

Navigating power dynamics:

An anthropological perspective on employees working with Female Genital Cutting in the Netherlands

Master Thesis Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship

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Abstract

Worldwide 300 million girls and women experience the effects of Female Genital Cutting (FGC), and more than four million girls are at risk of being circumcised every year (Amref Flying Doctors n.d). The practice of FGC varies in different countries, regions, communities, cultures, religions, as well as in the reason why FGC is practiced. Because of all these varieties in forms of FGC, Walley (1997, 429) argues that lumping different types of FGC into one phrase is inaccurate. Different meanings of FGC exposes the entanglement in different notions of cultures, human rights, the existing discourse of the idea what is right or wrong, forms of opposition, and the different power relations. Employees working on FGC related programs, and the organizations they work for, hold on to the definition of the World Health Organization (WHO), which is mainly based on health concerns and ending FGC. While employees work towards ending FGC, they also find it important to be culturally sensitive, and understand FGC from within the particular cultural context. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how employees working on FGC related projects, are constantly navigating power dynamics. These power dynamics refer to tensions in relation to FGC, that have to do with traditions, customs, knowledge, behavior, norms and values. These tensions make that employees struggle in living up to their organizations norms and values, make that employees subconsciously participate in a world in which stigmatization continues, and that these power dynamics affect employees' own agency. Therefore, this thesis shows that employees are constantly navigating power dynamics while working on FGC related programs through various forms of tension.

Keywords: Female Genital Cutting, power dynamics, universalism, cultural relativism, knowledge

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Preface

In the past I did volunteering work for ECPAT Youth. Together with a very nice group of girls I was committed to raise awareness against various themes in relation to the sexual exploitation of children. This is where my interest in the theme Female Genital Cutting started. During my masters, I discovered more about the complexity of the theme, which made me enthusiastic to learn more by writing my thesis about FGC. My thesis is written for everyone who is interested to learn more about FGC. Hereby, I want to thank my participants for being very open and enthusiastic to share all details and information about working with FGC with me. All research participants were very kind and put their heart and soul into ending FGC, with respect for everyone who can be related to the practice. Furthermore, I would like to thank my supervisor by giving feedback on all my huge amount of texts for the last six months. Lastly, I want to thank my mother, sisters, brothers in law, and friends for always supporting and believing in me.

Emese Veldhuizen

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Introduction

I think that respect for traditions and culture does not necessarily mean that you have to be okay with everything. Traditions change through insight. Changing traditions, or agreements, or norms, or cultures, is always accompanied by a field of tension. But I think that where you on the one hand try to maintain a good relationship with people, this should not necessarily stand in the way of what is scientifically proven to be harmful for a girl or woman. You can still point that out and try to change it. [...] What I think is interesting, and what worries me is that Female Genital Cutting (FGC¹) is often spoken of with disdain from the West. Look, from our organization we never talk about barbaric practices or anything. We are very careful in how we communicate about FGC. We never do anything with disgust, and never do anything with blood drops. We try to stay away from that sensational and strongly disapproving tone. Because, that just hurts women. They read such an article and they just feel rejected, which is what journalism and newspapers do. Because, it is about them, and that affects me. You have to be very careful how you go out with this topic and how you write about it and so on. Because, you are not only writing about FGC, but also about women. (Nova, Interview, 16 May 2022)

This quote comes from my interview on the 16th of May 2022 with Nova, who I would describe as a very friendly, lively, and interesting women. Nova is one of my research participants, who works for a Dutch health expertise center, and has been working on FGC related programs for about seven years. Interesting about the interview with Nova is that she pointed me to several important aspects she encounters during her work with FGC. The named aspects are; respect, traditions, cultures, norms, tensions, relationships, disdain from the West, and communication. What becomes clear from the quote, is that Nova is aware of her being a Western employee working with FGC, while working with non-Western traditions, cultures, and norms. This is supported by the way Nova talks about what respect means, and how to act with respect. Nova explains this by says that respect for cultures and traditions does not necessarily mean that she cannot aim for change. However, she does point out that respect is important, especially in the way you communicate about FGC. Nova does this by judging how in journalism FGC is often described as barbaric and with a strongly disapproving tone. According to Nova this not only has a negative effect on the women, but also on Nova as an employee. The quote sums up how

¹ In this thesis the term Female Genital Cutting (FGC) will be used as opposed to FGM since the word cutting provides a more neutral and accurate, nonpoliticized, and a more scientifically correct description of the procedure (Danial 2013, 1).

on the one hand Nova thinks about the importance of respecting traditions and cultures, but on the other hand works towards ending the scientifically proven harmful practice of FGC. However, Nova points to the fact that it is critical for her as an employee to be careful in the way she works towards ending FGC. Moreover, Nova's quote includes the fact that the practice of FGC is assessed in several ways and comes with various tensions.

Important to note, in relation to the quote of Nova, are the complexity and tensions coming with the assessment of FGC. Western organizations often use the definition of the World Health Organization (WHO) of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): "The excision and/or wounding of parts or all of the external genital area for reasons other than medical" (Hassanin and Shaaban 2010, 1; WHO 2020). According to the WHO FGM/C may be divided into four categories. The first type is the excision of the prepuce, with or without excision of part or all of the clitoris. The second type is the excision of the clitoris with partial or total excision of the labia minora. Thirdly, the excision of part or all of the external genitalia and stitching/narrowing the vaginal opening (Infibulation). The fourth type is unclassified, and includes pricking, piercing, or incising of the clitoris and/or labia; stretching of the clitoris and/or labia; cauterisation by burning of the clitoris and surrounding tissue (Sulkin 2009; Vlachova and BIASON 2005, 182; Yount and Carrera 2006; WHO 2020). The definition of the WHO is primarily based on health concerns. Besides, this definition is based on universal principles which see FGC as a violation of human rights and with the goal to eradicate this form of FGC. This universal definition of the WHO has been criticized by various anthropologists (Gruenbaum 2020; Monahan 2007; Ahmadu 2012).

Anthropologists emphasize how it is crucial not to forget that in some contexts FGC practices are vital to peoples feeling of belonging and establishing a cultural identity (Monahan 2007, 32). Furthermore, the practice varies in different countries, regions, communities, cultures, religions, as well as in the reason why FGC is practiced. The practice knows a wide variety of names, not only in the names found in the languages of places conducting the practices, but also in English terminology (Walley 1997, 407-408). Because of all these varieties in forms of FGC, Walley (1997, 429) explains that lumping different types of FGC into one phrase is inaccurate. Another anthropologist who critiques the universal definition of the WHO is Ahmadu (2012), who underwent FGC herself. Ahmadu explains that FGC's negative effects on health were not as severe as Westerners claim. Furthermore, she argues that FGC does not often leads to long-term issues with fertility and sexual satisfaction. Ahmadu contends that FGC is a tradition that preserves cultural identity and women's equality and authority within communities, and that Western ideas do not fully comprehend what they are

opposing. She does, however, acknowledge that medical advancement is possible (Ahmadu 2012, 283-310).

What becomes apparent from the interview with Nova, and the analysis of how FGC is assessed, is that on the one hand there is the existing viewpoint of FGC being considered as wrong. FGC is seen as a violation of human rights, regardless of cultural beliefs, or customs. On the other hand, there is the existing culturally sensitive point of view, which points to the fact that FGC must be evaluated within its particular cultural context. Interestingly, I spoke with various organizations during my fieldwork, whom hold on to the definition of the WHO which is mainly based on health concerns and ending FGC. However, those organizations acknowledge the importance of being culturally sensitive, and understanding FGC from within a particular cultural context. Gruenbaum (2020) argued that Western programs towards ending FGC, comes with various forms of tensions and contestations. Especially, due to the fact that it is difficult to understand the complexities in which families have to decide whether or not to practice FGC, or to take the risk of change. The complexity that Gruenbaum (2020) describes makes it interesting to look at how employees like Nova are also stumbling upon forms of tension and contestations while navigating between working towards ending FGC, and understanding FGC from a particular cultural context. Based on the fact that my research participants hold on to the definition by the WHO, I decided to use the acronym of FGC in my thesis based on this same definition. However, I want to acknowledge my understanding as a researcher that FGC cannot be defined as one specific practice. There are many reasons of why FGC is practiced, how FGC is perceived, and how various people use the term.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how employees working on FGC related projects, are constantly navigating power dynamics. These power dynamics refer to tensions in relation to FGC, that have to do with traditions, customs, knowledge, behavior, norms and values. While demonstrating this, I argue that power dynamics cause that employees struggle in living up to their organizations norms and values, make that employees participate in a world in which stigmatization subconsciously continues, and that these power dynamics affect employees' own agency. This purpose builds on the main question of this thesis: How do employees of organizations working on programs related to FGC, in the Netherlands, navigate power dynamics?

The power of opposition

Within anthropology, FGC is often associated with the debate surrounding universalism and cultural relativism. These two ideologies reside on different ends of the continuum.

Universalism is the ideology that there is only one truth, and that people have the same rights at all times regardless of one's nationality, race, culture, gender, religion, age and sexuality (Dahre 2017, 614). In universalism, human rights are globally agreed-upon ideals, standards, and laws (Reichert 2006). While human rights are universally recognized, they are influenced by Western principles of individuality, enabling everyone to have access to the same rights regardless of their history or circumstances (Reichert 2006, 25). According to universalists, people should not be penalised because of their country of origin, or culture. Moreover, everyone should be treated equally regardless of whether or not a practice, or behavior is considered a cultural norm (Reichert 2006, 26-27).

