Oba, Abdulmumini A. 2008. “Female Circumcision as Female Genital Mutilation: Human

Rights or Cultural Imperialism?” *Global Jurist* 8(3):1-38.

Oba (2008:1) makes a case for the Western Imperialistic views of human rights, specifically concerning the practice of female circumcision/female genital mutilation (FC/FGM), citing three reasons: (1) the West, often without a reasonable excuse or evidence, denounces unsavory cultural practices by non-Western societies; (2) the West fails to treat practices within its own accepted norms the same when condemning non-Western norms that are similar; and (3) the West often employs penalizing tactics against cultural practices it finds deplorable, instead of helping eradicate harmful practices within cultural groups through supportive and educational means. Although Oba (2008) claims this essay is not an argument in favor of or against FC, the tone of the paper suggests Oba supports FC, but not infibulation. In any case, Oba (2008) presents a strong case that Western practices concerning how it addresses non-Western cultural norms it finds unsavory, are imperialistic and hypocritical.

Obo (2008) claims views espoused by predominantly Western feminists focus on generalizations of male dominant cultural norms, stating that because it is parents who want their girls to undergo FC, it has nothing to do with potential husbands, further arguing they do not know what non-Western women feel. In addition, Obo (2008) argues that since FC practices are typically carried out by women and not men, the male dominance reason is invalid.

Obo (2008) further criticizes the lack of scientific rigor concerning different kinds of FC, pointing out the difference between FC and infibulation. While infibulation has been defined as a type of FC, Obo argues there are significant differences and it is actually the practice of infibulation that causes negative health consequences for girls and women. While the author has several strong points in this article, one of the strongest is the comparison of Western medical procedures and genital piercing that are not regulated under FC legislation. Western medical practices allow women to alter their genitalia for aesthetic reasons without legal ramifications. Obo (2008) rightly questions why it is acceptable for an adult woman to have cosmetic surgery that enhances the aesthetics of her genetalia, but unacceptable for non-Western adult females to have even the mildest forms of FC done. This is a good point worth exploring further. If an adult gives consent to a procedure that is essentially the same, but for differing cultural traditions, why is one form (Western ideal) acceptable while another (non-Western ideal) not?

Regardless of Oba’s (2008) apparent stance on FC, there is a strong argument that there are double standards at play concerning FC practices. While many of the claims made by anti-FC activists may be valid, Oba (2008) rightly questions the lack of scientific evidence to support some of those claims. Furthermore, Western societies should not be so quick to point fingers that some non-Western practices are abhorrent, while turning a “blind eye” to similar practices they support.