Wangila, Mary Nyangweso. 2007. “Beyond Facts to Reality: Confronting the Situation of

Women in “Female Cirumcising Communities.” *Journal of Human Rights* 6(4):393-413.

Wangila begins her article with a discussion of a personal account that brought about her awareness of the practice of female circumcision (FC). She had just arrived in Kenya, where she was conducting fieldwork when a young girl had just died during circumcision. The story highlights how people in the community respond to such circumstances. Wangila then discusses how communities proceed with the practice in spite of the fact it has been banned in Kenya. Female circumcision often takes place during the December holiday when girls are not in school to allow time for girls to heal.

Wangila advocates for a critical analysis of socio-cultural contexts of female circumcising communities to have a better understanding of the beliefs these communities hold that support the continuation of the practice. The author does not advocate for the continuation of female circumcision, but argues for a better way for helping a society to change harmful practices. As she states in her paper, FC is often referred to as “female genital mutilation” (FGM) and includes “pricking, piercing, stretching, burning or excision, clitoridectomy, and/or the removal of part of or all tissues around a woman’s reproductive organ and in some cases infibulation” (Wangila 2007, p. 394). The controversy over the practice of FC concerns human rights, which is often perceived as a “Western” intrusion upon a cultural practice, and deemed a Universalist approach. The alternate view, a cultural relativistic one, concerns the rights of a culture to retain its cultural practices without intrusion from others. Some who defend the practice cite ritual traditions, honor amongst family and community, social status, and religious adherence as justification for continuation of FC. Clearly, the practice is deeply entwined within socio-cultural constructs.

Wangila’s argument is not in favor of continuation of a harmful cultural practice, but cultures need to be receptive to self-examination and scrutinize their own beliefs and behaviors when they perpetuate harmful practices. Indeed, pointing out the harmful effects of practices is not necessarily a Western Imperialist judgement when examining, learning, and understanding the cultural contexts in which some practices are performed.