Cultural relativism is the anthropological ideology opposing universalism. With this ideology it is argued that one culture should not be evaluated by the standards of other cultures, but by its own history and environment (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001, 58). There is no universal or ideal way of life, according to cultural relativists, who believe that all cultures are equal. Instead, everything depends on the culture's context and setting (Danial 2006, 2). Cultural relativists say that cultural transformation should not and cannot be forced on anybody. Alternatively, cultural changes should take place organically from within the culture through local activists, as a consequence of generational shifts, or through the increased access to information and education (Merry 2006, 40). Therefore, the concept of cultural relativism relates to anthropologists examination of the importance of not forgetting that in some contexts FGC practices are vital to people's feelings of belonging and establishing a cultural identity (Monahan 2007, 32).

The concept that is inherently connected to the debate surrounding universalism and cultural relativism is ethnocentrism, introduced by Franz Boas (1924) (Darnell et al 2015, 129). Ethnocentrism refers to seeing one's own culture as superior, and to judge others by using one's own standards and values (Boas 1924). When individuals believe their own cultural views are more true, more right, or more moral than those of other cultures, they are considered to be ethnocentric (Darnell et al. 2015, 129). This authority of one's own morals and values is entangled in the ongoing debate surrounding universalism and cultural relativism (Darnell et al. 2015, 129). From the perspective of cultural relativism, any moral standard has no universal validity and only pertains to the individual or group in issue (Dahre 2017). However, according to Hernlund et al. (2007, 8-10), whom connect the debate to FGC, say that there is a risk that a cultural relativistic viewpoint makes individuals indifferent to moral issues, allowing culture to become "an excuse for abuse". Cultural relativists make numerous arguments, all of which derive from the view that by ignoring and prohibiting distinct traditions, individuals lose their

cultural identity due to pressure. This pressure comes from Western civilizations, which relates to colonial periods (Reichert 2006). The debate surrounding universalism and cultural relativism shows how with both ideologies opinions are critiqued on what is right and wrong, which points to sustaining various oppositions. How opposition arose requires to look back to times of colonial rule.

In the book *Orientalism* (1978), Said argues that colonialism was “not only a system of political rule, but also an all-round worldview that simply believed that the West was superior to the East” (Said 1978, 291). Furthermore, Said (1978) contends that years of colonial rule allowed a particular group in society to have more political and economic power. This group has a higher chance of having an inequitable amount of power. This power enables this group to frame, or decide what the culture of that society is, in which both the more empowered and the more disempowered groups within that society live (Said 1978). This is explained by Said (1978, 14) with the argument that in a worldwide culture dominated by the West, the East has been portrayed as irrational, odd, and driven by base human impulses, whilst the West has been portrayed as logical, sophisticated, and the standard. Similarly, Hall (1993, 60) discusses how the West/Rest dichotomy draws simplified distinctions and builds an exaggerated idea of difference. Hall (1993, 60) describes how the distinction between the West, the Rest, and the relationships between them, portrays the distinct civilizations of European cultures as homogenous by referring to them as the West. These distinctions between cultures are what binds them together and makes everything that is distinct from the West to be referred to as the Rest (Hall 1993, 60). This created worldview of the West being superior over the Rest (Said 1978) is still embedded in the everyday life of society. Said and Hall, therefore help to understand in how oppositions in the world came to be, and how this difference in superiority is connected to power. In relation to FGC, people often make the division between people who are in groups where FGC is practiced and the group that is not (Wade 2012; Walley 1997, 429). Therefore, in relation to the practice of FGC, forms of resistance also exist, indicating that around FGC, power also plays a role.

The concept of power is defined in many different ways. Foucault (1977, 93), described that power is “not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society”. This refers to the relational dimensions of power, focusing on circumstances of acts and interpretations (Foucault 1977, 93). This definition was given in the time when different scientists realized that instead of looking at power being embedded in structural relations, power constituted through language and everyday practice (Bourdieu 1991). Foucault (1998, 63)

argued that power is not only wielded by persons or groups through episodic or sovereign acts of dominance and coercion. Instead, Foucault (1998, 63) viewed power as scattered and widespread, by saying that power is everywhere and originates from everything. Another way of studying power is by looking at how institutional power works through the relation between the right to rule and the decision-making process. Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) refer to institutional power as the ability of institutions such as governments, religions, and companies to utilize incentives and punishments, to control and guide people's behaviour. There is a difference between power constituted during everyday life, and power through legitimate authority and sovereign forms of power that certain groups try to claim. Rather than studying the power of an institution in relation to society, I study power dynamics within institutions. In this research, based on Foucault's definition of power, I argue that power does not necessarily come in forms of oppression. Power is exercised through social relations and is omnipresent throughout the social body (Foucault 1998). In other words, power comes in systematic implementations in society and is part of our everyday lives, by manifesting itself in habitual ways of behaving towards one another (Foucault 1981-1998). The theory on power offers a framework that helps to understand how employees encounter forms of power while working on FGC related programs.

Power in relation to organizations is often studied on a macro-level instead of a micro-level. Research on a macro-level studies how effective and beneficial programs are, taking into consideration the socio-cultural environment of the people impacted as well as the political, economic, and power systems that constrain them (Kaur 2007, 27). For example, Ferguson (2009) studied how Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), are entangled in different power dynamics in relation to development, politics, human rights, and culture (Goodale 2009). Human relationships and social bonding are not emphasized in studies on a macro-level, even though there are several variables that support individual behaviour patterns. I see a gap in the theory where knowledge is missing about how employees, working as individuals at organizations with programs on FGC, are stumbling on various power dynamics. Therefore, this thesis is an ethnographic micro-level study that focuses on the network of human connections and social bonds (Kaur 2007, 2). Micro-level studies are used as a source of information and a database in anthropology to develop and implement macro-level strategies, as well as plan and implement programs and initiatives (Kaur 2007, 27). Understanding transnational dynamics requires micro-level study and research approaches that capture how employees experience change while simultaneously analysing linked systems (Markowitz 2005). This research helps to gain a deeper understanding of not only the power dynamics of

organizations in relation to FGC, but also how this influences employees who experience these power dynamics while working on FGC related programs.

Employees working on FGC related programs

Before the start of my fieldwork period, I contacted three organizations that work on different FGC related programs internationally. These organizations were all International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) that offer programs focussing on, raising awareness and changing behaviour, educating men about sexual and reproductive health and rights, enlisting men in the fight against gender inequality, utilizing public campaigns and media, and advocating for criminal legislation and enforcement. These INGOs are financed through various sponsors, private donors, and state subsidies. From these three INGOs I spoke with five employees from three different INGOs, including program managers, and research advisors working on FGC related programs. Within these INGOs there are only one or two responsible employees focussing on FGC related programs. For this reason, I was not able to get in contact with as many employees working for INGOs and on FGC related programs as I wanted.

Talking to only five employees of INGOs, made that I was not gathering enough data. Nevertheless, the employees I spoke to pointed me to the fact that instead of only INGOs working on fighting FGC internationally, there are also organizations in the Netherlands that work on fighting FGC nationally. Therefore, I decided to expand my research population from not only organizations focussing on fighting FGC internationally, but also organizations fighting FGC in the Netherlands. During my fieldwork period I got in contact with three of these organizations including a NGO, a Dutch health expertise centers, and other Dutch regional health organizations. These organizations focus on prevention and offering aftercare for FGC. Within these organizations I spoke to seven employees, including an assistant project manager, project leaders, and a 'key person'. These organizations are all subsidized by the government, which points to the influence the state has on these different organizations. Furthermore, I spoke with one Dutch researcher who is also an academic lecturer with a focus on international law, human rights, and FGC. In total I spoke to fourteen people, including employees from six different organizations in the Netherlands working with FGC related programs, and one researcher with a focus on FGC.

As a location, I chose to do fieldwork with employees of organizations based in the Netherlands. This decision was made on the fact that there is a large network of organizations working on FGC related programs in the Netherlands. Previous scholars studied the different power dynamics of organizations who are involved with development programs (Ferguson

1990), in countries such as Haiti (Schuller and Farmer 2012), India (Bornstein and Sharma 2016), and America (Fisher 1997). Different scholars, such as Graamans (2019) and Kawous (2020), wrote various research on FGC for organizations in the Netherlands. However, those scholars focus on how the approach of organizations in relation to FGC can be improved. Therefore, I wanted to shift the focus on research in relation to FGC in the Netherlands, by focussing on employees working with FGC related programs. Since, there are many organizations in the Netherlands working on FGC, it is interesting to look at how these organizations in the Netherlands experience different power dynamics. Moreover, Dutch is my native language which has been an advantage by sharing the same language as employees in the Netherlands working in FGC related programs. This was helpful while attending meetings, events, and in participating with my participants during my fieldwork period.

An ethnography on Female Genital Cutting

This research is an ethnography, which are methods and techniques, that support studying experiences of people. Anthropologists use ethnographic methods and techniques to try to make it possible to experience and understand a society or group from within (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019, 3). I decided to use the method of multi-sited ethnography, which refers to an ethnographer moving between sites and groups of differently situated individuals (Bell 2001, 60). I used this method, because my population includes different organizations, and therefore different situated individuals. Furthermore, using ethnographic methods was valuable by Mertz and Timmer (2011, 171) describing how ethnographic research can take a researcher into the microlevel practices and approaches to organizations and habits of thinking. Therefore, this value of ethnographic research aligned with my focus on studying the micro-level of organizations, by focusing on employees working on FGC related programs. As ethnographic and qualitative fieldwork methods, I used interviews, participant observation, digital ethnography, and secondary data analysis.

