

BOOK REVIEW

**Review of *The Twilight of Cutting: African Activism and Life after NGOs* by Saida Hodžić.
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Saida Hodžić's book, *The Twilight of Cutting: African Activism and Life After NGOs*, is an anthropological intervention that explores the exportation of cultural imperialism to Africa, with a specific focus on Ghana through non-governmental organizations (NGOs). When Europe colonized Africa in the late 19th Century to 20th Century, most of the cultural practices and traditions were labeled savage, barbaric, and primitive. The colonizer's burden was then to civilize Africans and deliver them from such practices (p. 51). These practices include cutting, otherwise known as female genital mutilation (FGM). Cutting is an initiation ritual for girls entering womanhood. It is practiced in several communities in Africa. In Ghana, it is practiced by northern communities

One of the critical questions Hodžić raises is: Why, despite low levels of cutting in the last 30 years, has there been an increase in NGOs including feminist groups and movements, both local and international, campaigning in Africa against the practice of cutting? Hodžić argues that these groups and organizations work together with governments, international bodies and feminist movements to de-campaign and enforce laws against cutting, "problematizing and criminalizing the practice" (p. 13).

Examples of NGOs whose campaign and collaboration with governments in Africa in shaping discourses, laws, and policies that criminalize FGM and enforce arresting anyone participating in the act, include feminist movements local and international NGOs such as the Ghana Association for Women Welfare (GAWW), the Inter-African Committee on Harmful Traditional Practices affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Hodžić sees her research as "anthropological intervention" that not only critiques how NGOs, feminist movements, and governments have handled cutting, but also how imperialism continues to haunt and dominate most cultural interventions in Africa, particularly,

the campaign against FGM and the Clitoraid project (p. 50). While informed by theories of cultural relativism, liberal tolerance, and feminist activism to condemn African Indigenous cultures, NGOs claim that FGM is harmful to its practitioners, yet practitioners themselves are not involved in the debates that shape laws and policies against FGM. Hodžić observes that such an approach could be why most of NGO and government interventions continue to attract resistance from practitioners and their supporters despite the punitive punishments governments put in place, and NGOs' vigilance of NGOs to eliminate the practice.

Hodžić argues that the region in question—northern Ghana—is thus stereotyped for “barbaric” and “criminal” acts, labeled “backward,” and inherently “violent,” which in general terms result in excluding northern communities from Ghanaian citizenship. For that matter, elite Ghanaians from the region disassociate with the practice of cutting in order to socially belong and be regarded as “civilized” citizens. Hodžić compares this scenario with what happens in the global political economy, between the Global North and South, which led to racism, demonization and segregation of some groups such Muslims, Arabs, and Blacks. She notes, “When people are defined as problem populations, in need of management or reform, they are always already marked by categories of social differentiation—be they race, class, gender, citizenship, ethnicity, or place—and their humanity is often put in question” (p. 9). Accordingly, Ghana's efforts to end cutting seem to target northern poor immigrant neighborhoods called Zongos as “sites of non-citizenship and disorder,” while in a global political economy context, such communities would be Africa or the Muslim-Arabs (pp. 9-10). With such identifications in mind, Hodžić elaborates that both international and national NGOs, and government agencies use Aid and dogmatic messages aimed at eliminating the “cultural pathology” and “patriarchy” of that particular community deemed the source of that region's problems (p. 10).

In all fairness, Hodžić takes a close look at African elites and governments and the role they play in preserving African cultures. For example, Ghana under Nkrumah was a leading pan-Africanist advocate and visionary of black modernity that “symbolized the prominence of Africa in global affairs” (p. 13). Today, however, Ghana is a leading agency of western imperialism and neo-liberalism policies, some of which are designed to destroy or disregard African identities and pan-African agenda. According to Hodžić, Ghana, which used to be “a gateway to Africa,” became a ‘get away from Africa’” (pp.13-14).

The Twilight of Cutting suggests exploring local and social sites as a basis for a meaningful social change rather than imposing outside interventions. “We should think of this as a fallback

position, as an anthropological and feminist safe place that readily generates consensus” (p. 23). Hodžić stresses the need for anthropological feminism to study the value the people attached to certain practices—social and spiritual—and, together with the people, discuss necessary mechanisms of intervention. Thus, “people should be given education which would enable the people to choose what customs to keep and which ones they would like to get rid of” (p. 22).

Hodžić’s book is a critical resource for anthropology and feminist scholars, policy makers, government workers, and NGOs, most especially feminist NGOs, in understanding how their work and approaches affect communities they are serving. It is also a timely contribution to pan-African scholarship.