nationality and refugee status, the statement implies that this cultural practice is foreign and does not belong in Danish society. This creates a cultural divide between the Western “self” and the non-Western “other”. The

“one-sided condemnation” leaves no room for cultural nuance or understanding, and the practice is rejected outright as inferior and harmful. All the above can be linked with Said’s Orientalism (Said E. W 1978).

The editorial continues arguing about the one-sided condemnation:

“Den ensidige fordømmelse af omskæringen af kvinder består fortsat og bestyrkes faktisk på kultursiderne i Kristeligt Dagblad i dag, hvor en ny rystende dokumentarfilm om de afrikanske kvinders kamp mod de tunge traditioner og et helt forskruet kvindesyn anmeldes.” (“The one-sided condemnation of female circumcision continues and is actually reinforced on the culture pages of Kristeligt Dagblad today, where a new shocking documentary film about African women’s struggle against the heavy traditions and a completely twisted view of women is reviewed. “)

The statement presents African women as oppressed by “heavy traditions” and “a completely twisted view of women”, presenting a simplistic and homogenized view of non- Western women’s experiences. This fits with Mohanty’s critique (Mohanty, C. T. 1984) of how the oppression of women in the Global South is generalized without acknowledging local variations and agency. The phrase “shocking documentary film” creates a binary distinction between the enlightened, progressive West (which produces such films to “educate”) and the backward, oppressive non-West (where women are subjected to these harsh traditions).

The editorial then refers here a review from the newspaper of the film about female circumcision:

“Som det fremgår af Kristeligt Dagblads anmeldelse af filmen om kvindelig omskæring, så kæmper de afrikanske kvinder imod en kultur, der i ramme alvor mener, at ikke-omskårne kvinder er farlige, fordi man ikke kan styre og kontrollere deres seksualitet”. (“As can be seen from Kristeligt Dagblad’s review of the film about female circumcision, the African women are fighting against a culture that seriously believes that uncircumcised women are dangerous because you cannot manage and control their sexuality).

The statement implies that African culture holds beliefs about women’s sexuality, suggesting that uncircumcised women are “dangerous” and cannot be controlled. This fits within Said’s notion of Orientalism, where non-Western cultures are often portrayed as primitive and in need of Western intervention. Although we must notice here that there is a sign of agency here in the phrase “African women fighting against a culture that seriously believes that uncircumcised women are dangerous because you cannot manage and control their sexuality”.

The editorial closes with the statement that:

“Ethvert indgreb i et menneskes krop, der under et religiøst eller kulturelt ritual skaber langvarige lidelser i kroppens normale funktioner, er uacceptabelt i et mo-derne samfund som det danske. Derfor må vi stå fast på at forbyde den kvindelig omskæring, der lemlæster kvinder og udsletter deres seksualitet på livstid”. (“ Any intervention in a person's body, which during a religious or cultural ritual creates long-term suffering in the body's normal functions, is unacceptable in a modern society like the Danish one. Therefore, we must stand firm in banning female circumcision, which mutilates women and wipes out their sexuality for life”).

Here the Danish society seems that it cannot understand and consider the cultural context where the FGM exists and in that way must be banned providing a more modern view and also providing the human rights understanding. That sentence can be examined through *Orientalism* (Said E. W 1978) because here we can see again the binary between “Western” and “non- Western” since the FGM presented as an “intervention” which is “unacceptable” and therefore dangerous.

6.6 Patterns

After *analyzing* each editorial, there will be an attempt to locate patterns across them. That will help us narrow down our analysis and come closer to our findings.

First, we are able to locate the pattern of “othering”. All three editorials reflect an Orientalist discourse that positions FGM as a practice belonging to the “Other”. The non-Western, specifically African and Muslim cultures, framing them as “barbaric”. There is a contrast between the “civilized” West and the “uncivilized” cultures that practice FGM. In all the editorials, FGM is attributed to African, Somali cultures. The *Jyllands-Posten* editorial, for instance, specifically targets Muslim imams as criminal figures promoting the practice, reinforcing the idea of a “barbaric Other”.

“Lack of agency” is the second pattern that we can define, and that is because across the editorials, women undergoing FGM are framed as passive victims, stripped of agency. The narratives do not acknowledge the agency or the potential resistance of these women, even though the *Kristeligt Dagblad* mentions African women’s resistance to FGM in a documentary review.

“Fixed Gender Roles” is the third pattern, where the editorials maintain a relation to FGM, which is connected to women’s bodies and their oppression. *Politiken* and *Jyllands-Posten* editorials particularly emphasize the mutilation of women as an attack on their femininity and sexuality, portraying them as victims of patriarchal traditions.

“Victimhood” is the fourth pattern, where FGM is framed across the editorials in that terms and women are presented as victims of cultural and religious oppression. This is particularly evident in the *Jyllands-Posten* editorial, which portrays imams as authoritative figures who enforce harmful practices, but also in the editorial of *Politiken* where the father is the figure who decides for that practice. Both figures leave no space for the idea that women in these communities might resist or negotiate these norms. Even though, again here, the *Kristeligt Dagblad* editorial briefly mentions the African women’s fight against FGM.

Last pattern is the “Legal and Moral Superiority”, where all three editorials emphasize the need for Danish society to intervene and punish those who promote FGM, framing the country as the protector and enforcer of human rights.