My fieldwork mainly consisted of interviews. According to O'Reilly (2012, 116) interviews are used as a tool to study topic more in depth, and that it is a method that is best to start with as an informal conversation. Starting interviews with casual chats and informal questions, enabled me to use interviews as a tool to build rapport in order to discuss my research topic more in-depth (O'Reilly 2012, 116). I chose to use in-depth interviews as a method, to gather deeper information about employees daily work activities, their organizations strategies, the tensions they encounter, but also what they like most about working on FGC related programs. Having conversations about these topics, led into more in-depth data relating to

employees encountered power dynamics. In preparation of my interviews I created a topic list with topics related to my research questions. I did thirteen in-depth interviews, with different employees that helped me gather information about experienced power dynamics, daily work activities, organizations norms and values, and employees relation to universalism and cultural relativism. All my interviews were in Dutch. Therefore, all included quotes in this thesis are translated by myself from Dutch to English.

My fieldwork also contained participant observation, which is a form of collecting data in a natural setting, meaning a field explicitly set up for study purposes (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019, 4). DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 1), describe this natural setting well by explaining how participant observation is a method through which the researcher takes part in daily activities and interactions with people. This method makes it possible for the researcher to experience the actual routines of people their lives and cultures (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 1). I did participant observation while attending work meetings and events through which I experienced the daily work activities of employees working with FGC related programs. Using participant observation was valuable in order to really get a feel for what it is like to work on FGC related programs.

Another method I used is digital ethnography, which is a tool to study virtual worlds, which can help to analyse aspects of everyday life (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019, 140). This method was used by observing websites of organizations with programs related to FGC, attending webinars, and listening to podcasts created by employees working on FGC related programs. Lastly, I did a secondary data analysis which refers to analysing existing data (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019, 140). I used this method by searching for more academic articles and books that relate to power dynamics, employees within organizations, theories, and concepts in relation to FGC. With these new found articles and books I did a critical literature review, to gain more data for my research.

As part of me being a researcher, I have been aware of considering my positionality during my fieldwork period. I am a Western woman writing about a topic that is often practiced in sub-Saharan countries. This means that my views may be constrained by the limits of my own experiences (Takacs 2013, 29). As a researcher I bring my own background, experiences, and possibly prejudices (Madden 2017, 22). Therefore, as a researcher I had to be constantly aware of making assumptions, because my positionality is biased by how I see the world. This has not always been easy, because, FGC is a topic that I have found very interesting for a longer period of time. As a researcher I had to be carefully aware when and how often I could share my opinion or view on the topic. Especially, because during my fieldwork period participants

often asked me for my input. Sharing my own opinions and views in some cases led to more research participants and building more rapport. Me sharing my viewpoint opened up the confidence of participants sharing more in-depth information with me. For example, research participants often asked how I became so interested in FGC to write my thesis about this topic. I tried to control sharing my own opinions on FGC, by only sharing when participants asked. Deciding to not share my thoughts at all was not an option. This is what I noticed during my fieldwork, since why I am interested in the topic became part of my methods to find more research participants.

On an ethical note, it is important to acknowledge that before starting this research I made sure that I was aware of the guidelines for anthropological research. These guidelines are introduced by the American Anthropology Association (AAA), and relate to data management, ethics, and integrity (AAA 2012). I acknowledge that as a researcher I cannot share data with others, without approval of interlocutors. Especially, since research participants often share personal and sensitive information it was my responsibility to safe and secure this information. Therefore, it was important to me to take the position as a safeguard of my research participants anonymity in my data and texts, because I have the responsibility to protect the privacy and safety of my research participants. For this reason, I have asked all my research participants for oral consent. I did not use written consent forms, because that could have had a negative impact on the research participants privacy, safety, and possession of knowledge (AAA 2012). Different participants brought to my attention that they preferred me anonymizing their names as well as the organization they work for, since it is a small world they work in. Because some of my research participants requested to anonymize their names, I decided to anonymize all research participants by not using personal names or directly referring to the names of the organizations I spoke to.

Included chapters

This thesis studies employees working on FGC related programs. In the introduction I explain the purpose of this thesis, which is to examine how employees working on FGC related projects, are constantly navigating power dynamics. These power dynamics refer to tensions in relation to FGC, that have to do with traditions, customs, knowledge, behavior, norms and values. While employees work on FGC related programs they experience various forms of tensions. In this thesis I describe the theme of FGC, the debate surrounding universalism and culturalism, theory on forms of opposition, and power. In addition, in my introduction I describe my research population, methodology and my position as a researcher.

Chapter one shows that employees are struggling to live up to norms of values of the organizations they work for. In chapter one, I explain how collaborations, financial flows, and crisis situations create tensions that are part of the reasons that employees struggle with implementing organizations norms and values.

Chapter two discusses how employees assume that more awareness on FGC at communities practicing FGC, and Dutch health professionals, would contribute to ending FGC. In chapter two I argue that making assumptions to who has what knowledge in relation to FGC, makes that employees are part of a world in which stigmatization subconsciously continues.

The third chapter explains that the positioning of employees within the debate surrounding universalism and cultural relativism is complex due to their ongoing search for a good understanding of the reasons why FGC is practiced. In chapter three, I argue that even though employees are working towards ending FGC, they also find it important to understand and consider the different cultural and traditional aspects of why FGC is practiced. The way employees navigating between both ends within the organization influences employees agency, in the ability to act freely.

In the conclusion I explain that employees do encounter power dynamics while working on FGC related programs, through navigation forms of tensions surrounding collaborations, financial flows, times of crisis, forms of opposition, cultural relativism, universalism, and their own agency.

Chapter One : Living up to strategies

On the 30th of March 2022 I had an interview with Florien, one of the project leaders working at an international health organization, for six years. Florien is a very enthusiastic and chatty person, especially when talking about FGC and anthropology. Within the organization, Florien is widely involved with different themes, such as sanitary and hygiene, human resources for health, harmful practices, and health finance. Florien calls herself, and her colleagues, technical experts and advisors, because many activities, such as writing reports, are done by the offices in the countries they collaborate with. The role of Florien includes contributing to writing research reports, writing evaluating reports for donors, and project management. When she explained more about the norms and values of the organizations Florien said:

We actually do not do anything without our African colleagues seeing the need for it. With us, Africa is in the lead, also because the head office is located in Africa. That is where the need for working on certain topics must come from. We might be interested in topics as FGC ourselves, also because interest was shown in this topic from the Netherlands, but the strongest intention to work on topics must come from there. That is what we need to persevere and what asks for interaction between what is relevant for the countries and whether we can find a donor for that. That is the most important thing for our offices in the Netherlands. Can we find the funds that match this subject? Which is easier with some subjects than with others (Florien, Interview, 30 March 2022).

The interview with Florien, gave me an inside in what working on FGC related projects looks like within the organization she works for. Florien acknowledges that it is important that the offices in Africa determine the subjects that projects will be based on. According to Florien, the partner offices in Africa need to see the need and intention to work on a certain topic. Even though the office in the Netherlands is interested in working on another topic, her colleagues in Africa are decisive. In her view, this is needed to persevere in order to work on topics that are relevant. Furthermore, Florien elaborates on the collaboration between the offices in Africa and the office in the Netherlands. This collaboration is described by Florien as the interaction between country offices that come up with relevant topics to build projects on, and the office in the Netherlands finding funds for these projects in Africa. Hence, the office in the Netherlands depends on the decided upon topics by African offices, and the African offices depend on whether the offices in the Netherlands can find funding. However, the quote refers to that finding funding for a project is not self-evident. Florien says that finding funds is easier with some topics than with others. This implies that the offices in the Netherlands depend on

the availability of funding. Florian encounters an existing field of tensions during working with FGC in relation to collaborations and funding. Tension is visible in how offices in Africa depend on the funding found by the offices in the Netherlands, and the dependency of the office in the Netherlands on the donors' desires to fund a project. Thus, working as an employee on FGC related projects for an organization can be difficult, because they have to deal with various ways of working, arrangements, and collaborations that create certain dependency, and accompanying tensions.

Within anthropology, organizations are a field of study. According to Czarniawska-Joerges (1989, 3), an organization is a system of collective activity that is used to try to influence the world (that part of it which is relevant for a given organization). Anthropologists often study culture in relation to organizations. Wright (1994, 2) described how culture can mean the informal 'concepts, attitudes and values' of a workforce. Similarly, Jordan (1994, 4) describes culture as organization's ideals and beliefs. However, it actually represents the complex human issues that employees contend with (Jordan 1994, 4). According to Schein (1985), the organizational culture is a set of fundamental shared beliefs that the group developed as it dealt with its problems with external adaptation and internal integration (Bebington et al. 2007, 603-604). Tharp (2009, 2-5) describes that an organization's culture has a significant impact on all its decisions and actions. After examining the various definitions of an organization's culture, my understanding of an organization's culture is that it is a set of norms and values. Together, those norms and values determine the behavior of employees within that organization. The theory on organization's culture provides an insightful framework for the examination of how organizations have their own norms and values that they live up to. At the same time, those are complex human issues that encounter problems with external adaptation and internal integration. Hence, it provides a language to understand that while employees work on FGC related programs and adhering to the organization's norms and values, they might face tensions from external and internal actors.

During my fieldwork period, I spoke to employees who encountered numerous forms of tensions while working on FGC related projects. In this chapter, I analyze various norms and values of organizations, that employees told me about during my research. In doing so, I argue that employees navigate various power dynamics in the form of encountered tensions while employees adhere to the organization's norms and values. In this chapter, I explain how collaborations, financial flows, and crisis situations are part of the reasons that employees experience tensions regarding adherence to the organization's norms and values. I chose to

focus on these three aspects since they explain how employees encounter power dynamics that are directly related to their work on FGC related programs.

Collaborations

Employees working on FGC related programs internationally and in the Netherlands encounter various forms of power dynamics in the form of tensions that come with collaborations. Schuller (2012, 174-175) discusses how organizations aiming for funding makes that there can be friction between organizations. Furthermore, Schuller (2012, 175) explains that the dependency of organizations on the state, funders, and other organizations is related to power by the existing dependency on others to achieve their goals. In this section, I argue that tensions surrounding collaborations are one of the reasons why employees are struggling to live up to their organization's norms and values. First of all, I explain that while employees adhere to international organizations norms and values in relation to involving the local offices at the grassroots level, they encounter tensions surrounding collaborations. Second of all, I show that while employees adhere to the norms and values of organizations in the Netherlands to involve the communities that practice FGC, they experience tensions in relation to collaborations.

On the 24th of February 2022 I met Mandy, a program officer of an International girls rights organization in the Netherlands. Mandy is a very enthusiastic, helpful, and open women. She was very willing to explain me everything she knows about FGC, and how she experiences working on programs in relation to FGC. Mandy has seven years of experience working on various projects on different themes. During my interview with Mandy, we spoke about the ambition and the norms and values of the organizations she works for:

Mandy: It is just common knowledge that a lot of decision making is done from the West. The fundraising offices of large organizations now want to leave as much decision making as possible with the local people and offices, also in the light of decolonization. I must say and add, that this is an ambition. We have started with small steps but, it is an ambition that we want to realize within now and ten years.

Interviewer: And the topic that you are going to work on, is that to be decided within your own team, or how does that work?

Mandy: Of course we also look at our revenues. For example, the focus of the ministry and what countries they want to work with. Furthermore, what is the subject matter that you can easily work with in the Dutch contexts. That is what we are working on. (Mandy, Interview, 24 February 2022)

According to Mandy, there is a collaboration between offices in the countries they work with, and the office in the Netherlands. Besides, there is a collaboration between the office in the Netherlands and organizations in relation to their revenues. Mandy explains the ambition for the organization to leave the decision making to the local people and offices within ten years, with emphasizing that it is common knowledge that currently a lot of decision-making is done from the West. In Mandy's view, the ambition is based on a historical reason, by saying that this is aimed for "in the light of decolonization". However, the interview excerpt shows that decisions on topics are for now still made in relation to their revenues. Mandy points out that even though the ambition is there to leave the decision-making at the offices in the countries they work with, the organization's decision making is currently still related to their revenues. These are the revenues, arranged by the offices in the Netherlands to fund projects of the country offices. Choices on topics are partly determined by revenues, because funding organizations have a say in what their money is spent on. Because of the dependence on these revenues, the choices on topics by funding organizations can be decisive. However, according to Mandy, there is the organizations ambition to change this within "ten years". The way that decisions are currently based on revenues, implies that the West is still decisive. Here I identify a tension between adhering to the ambition of the organization, and the dependency on their revenues, which are currently still being taken into consideration while deciding on topics. Therefore, the dependency on revenues from, for example, the ministry is part of why Mandy and the organization she works for struggle to adhere to the ambition to leave the decision-making to the country offices.

Mandy is not alone in acknowledging the encountered tensions in relation to collaborations. On the 14th of April 2022 I met Sendy, the program manager of an international health organization. Sendy is a friendly women, with a happy and motivated appearance. During my interview with Sendy, she described her and her colleague's role within the organization as; "facilitating our colleagues, teams, and offices in the country we work with". Sendy added; "What we do is getting as much money in their direction as possible". The conversation with Sendy demonstrated the importance of collaborating with offices in the countries they work with. In Sendy's view this comes in the form of facilitating, by, for example, providing fundings. In our interview, Sendy explained how during a project in a community in Kenya, the offices in Kenya worked hard, and arranged that a community agreed to have a dialogue on FGC. Even though the funding was facilitated, the funding organization felt that they had not been adequately informed about the projects results, which made them decide to end the funding (Sendy, Interview, 14 April 2022). These collaborations point to the tension between the norms

and values of the organization Sedy works for and the organization's dependency on funding in order to continue a successful project. According to Schuller (2012), power is created by the dependence on others to achieve goals. The influence and power of financing organizations are demonstrated by their possibility to withdraw from what was appearing to be a successful project. The example of Sedy explained how the collaboration with funding organizations can influence the progress of a successful project. This directly affects adherence to the organization's values and standards, as the importance of collaborating with the offices at the country offices loses its value due to one decision by a funding organization. Hence, employees depend on funding organizations, which becomes visible by the loss of the fundings and how this demonstrates the power of dependency by having to stop the project.

Tensions in relation to collaborations are also encountered by employees working on FGC related programs in the Netherlands. On the 14th of March 2022, I attended a webinar, organized by a Dutch health expertise center. This webinar was about the role and the use of so called “key persons”, who are referred to as the unmissable success factor of FGC related projects in the Netherlands. Key persons are women and men from within communities where FGC is practiced, and who show affinity with FGC. Organizations approach key persons to work for them as volunteers. The strength of key persons is their ability to create access to the communities, speaking the language, understanding the cultural barriers, and offering secure spaces to talk about FGC. Key persons perform home visits and so-called “living room conversations” to bring up the conversations about FGC. Furthermore, they are involved as intermediaries and interpreters during trainings, information meetings, and open office hours of health organizations for circumcised women in the Netherlands. For example, they function as mediators with health professionals, to create a comfortable atmosphere in which the right help, and access for after care can be offered to circumcised women (Fieldnotes, Participant Observation, 14 March 2022).

During the webinar on the 14th of March 2022, not only the indispensability of collaborations with key persons was emphasized, but also the bottlenecks and challenges. This mostly concerned the safeguarding of collaborating with key persons. Guest speakers of the webinar pointed to the aim to make their projects structural, instead of having to apply to five years lasting subsidies from the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (MHWS). One attendee of the event said: “some key persons also have work, or some are students. Besides this, they are also committed to us, this has to be taken into account”. The attendee continued: “I aim to work converting the role of a key person as a volunteer to an actual paid position”. With these statements the attendee, points to how the power of key persons have not been utilized enough,

by bringing to the attention that they volunteer out of free will beside their own personal live, implying more can be gained by better financially rewarding these key persons. While key persons receive a compensation fee for their volunteer work, during the webinar concerns were shown about the importance of the aim towards offering key persons paid positions (Fieldnotes, Participant Observation, 14 March 2022). While staff emphasize the importance of continuing valuable collaborations with key persons, they experience tensions related to the need of subsidies, and thus dependence on the ministry. Herein, power plays a role in that to achieve the goal of continuing to collaborate with key persons depends on access to grants from the ministry (Schuller 2012). This dependence causes staff to constantly navigate between adhering to the value of continuing to collaborate with key persons, and the tension experienced around dependence on funding.

Employees struggle to live up to the organizations norms and values, hence there is dependency on other organizations involved with their projects on FGC. The dependency of others to achieve goals, is related to power (Schuller 2012, 175). For example, how the dependency on funding makes that employees collaborations with country offices loses its values, by funding organizations being decisive. Furthermore, power is visible through the tensions that come with the risk of not being able to continue collaborations with valuable key persons, because of the dependency on decisions about funding by other parties. These dependencies cause employees to constantly navigate power dynamics to adhere to their organizations norms and values, related to increasing the involvement of country offices, and collaborations with key persons.

Financial power

Another reason why employees struggle to adhere to the organizations norms and values, are financial flows. Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) study how power works through the relation between the right to rule and the decision-making progress. They refer to institutional power as the ability of institutions such as governments, religions, and companies to utilize incentives and punishments, to control and guide people's behaviour (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008, 77). In relation to Armstrong and Bernstein (2008), I argue that employees experience power dynamics by the ability of funding organizations to influence employees behavior towards living up to organizations norms and values. First, I explain how employees working for international organizations experience the influence of donors and sponsors on FGC related

projects. Second, I explain how for organizations working on projects in the Netherlands, their behavior is guided by their search for the access to budgets.

Organizations working internationally on FGC related projects, are financed in various ways. For example, through private sponsors, corporate sponsors, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through for instance, one-time donations, monthly donations, large gifts, legacies, and donations by large multinationals as well as smaller companies. During my interview with Mandy on the 24th of February 2022, she was able to tell me a lot about the way the organization is sponsored;

You have several donors. So, we have private individuals who deposit an amount to us every month so that we can do our own thing without there being a requirement. We also have large companies that sponsor us in our economic empowerment and training programs, and we also have legacies, so someone who includes the plan in his or her will. Those are mainly the smaller donors. I think they are the nicest, because you get money and you can decide how you can create impact, then you'll be able to get a lot more done from the core of the problem. And those big donors like the European Union (EU) and foreign affairs already have their own idea of what is needed and our ideas have to fit in there, so that limits us here and there because you can't do everything indefinitely (Mandy, Interview, 24 February 2022).

Mandy explained how there are different forms of donors and sponsorships. According to Mandy, there are smaller donors and large companies that sponsor. Mandy explains that smaller donors are often private donations with which organizations are free to choose where to spend the money on, what indicates that this is different with larger donors. This is substantiated by Mandy, saying that bigger donors like the EU need “our ideas to fit in there”, and that smaller donors are not dependent on requirements. This says something about the influence of donors, and the ability to add requirements for bigger donors. In Mandy’s view, it is nicest to work with smaller donors and to “decide how you can create impact”. She explains that with this money, you make impact at the core of the problem. Therefore, there is a link between making decisions on how to make impact, and the influence of donors. The link between the decision-making of organizations and donors relates to the study of Mutua (2008, 31) who states that “NGOs without strong, well-thought-out agendas and programs can be easily confused and pushed around by donors”. He points to the influence that donors can have on organizations’ agendas and programs. In relation to the quote of Mandy, power is visible in how bigger donors can influence the ability of Mandy to make impact at the “core of the problem”. Instead, donors

have the control to focus on “their own idea of what is needed”. Therefore, in relation to financial flows, employees experience tension in relation to the influence that donors have. The power that donors have, cause employees to struggle to live up to the norms and values of the organization to make an impact at the core problem. Instead, the donor requirements make that this impact has to fit in with their ideas.