6.7 Discursive Shifts

Victimization vs. Agency: The *Politiken* editorial frames women as passive victims of FGM, with no mention of their agency or any active resistance to the practice. It portrays FGM as an inhumane act on women, with no discussion of women’s voices from the communities in which FGM occurs. The focus is entirely on the barbarism of the practice and the need for external intervention. The *Jyllands-Posten* editorial continues the victimization narrative, emphasizing the role of Muslim imams in promoting FGM. Again, the women are portrayed as victims, this time of religious leaders, with no suggestion of agency. The *Kristeligt Dagblad* editorial, introduces a shift by briefly mentioning African women’s resistance to FGM, as depicted in a documentary.

Religious vs. Secular Discourse: The *Politiken* editorial even though took initiative from the imams’ statement regarding the FGM does not engage deeply with religious discourse, focusing instead on FGM as a cultural practice. The tone is secular and humanist, positioning FGM as a violation of universal human rights without addressing the religious justifications often associated with it. The *Jyllands- Posten* editorial targets religious leaders, particularly the imams themselves, for promoting FGM. It frames the imams as criminal figures who encourage the practice. The religious

discourse here is presented as oppressive and misguided. The *Kristeligh Dagblad* editorial, remains secular in the examination of FGM.

7. Findings and Research Question

To begin with, the framing of FGM as a primitive, backward practice associated with African and Muslim cultures relates to “Othering” and cultural superiority. The language creates a binary between the “civilized” West (Denmark in our case) and the “uncivilized” Other (African/Somali cultures in our case), positioning Western norms as *the moral standard*, while constructing non- Western cultures as inferior and in need of intervention/rescuing. These divisions are common in postcolonial discourses like Orientalism for example and show power relations.

Addressing the research question, the editorials rely on Orientalist representations, presenting for example the Muslim leaders as oppressive. The language used for that reminds of Edward’s Said approach in Orientalism (Said E. W 1978). According to that, we can see how such language creates unequal power relations, presenting African societies as static and oppressive, in need of Western reform. Additionally, the portrayal of women as passive victims of their cultural traditions denies their agency, reflecting the postcolonial feminist critique by (Mohanty, C. T. 1984) that Western narratives often silence the voices and resistance of women from the Global South . By framing women as helpless, we can say that the language creates a narrative that Western intervention is the only solution. While there is a slight contestation of these postcolonial discourses, such as the brief mention of African women resisting FGM, this recognition of agency is minimal and not fully developed. Here we could wonder if that slight acknowledgment reflects a bias where the idea that nothing will change keeps the narrative of victimization alive. Again, here the Western intervention is framed as the moral solution to the victim vs. rescuer binary that exists. In terms of postmodern discourses, the language in the editorials reinforces fixed gender roles, particularly by presenting women as victims of patriarchal cultures. There is little engagement with Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, which would suggest that gender is fluid and socially constructed. Instead, the language perpetuates static gender identities. So, we could say that our editorials, in this case, contest postmodern discourses and specifically the *gender performativity*.

However, we must consider the limitations of our theories like we have already presented earlier. For example, the Danish media landscape is not homogeneous; a range of voices exists that cannot be assumed to approach FGM in the same way as those represented in our sample. Also, the theory of *gender performativity* comes with

limitations so perhaps this is the reason why there was such a little engagement in our analysis.

Additionally, it is essential to consider the research limitations examined earlier in this thesis.

Our sample size is extremely small and cannot represent the entire Danish media landscape. Although we aimed to select articles from a variety of political perspectives, we may not have captured all the voices within the media discourse. This raises an important point: despite the diversity of political viewpoints, the voices we analyzed may converge, leading to similar approaches in their representation of FGM.

Considering these factors allows our research purpose to become more rounded and comprehensive, highlighting the complexities of media representations of FGM within the Danish context.

If we want to extend the discussion on the findings further, we can also notice that there is a homogenization of non-Western practices in the language, where African cultures are generalized, presenting an oversimplification that does not show diversity within these communities. Although in some parts the editorials made clear that they referred to Somali girls/societies etc. Furthermore, the absence of firsthand accounts from women directly affected by FGM and the invisibility of local activism, highlights how the language of the editorials maintains a top-down social change and a paternalistic narrative. By excluding these voices, the discourse is dominated by external commentators (everyone else apart from the women themselves) who control the narrative without engaging with the perspectives of those directly impacted. The language using such as “barbaric” and “bestial” although creates attention, limits the possibility for more dialogue that could promote deeper understanding and sustainable change. The editorials through secular views, describing religion, especially Islam, as blocking gender equality and progress. There is a focus on secular solutions that fit Western ideas.

8. Conclusion

While the media offers strong condemnations of FGM, the narratives often fail to account for the nuances within the communities where these practices occur, including the voices of local activists and women directly affected by FGM. Furthermore, the portrayal of women as passive victims awaiting Western intervention overlooks their agency and the ongoing resistance against harmful traditions within these societies.

Ultimately, the study underscores the need for more nuanced media portrayals that engage with the complexities of FGM beyond sensationalist framings and the victim-rescuer binary. It calls for an approach that centers the voices and agency of affected women, recognizes the diversity within non-Western communities, and encourages a more critical reflection on how Western media participates in the global conversation on gender and culture. Such representations have broader implications for how cultural practices are understood and addressed in a globalized world, particularly in the context of ongoing debates around human rights, gender equality, and cross-cultural dialogue.

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