Mandy is not the only employee that experiences tensions in relation to the requirements of donors. During my interview with Sendy, she pointed to how she is navigating between the need of projects on the grass-root level and the requirements of donors. While talking about the struggle of finding donors for the subject of FGC, she said: “When we have a proposal, we will collect all the content from our African colleagues and use it to write a concept together with my African partners, which will then be further shaped by our communication colleagues to fit with how the fund wants it”. According to Sendy, proposals are written and shaped, together with African partners to fit to funding requirements. Similarly, during my interview with Mandy, she said;

Our job is to make sure that their ideas from the country offices also match what the offices in the north are asking at that time. [...] So, suppose an EU comes and asks the office in Ghana to work with us. Then we look at what Ghana wants and what the EU wants. Then we will translate that, because Ghana does not know how the EU thinks and how proposals are judged, so then we will work on it together.

According to Mandy, proposals are translated in a way that ideas of country offices and the EU match. The quote shows that Mandy is constantly navigating between the country’s offices and the EU by saying that “they make sure that the ideas from the country’s offices” match “what the EU wants”. The way Sendy and Mandy navigate the requirements of donors, and the need of projects at the grassroot level, relates to what Bornstein and Sharma (2016), call “technomoral” techniques. NGOs increasingly use technomoral techniques to navigate their political relationships. The term technomoral politics refers to how diverse social actors transform moral goals into technical, implementable terms such as laws or policies, as well as how they explain technocratic activities (Bornstein and Sharma 2016, 77-78). For example, development and administrative reform legislation as moral imperatives (Bornstein and Sharma 2016, 77). In other words, NGOs have the ability to exert influence through the use of pronounced technocratic language to further their own moral goals. In relation to Sendy and Mandy, they use technocratic language in mediating between the grass-root level and the donors, by rewriting proposals in order to fit donor requirements. Rewriting proposals becomes

a form of power and a political act, by the ability to translate two ideas into one (Bornstein and Sharma 2016, 77-79). Therefore, employees, are constantly navigating between the control of donors and the needs at the grass-root level. An example of how employees are navigating these power dynamics, is by using technocratic language, which helps them to live up to the organizations norms and values.

Not only international organizations are struggling with finances in relation to FGC. The organizations working on fighting FGC in the Netherlands, started their current projects by the request of the Minister Hans Hoogervorst from MHWS around 2005. Due to the increasing influx of immigrants from FGC practicing countries, FGC became a returning issue in the Netherlands (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport 2005). A chain of organizations, mostly health organizations, started this project five years ago, with the goal to improve the prevention, detection, and prosecution of FGC in the Netherlands. Nowadays, the subsidies of the projects have stopped. Instead, the MHWS sends subsidies to municipalities as part of broader theme. Namely, harmful practices. Noraly, a policy officer of MHWS, explained in a meeting of project leaders on FGC I attended on the 15th of March 2022, that:

What can be done from the government is to give extra resources from the municipality. However, we cannot actually impose any conditions, because based on the way the system is set up they can decide for themselves how to spend that money. So, claiming subsidies varies greatly per municipality. (Fieldnotes, Participant Observation, 15 March 2022)

According to Noraly, the system works in a way that municipalities can decide themselves on where to spend money on, and that how accessing resources varies between municipalities. This means that accessing resources is different for each specific municipality, and that therefore, employees depend on their own municipality. This system is part of the reason why employees experience tension in adherence the organizations norms and values, as they encounter difficulties within the complexity of claiming resources to continue their projects.

The ability to secure the continuity of the projects in relation to the accessibility of budgets is something that employees worry about. On the 13th of April 2022, I interviewed Myrte, one of the project leaders from the center of expertise on health differences. She emphasized that: “How financing flows run and how politics determines whether a theme is important or not makes the continuity of such a theme complicated.” According to Myrte, the politics play a role in determining if a theme is important or not. The way Myrte connects this to the influence of the continuity of a project, points to the dependency on money. Myrte was not alone in this. Celeste, the project leader of harmful practices working for a Dutch health

organization, who I interviewed on the 21st of April 2022, explained that: “Sometimes you have to be lucky. We did a lot of lobbying at the municipality and then it turned out that one of the youth councilors promoted the theme. That helped a lot in putting FGC on the agenda within the municipal council.” In Celeste’s view, there is a dependency of who makes decisions on budgets, by emphasizing that you have to be lucky with someone promoting the theme in order to continue projects. Therefore, organizations in the Netherlands are exposed to power dynamics in relation to institutional power. In this case, the government has the ability to decide what projects they subsidize, and are thereby controlling the continuity of FGC related projects (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). Employees experience tension since they have to focus on the continuity of projects and their access to needed resources, instead of their organizations norms and values.

Thus, employees struggle to adhere to the organizations norms and values, because of tensions in relation to financial flows. Funding organizations have the ability to influence employee’s behavior towards living up to organizations norms and values. These funding organizations have the power to ask for donor requirements that fit their own ideas, instead of the ability of employees to make impact at the core of the problem. Another way that employees struggle to live up to the organization’s norms and values, is through the experienced tensions of worrying about the continuity of their projects. These worries come from the constant search for access to needed resources, which is very dependent on the Dutch governments’ decisions on subsidies. Thereby, employees are constantly navigating power dynamics by the ability of actors surrounding their organization that have the ability to control the decision-making process and their behavior (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008).

Stuck in crisis

Another way employees experience tensions while living up to organizations norms and values, is through power dynamics in situations of crisis. Hage (2009, 463-475), defines crisis as a severe emergency or condition, in which the functioning of a project becomes seriously disrupted. He studied how the social and historical conditions of crisis leads to an increased feeling of not being able to go somewhere, by experiencing the feeling of being stuck. I argue that in times of crisis, employees struggle with their own norms and values, which create tensions within the organizations culture. The reason for this is that on the one hand, the organizations that employees work for have the ambition to work towards ending FGC. While on the other hand, situations may arise in times of crisis that have more urgency in the country

at that moment. I will explain this by giving two examples: the extreme draught in Kenya, and the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

One way in which employees experience tensions in situations of crisis can be explained by the example of Lyan, the program manager of an international girls rights organization who I interviewed on the 31st of March 2022. During our interview we discussed the extreme draught crisis in Kenya, where, at that moment, many people are suffering from a shortage of food. Lyan explained how in this situation the draught in Kenya is seen as a way more urgent problem compared to FGC. According to Lyan, it is very difficult to continue FGC related programs of her organization in such situations. The situation in Kenya made Lyan feel uncomfortable, as she said; “I really have trouble with that.” Lyan clarified the impact of the donors who continue to ask for requirements in times of crisis. Donors require a financial report every half year. For these financial reports, offices at the grass-root level need to deliver reports about the progress of the project. According to Lyan, it is not manageable to commit to these donor requirements in times of crisis. Lyan continued the conversation by explaining that everything has to be measured. The conversation with Lyan explained how donor requirements can impact employees by situating them in difficult positions by requiring them to respect local communities in crisis, but simultaneously respect the donor requirements which ask for reports which show the progress of the programs. Lyan substantiated this by saying that: “donor requirements often push you into a corner”. (Lyan, interview, 31 March 2022). How Hage (2009, 463-475) described how crisis can cause a sense of stuckedness, this is similarly to Lyan describing how donors can push you into a corner in times of crisis. This sense of stuckedness is relatable to the encountered tension between being situated between the donor requirements, the ambition of the organization Lyan works for, her own norms and values, and her relation with the offices in the country in crisis.

Another example of when a crisis situation became more urgent than the organizations goal to end FGC was the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. During the workshop I attended on the 7th of February 2022, the effects of COVID-19 were discussed in relation to the visibility, prevalence and prevention of FGC in different countries in Africa. Employees of Plan International explained how in Somalia, the lockdown led to a large increase of the practice of FGC. The economic downturn motivated circumcision workers, to go door by door to circumcise girls. This led to more invisibility of the practice of FGC (Plan International 2020). Thereby, COVID-19 made that the urgency of fighting FGC diminished in the ongoing projects that employees in the Netherlands work for, since fighting corona itself became more urgent within the countries (Fieldnotes, Participant observation, 7 February 2022). This relates to

employees feeling stuck while working in times of crisis (Hage 2009). Employees mentioned that times of crisis put them in circumstances where they had to make key decisions about what it means to act morally between making a decision to move forward and finishing a project. Employees were caught between the ambitions of the organization towards ending FGC, and the reality that COVID-19 increased the invisibility of FGC, and that the urgency of FGC that diminished due to COVID-19. Hence, working on FGC related programs in times of crisis comes with tensions that influence the ability of employees working on the organizations' norms and values.

The two given examples, relate to a study by Ferguson (2009), who observed, that even the most powerful players in development institutions are frequently hindered in their pursuit of their goals and often fail. Ferguson critiques the tendency for failing development projects to be hailed as successes based on a skewed, retrospective explanation of their effectiveness in resulting in better programs. During my fieldwork I spoke to various employees who referred to the fact that times of crisis brought them in situations in which they had to decide to continue, and achieving the aimed result of a project, in which the question of what it means to do good becomes critical. The examples given of extreme draught and COVID-19 relate to Ferguson's study in that various development projects often fail, because in situations of crisis employees struggle, or are not able to continue working on their FGC related projects. However, Ferguson claims that these failing projects, are sometimes turned into successes. In my research, it became evident that crisis situation resulted in the experience of tensions for employees, since the expectations of donors remain, while the situation demand other priorities. Nonetheless, employees recognize that such expectations of donors are not self-evident in times of crisis.

Thus, employees experience tensions in relation to crisis situations, while working on FGC related programs. During crisis situations, employees realize that there can be more urgent subjects appearing than focusing on FGC. However, the fact that donors still expect employees to commit to the donor requirements, make that employees experience tension. This tension is present in the way employees are feeling a sense of stuckedness (Hage 2002), because the donor requirements ask for commitments, which employees cannot provide. This tension makes that employees find it difficult to live up to the shared ambition of their organization of working towards ending FGC, and their own norms and values that understand that in times of crisis other subjects than FGC can be considered more urgent.

In Sum

Employees navigate various power dynamics in various forms of tension. These tensions make that employees struggle with living to organizations' norms and values. Employees encounter the dependency on other organizations involved with their projects on FGC. The dependency of others to achieve goals, is related to power (Schuller 2012, 175). Funding organizations have the power to be decisive, because employees are dependent on the funding of projects. These dependencies make that employees are constantly navigating power dynamics to adhere to their organizations norms and values, related to increasing the involvement of country offices, and collaborations with key persons. Furthermore, employees struggle to adhere to the organization's norms and values, because of tensions in relation to financial flows. Funding organizations have the ability to influence employee's behavior towards living up to organizations norms and values. These funding organizations have the power to ask for donor requirements that fit their own ideas, instead of the ability of employees to make impact at the core of the problem by involving country offices. Besides, employees experience tensions about worrying about the continuity of their projects. These worries come from the constant search for access to needed resources, which is very dependent on the Dutch government's decisions on subsidies. Therefore, employees are constantly navigating power dynamics by the ability of actors surrounding their organization that have the ability to control their decision-making and behavior (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). Moreover, employees experience tensions in relation to crisis situations, while working on FGC related programs. These tensions create a feeling of a sense of stuckness (Hage 2002). Therefore, employees find it difficult to live up to the shared ambition of them and the organization of working towards ending FGC, and their own norms and values that understand that in times of crisis other subjects than FGC can be considered more urgent.

Chapter Two : Stigmatizing knowledge

During my interview with Florian, the project leader working at an international health organization, who I introduced at the beginning of Chapter one, we spoke about the goal of the organization she works for in relation to FGC. Florian explained the organization's goal of changing health systems in Africa, so that people have better access to health care. According to Florian, that is not only building hospitals, or training health care providers, but also offering prevention by making sure that people know where to access health care. An example she gave, is how in a community of nomads in Kenia who migrate with their cattle, FGC is very common as a transition for girls to become a women, and thereby marriage candidates. However, for people living in these remote areas it is difficult to access health care. Florian said:

But a lot of girls died as well, and that is where we try to help to improve the preventive health care of this community. We started to look at how can we educate people and actually ensure that they would no longer practice FGC, because it is so harmful and not medically necessary. Of course those are all universal aspects. However, in the 90s it was established that FGC is a violation of women's and human rights and we adhere to that, even though we understand that in the culture where those women live, FGC has been practiced for years and decades. We also see that sometimes it is not necessarily the integrity of the girl herself that is violated, because we see that there are a lot of people who actually do not know what is happening. We find that many men do not really know what is happening to women in their communities. So our first step is to inform people and show them what FGC is really like. [...] So we are looking at what is the reason you practice FGC? With this we want to elicit the making of an informed decision, rather than people naturally getting circumcised, or under social pressure. So starting that conversation and starting that dialogue is actually a very important starting point from our point of view (Florien, interview, 30 March 2022).

In this quote Florian explains the organizations focus on health care, by saying that they are trying to help improving the preventive health care. According to Florian, there is a need to educate people towards working on ending FGC, by saying that FGC is “harmful and not medically necessary.” In addition she mentioned that FGC is a “violation of women’s and human rights.” Interesting is that Florian points to the fact that often people do not know what is happening in communities, for example by saying men who do not really know what is happening to women in their communities. With not really know, Florian refers to that people in communities do not know what FGC really is, by saying “So our first step is to inform people

and show them what FGC is really like.” What I conclude from the quote of Florien is that in her view more knowledge on what FGC is, would help towards people elicit the making of an informed decision. Various views on knowledge concerning FGC, is what has been a returning theme during my conversations with employees working with FGC.

Anthropologists study knowledge in various ways. In the context of the social connections that people maintain, Barth (2002, 1) explains how bodies of knowledge are formed in people and communities. He contends that knowledge changes both within local human groups and between individuals. Barth (2002, 2) argues that although experience is the foundation of most knowledge, it never becomes subjective. Therefore, a big part of everyone's knowledge is conventional, because of the production of knowledge in traditions that we are all part of (Barth 2002, 2). Similarly, Russell (1948, 9) notes that a person's knowledge is based on his or her own unique experiences. By relying on judgements based on the validity standards we accept, but especially by depending on what other people whose opinions we trust tell us what they believe, each of us increases the scope of our knowledge. Foucault studies how power and knowledge are related, by arguing that one cannot exist without the other. Power reproduces knowledge and knowledge reproduces power (Foucault 1972-1977, 98). Foucault studied the function of discourse in society, and claimed that discourse acts as a control mechanism and an imposition of power through the episteme, which is a knowledge-power complex. For example, certain objects are identified and categorized using one set of knowledge claims that distinguishes what is regarded to as normative or not. Through categorization, the difference between the abnormal and the normal is established, and any societal sanctions for dealing with the abnormal are based on this knowledge. People in society are able to comprehend their own place within this episteme thanks to the knowledge-power complex. In relation to FGC, this power-knowledge complex emerged during my fieldwork by various prejudices on knowledge about FGC. This constitutes as described by Walley (1997, 429), “a generic ‘they’ who conduct such practices and a generic ‘we’ who do not” (Walley 1997, 429).

This chapter shows how employees explain that more knowledge on FGC in practicing communities, and for health professionals would help towards ending FGC. In relation to the purpose of this thesis, I argue that employees navigate power dynamics by unconsciously contributing to a world in which stigmatization continues. In this chapter, I first explain that employees encounter that within communities that practice FGC there is an existing unawareness of FGC being a harmful practice. Secondly, I explain that employees encounter that Dutch health professionals are often unaware of what FGC is, and struggle with being culturally sensitive.

Practicing communities

A recurring topic among the employees I spoke to was that within communities that practice FGC, there is an existing unawareness of FGC being a harmful practice. Several employees indicated that this is an aspect they are working on to ensure that FGC can be ended. I found that employees constantly name that within communities that practice FGC, people are not aware that FGC is a harmful practice. Therefore I argue, that employees navigate power dynamics through forms of opposition and are because of this unwittingly part of a world in which stigmatization continues.

Sendy, the program manager I interviewed on the 14th of April 2022, explained how there exists ignorance on FGC being a harmful practice. She said:

What I notice from conversations with my colleagues who really have conversations with former circumcision workers, is that they often just do not know that FGC is very harmful. When former circumcision workers continue to have those conversations they gain insight, and become aware of the harmfulness of FGC. Finding out that they have always done this without actually knowing that FGC has always been harmful, really shocks former circumcision workers and gives them an enormous sense of guilt. You also see this in Tanzania. There I encountered a former circumcision worker who is now the biggest advocate against circumcision. She just got that insight on that FGC is harmful, and comes with consequences related to giving birth. Why women bleed to death or why women become very unhappy, or emotional, and experiencing mental stress in the form of trauma? A lot of women and former circumcision workers do not really know that. So, to what extent do they have some kind of good option to make a decision about whether this is good or bad, especially if you do not know better (Sendy, Interview, 14 April 2022).

Sendy gives the example of a Tanzanian woman who finds out that the practice of FGC is harmful because of the conversations with her about the risks of FGC. According to Sendy, the reason why FGC is still an issue, is because in her example former circumcision workers are not aware of the harmfulness of FGC. In her view, assessing that often women and former circumcision workers are not aware of FGC being harmful can have an effect on ending the practice of FGC. Sendy is not alone in this assumption, For example, Mandy has the similar assumption of that not knowing that FGC is a harmful practice, is one of the reasons why FGC is still practiced today. During my conversation with Mandy on the 24th of February 2022, the program officer of an International girls rights organization in the Netherlands, we spoke about how often people do not talk about FGC within communities. Mandy said:

We try to make sure that discussions take place and that people start looking critically at FGC and how terrible it is for their children, even though they do not talk about the consequences. That is what we try to do. Talk about the consequences, because many women do not talk about it. If it turns out that during conversations women do experience many disadvantages, it often brings them to their senses (Mandy, interview, 24 February 2022).

According to the quote, Mandy's view is that women do not talk about the consequences of FGC. In her view, talking about the disadvantages of FGC for women, would make that women would change their opinion on FGC. What I conclude from the conversations with Sendy and Mandy, is that in their view learning more about FGC being a harmful practice, would be helpful. Then, is the knowledge they had before becoming aware of FGC being a harmful practice bad? The interviews with Sendy and Mandy show that subconsciously making an assumption on what is right or wrong knowledge in relation to FGC is quickly done.

While talking about FGC, and the assumption on what is right or wrong knowledge, I find it interesting to point out that my research participants use the term FGC as harmful, as if it is one specific practice. However, the anthropologist Ahmadu (2012, 283-310) who did undergo the practice of FGC herself, points out that FGC does not always come with negative health effects. In her view, Western ideologies do not completely understand what FGC is. This shows the complexity of the term FGC and knowledge, and how this is used differently. This refers back to how Barth (2002, 1) and Russel (1948, 9) explained how knowledge changes both within local human groups and between individuals, and how knowledge relies on judgements based on the validity of standards we accept. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is a difference between Dutch employees considering FGC as harmful, and Ahmadu pointing out that FGC is not always as harmful as it seems. This difference can be explained by Sendy, Mandy, and Ahmadu all being different individuals situated in certain local human groups with different accepted standards they are used to. According to Foucault (1972-1977, 98), discourse in society acts as a control mechanism and an imposition of power. An example is how objects are categorized, and how through categorization differences are made between what is normal and abnormal, and any societal sanctions for dealing with the abnormal are based on this knowledge. Foucault argues that people in society are able to comprehend their own place within this episteme thanks to the knowledge-power complex. In relation to my thesis power is visible in the ability of employees to refer to FGC as a negative practice by calling it

harmful, while Ahmadu (2012, 283-310) states that FGC does not always come with negative health effects. This shows the existing oppositions surrounding the practice of FGC.

Scholars that have criticized the making of distinctions are Said (1978), Hall (1993) and, Gupta and Ferguson (1992). Said (1978), looked at distinctions in the form of worldviews that believed that the West was superior over the East. He argued that years of colonial rule had given some groups in society greater political and economic power, making them more likely to shape or determine the culture in which both the more powerful and the more disempowered groups of people within that society live. In a similar manner, Hall (1993, 60) discusses how the dichotomy between the West and the Rest draws simplified distinctions and builds an exaggerated idea of difference. Distinctions between cultures are what binds them together and makes for example everything that is distinct from the West to be referred to as the Rest (Hall 1993, 60). Gupta and Ferguson (1992, 7), studied cultural critique, and argued that the world keeps making distinctions by referring to our own society and other societies. They criticize how diverse categories of opposition, such as here and there, us and them, are taken for granted. For anthropologists, the difficulty is to utilize our interaction with them, and there, to construct a critique of our own society, here. Gupta and Ferguson (1993, 13-14) raise the question of who is we, which comes in expressions like ourselves, and our own society.

The way Gupta and Ferguson point to raising the question of who is we, this can be related to questions surrounding FGC, like why are we not looking at how cosmetic surgeries and procedures at the uterus are socially accepted in Western cultures? (Gruenbaum 2000, 72). Fusaschi (2022) argues that there is a selective production of knowledge about FGC that causes social and political polarization to intensify between practices labeled as harmful, modern, accessible and empowering. I argue that employees are unconsciously part of this selective production of knowledge in which they live in the Western culture in which cosmetic surgeries on the uterus is socially accepted, and in which they work on raising awareness in communities of how FGC is a harmful practice (Gruenbaum 2000, 72).

On the 31st of March I met Simone, with whom I talked about trainings she gives to men and women in refugee centers in order to provide more knowledge on the regulations and health impact in relation to FGC in the Netherlands. Simone is a friendly, very lively, and busy women who has been very committed to working on FGC related projects. Simone works for a regional health organization, and is often involved with training key persons. What stuck out the most from my interview with Simone was that there are women who find out that FGC is a harmful practice only after coming to the Netherlands. In addition, there are also women who learn that there are also women who have not been circumcised after coming to the Netherlands. Simone

explained how these moments often cause emotional situations, because “then they experience their history and unnecessary pain again” (Simone, Interview, 31 March 2022). The impact of women becoming aware of the damaging effects of FGC, is also studied by Jordal et al.(2019, 708). They describe the impact by how women start viewing their genitals as damaged, deformed, ugly, and invoked with feelings of shame. This is when their genitals became a sign of stigma (Goffman 1963, 5), and looking at their genitals evoked negative emotions (Jordal et al. 2019, 708). Brewis and Wutich (2018) define a stigma as the process through which persons are socially discredited by being identified with an unwanted or unacceptable quality. How employees keep referring to FGC as a harmful practice, and how this information on FGC being a harmful practice is received by circumcised women, shows how persons are socially discredited by being identified with an unwanted or unacceptable quality. Therefore, I argue that subconsciously employees contribute to stigmatizing people from communities where FGC is practiced by referring to them as people who do undergo harmful practices.

The employees I spoke to frequently brought up the issue of communities that engage in FGC being ignorant of the practice's negative effects. Several employees stated that they are focusing on this issue to make sure that FGC can be stopped. Employees constantly navigate power dynamics through forms of opposition, assumptions what is right or wrong knowledge, and continuously referring to FGC as a harmful practice. I argue that thereby, employees contribute to a world in which stigmatization is subconsciously continuing.

Health professionals

During their work on FGC related programs, employees find that Dutch health professionals are often unaware of what FGC is, and struggle with being culturally sensitive. Professionals dealing with FGC must act according to their reporting code. Every organization and self-employed person must have a reporting code according to the Act Mandatory Reporting Code for Domestic Violence and Child Abuse. Policy in the Netherlands is primarily aimed at preventing a girl from being circumcised. If prevention has failed, repression or law enforcement comes into play (Pharos 2019). During my fieldwork it was often mentioned by employees that acting according the reporting code is something that health professionals struggle with. Health professionals unawareness about the topic of FGC is something that many employees I spoke to encountered as something that limits their way in working on their FGC related programs. In this section I argue that the stigmatization is perpetuated by constantly acknowledging that health professionals are often unaware of what FGC is, and that they struggle with being cultural sensitive.

As described in chapter one, organizations fighting FGC in the Netherlands created a whole network to prevent FGC, but also to offer aftercare to circumcised women. On the 22nd of April 2022 I spoke with Stefanie, researcher, and an academic lecturer with a focus on international law, human rights, and FGC. During my interview with Stefanie, we talked about FGC related programs internationally and in the Netherlands. Stefanie is often involved with FGC related projects and works on research on FGC in the Netherlands. She does this in collaboration with some of the involved organizations in my research. When talking about the Netherlands, we discussed the importance of involvement of health professionals on the topic of FGC, such as family doctors and midwives. Stefanie said:

There is really a lack of knowledge and if you do not know the practice of FGC and in which communities FGC is practiced then you will of course not ask about it. Or you do not dare to ask about it, or you ask it in a retarded way. This is what happens and you cannot blame them because they really have no idea that they are completely missing the point. That is worrisome, because as a result women do not get the right care when they really need it, and girls are still at risk, because important signals are being missed. There are still girls who were born in the Netherlands and who are circumcised in their country of origin (Stefanie, Interview, 22 April 2022).

According to Stefanie, it is worrisome that Dutch health professionals are often unaware of what the practice of FGC entails. In addition, Stefanie points out that there are also health professionals that are afraid to ask about FGC, or do this in a simplified manner. As a result Stefanie said that women do not get the proper and required care, and this is a risk for girls in the Netherlands because there are still girls in the Netherlands who do get circumcised in the country of origin. However, Stefanie said that Dutch health professionals cannot be blamed, since they have 'no clue'. Stefanie is not alone in noticing that health professionals are often unaware of what FGC is, and how to handle situations in which FGC appears. For example Celeste, the project leader who I introduced in chapter one, said:

Family doctors in particular, of course, have very little to do with FGC. We have noticed so many times that they just do not make the connection between psychosomatic complaints and urinary tract infections that people have six times. They just do not ask about FGC. That is one thing we have on the agenda for this year. We also want to train general family doctors. A webinar is also being developed on a national level, so we definitely want to use that, because they do not get involved with FGC very often, and

women do not just say 'I have been circumcised'. So they often do not make that link.
(Celeste, interview, 21 April 2022)

In the quote from Celeste, it is explained how family doctors are not often exposed to situation in which FGC appears. Celeste adds that if a patient is suffering from symptoms associated with FGC, family doctors often do not bring FGC to the attention. According to Celeste, this is an issue that is being brought to greater attention. The reasons Celeste gives, is that family doctors often do not get involved with FGC, do not make the link between complaints and FGC, and women do not bring it to their attention themselves. Interestingly, Stefanie, Celeste, and other employees used the designation “shyness of action” during interviews. This term is used to refer to the failure to discuss FGC when necessary. Employees see this as a problem of health professionals that has to be improved. Stefanie referred to the shyness of action by saying:

It is not only the knowledge about the practice, but also just understanding the practice. That is also something that is very important and which is very much underestimated. So it is the combination of that. Not knowing the practice and not knowing how to act or how to interpret things. This makes that having the conversation is of course very difficult.
(Stefanie, Interview, 22 April 2022).

According to Stefanie, the shyness of action does not only relate to knowledge about, and understanding of FGC, but it is also about how to interpret or act in situations where FGC appears. In her view it is a form of being aware of FGC, and a form of cultural sensitivity. Therefore, Stefanie and Celeste both point to the need of raising more awareness surrounding the practice of FGC to Dutch health professionals, since this is something employees encounter during working on FGC related projects. Another situation in which a form of shyness of action occurred, was during the online meeting that I attended on the 4th of April 2022, for project leaders of FGC in the Netherlands. During the meeting it was brought to the attention that shyness of action often occurs, because the procedure of asking about FGC is not normalized. It was discussed that if the situation is not considered to be urgent, that health professionals do not bring FGC to the attention during contact moments. However, during the meeting it was agreed upon that asking about FGC is part of the job of health professionals when they are in contact with people from communities where FGC is practiced (Fieldnotes, Participant observation, 4 April 2022). It refers to the knowledge of health professionals as in not being aware of what FGC is or how to act in relation to the practice. Which relates to Barth (2002) saying that that knowledge varies both within local human groups and between individuals. In

relation to Foucault (1972-1977, 98), employees refer to that it should be normal that health professionals bring FGC to the attention when needed. However, Stefanie said that often health professionals cannot do anything about this. Therefore, employees situated themselves within a knowledge-power complex by taking action in order to raise more awareness on FGC to health professionals.

During their work on FGC related programs, employees find that Dutch health professionals are often unaware of what FGC is, and struggle with being culturally sensitive. During my fieldwork it is often mentioned that employees encounter this as something they run into while working on their FGC related programs. I argue that using the term shyness of action is problematic. I argue that referring to the term shyness of action comes with a negative undertone. The one with which health professionals are portrayed of being unaware, and do not know how to act in relation to FGC. This negative undertone makes that health professionals are being identified with an unwanted quality, in this case the shyness of action. Hereby, I state that referring to health professionals experiencing shyness of action makes that employees without realizing contribute to a world in which stigmatization is unconsciously continuing.

In sum

The employees I spoke with frequently brought up the issue of communities that engage in FGC being ignorant of the practice's negative effects. Several employees stated that they are focusing on this issue to make sure that FGC can be stopped. Employees constantly navigate power dynamics through forms of opposition, assumptions what is right or wrong knowledge, and continuously referring to FGC as a harmful practice. Furthermore, employees encounter that Dutch health professionals are often unaware of what FGC is, and struggle with being culturally sensitive. Employees often use the term shyness of action, which refers to health professionals being unaware, and do not know how to act in relation to FGC. Constantly referring to the unawareness of FGC being a harmful practice, and using the term shyness of action makes that employees subconsciously contribute to a world in which stigmatization is continuing.

Chapter Three: The behavior of employees

One of the main themes during my research with employees working on FGC related programs, was understanding the reasons why FGC is being practiced. For example, during my interview with Florien on the 30th of March 2022, who I introduced in chapter one, he explained how the reasons of why FGC is practiced are very diverse depending on the country, region, and community. According to Florien, her and her colleagues always search for the reasons why communities practice FGC. She said: “you just cannot ignore that if you want to develop a good and effective program.” Furthermore, she explained that in considering the reasons why FGC is practiced, she lives up to the ambition of the International health organization she works for. She said:

We have the ambition to have all of Africa free of FGC by 2030. That is, of course, a very bold ambition. You can say not achievable, but you have to aim for the stars. So we are much less relativistic about it, because we really do want FGC to stop and disappear. But we also realize, that it is not our choices. We choose not to make the final considerations and choices. You only achieve change when you make sure that everyone understands what the considerations are. Therefore, having the dialogue is important to achieve what we want to achieve. We do really want to get rid of FGC, but we know that the way to get there is not as universalistic as it is sometimes thought to be. You have to know how to give and take, and approach each other. Otherwise you will not get there. (Florien, interview, 30 March 2022)

According to Florien, the organization she works for aims to make Africa FGC free by 2030. However, she does acknowledge that this will not be easy, and that in order to achieve this it is important to realize that they cannot do this alone. In her view, the final choices can only be made with going in dialogue with communities in which FGC is practiced. Florien explains the importance of understanding, and knowing how to approach each other. According to Florien, the only way to reach the ambition to end FGC, is to do this in collaboration with others. Collaborating with African colleagues is what Florien said to be the nicest part of her job. Especially, having conversations about what they are doing, and what they encounter during their job. She said: “It inspires me enormously, and gives a lot of relevance to work, and hearing how projects are turning out there.” In addition she explained that she does not have trouble with being situated in the Netherlands, because she and her colleagues fulfill another important role, namely; “create money and the possibilities so that they can do their job even better” (Florien, interview, 30 March 2022). How Florien is situated in the Netherlands, and works

with colleagues in Africa, is part of the organizations' structure.

Within anthropology, structure has been studied by many scholars. According to Galtung (1969, 175), for a particular set of actors, the set of systems of interaction can be referred to as a structure. Another study by Giddens, examines how structures are created through action, and how structure influences the production of action (Giddens 2007; Karp 1986, 134). This relates to the study of Durkheim (1933), who studied social structures, by examining that actions of individuals are shaped by the workings of society (Rapport and Overing 2000, 1). He claimed that interdependence among societal components imposes structure on how institutions and their constituents behave. In other words, Durkheim held that outside factors have an impact on each person's behavior. Focusing on structures provides an insightful framework for the examination how employees work on FGC within the structure of their organization. Hence, it provides a language to understand how employees behavior is influenced while working on FGC related programs.

In this chapter I show how in working towards ending FGC, employees find it important to understand and consider the difference in cultural and traditional aspects of why FGC is practiced. In doing this, I show how employees encounter various power dynamics in the form of tensions surrounding universalism, cultural relativism, and their own agency. In this chapter I argue that while working on FGC related programs, employees are limited in their acts of agency by the structure within the organizations they work for. I will first explain how employees experience tension while trying to understand the different cultural and traditional aspects of FGC. Secondly, I examine how employees experience tensions while working towards ending FGC. Thirdly, I explain how working on FGC related projects influences employees agency.

Understanding the reasons why

During my fieldwork I spoke with various employees about the importance of understanding why FGC is practiced. Within anthropology there have been various studies on the importance of trying to understand the various contexts and settings of cultures. For example, through the concept of cultural relativism. Cultural relativism is an anthropological ideology and perspective with which it is argued that one culture should not be evaluated by the standards of other cultures, but by its own history and environment (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001, 58). Cultural relativists believe that all cultures are equal and that there is no universal or ideal way of life. Instead, everything is relative to the context and cultural setting (Danial 2006, 2). Cultural relativists make numerous arguments, all of which derive from the view that by ignoring and

prohibiting distinct traditions, individuals lose their cultural identity (Reichert 2006). What cultural relativists say is that cultural transformation cannot, and should not be forced on anybody. Instead, cultural changes should take place organically from within the culture. For example, through forms of local activists, as a consequence of generational shifts, through an increased access to information, or through education (Dahre 2017). Focusing on cultural relativism provides an insightful framework for the examination of why employees find it important for employees to understand why FGC is practiced. Hence, it provides a language to understand why it is important to look at cultures in relation to the context and the setting, in order to work towards changing the practice of FGC without individuals losing their cultural identity. Furthermore, the framework will help in showing how employees experience tensions in their search for understanding the reasons why FGC is practiced.

Mandy, who I introduced in chapter one, explained to me during our interview that there are different underlying reasons of why FGC is practiced. She said:

We also do not say 'you guys are really awful'. We do not approach people who undergo FGC or who have their children circumcised as 'oh, how awful'. But we look at the different reasons behind it. There are different reasons why someone decides to circumcise a child. Not out of hatred or anything like that, but out of protecting. You are part of a community and your security is not guaranteed because then you are resilient. So it is all done from the right intentions. We try to address those underlying reasons. Does a girl necessarily have to be circumcised to get married or become an adult? (Mandy, Interview, 24 February 2022).

According to Mandy, the reasons why FGC is practiced differs. As shown in the quote, Mandy explains that the way to approach people is important, because often FGC is not practiced out of hate, but out of protection. In her view, it is important to address the reasons why FGC is practiced, because this will help in asking relevant questions while addressing the practice of FGC within communities. Mandy is not alone in this assumption, many other employees I talked to have similar views on how it is important to understand why FGC is practiced. For example Florian, she explained the importance of studying why FGC is practiced, before starting a project to “look at what is going on in the community, to see why do people do what they do.”. According to Florian, this is important at the beginning of a project to see what the situation is with the subject that you are going to work on. Especially to find out “what the knowledge and background is”. In Florian’s view, this is important to understand why people do what they do (Florien, Interview, 30 March 2022). As the interview continued, Florian

explained that the organization she works for often works with an Alternative Rite of Passage approach (ARP). Because, in various communities FGC is practiced as a rite of passage, which is a ceremony or ritual through which young girls can become a women. However, Florian emphasized that ARP does not always work everywhere, because of the variety of reasons why FGC is practiced in various communities. She said;

Because the intrinsic motivation is very diverse. For example, the project in Ethiopia, where we also work on female circumcision. There, children are already circumcised as babies seven days after birth in areas. There, for example, developing a new rite of passage does not work. There we started looking at what is the reason people do it? Is the motivation then related to the Islamic religion? It wasn't, but then what is it? It turned out to be really socially and culturally motivated, so we looked at how we could bring this up. Who do we need to influence, and then we involved health extension workers and pregnant mothers in order to talk about their intentions as to whether or not they wanted to circumcise their daughters. So you need a whole different approach to that. So you just cannot ignore things like that if you want to develop a good and effective program. (Florien, Interview, 30 March 2022)

According to Florian, finding the reason for practicing FGC, helps in developing good and effective programs. Florian emphasizes that this will help to find out how to approach the community in order to influence their thoughts on FGC. In the quote, Florian names numerous reasons why FGC is practiced in communities. For example as a rite of passage, as part of the Islamic religion, or because of socially and culturally motivations. Florian also emphasizes in the quote that the reasons why FGC is practiced, leads her and her colleagues to the people who they need to have the conversations with. In her view, it is important to talk to those people to learn their intentions, and to find out if they agreed with having their children circumcised or not. This points to the fact that FGC is also practiced without mothers permission. During my interview with Simone, she gave another reason why FGC is practiced, by explaining how FGC is often practiced out of the love from mother to daughter, which is related to parents who let their daughters being circumcised in order to become a good marriage candidate (Simone, Interview, 31 March 2022). Furthermore, according to Celeste, another reasons why FGC is being practiced, is out of social pressure, which is related to the fact that circumcision makes a daughter a good candidate for marriage (Celeste, Interview, 21 April 2022). These examples together, show that there is not one universal reason for practicing FGC. This relates to, as described in the introduction of this chapter, why the practice of FGC should not be lumped

into one specific practice, since the practice varies, and the practice can vary per country, region, and communities (Walley 1997, 429).

Employees find it important to consider the culture and traditions of communities where FGC is practiced. Trying to understand the practice of FGC, makes that employees encounter tension by constantly searching for reasons why FGC is practiced in a specific country, area, and community. Thereby, employees constantly change their programs approach in order to create a successful project. Employees want to respect the communities that practice FGC, by understanding the reason why FGC is practiced. However, understanding this is complex, since there are many reasons why FGC is practiced, which makes it difficult for employees to fully grasp an understanding.

Working towards ending FGC

The importance of understanding the reasons why FGC is practiced, is not the only aspect that employees working with FGC take into consideration. There is also the fact that employees I spoke to work for organizations with the goal to end the practice of FGC. In the Netherlands the practice of FGC is forbidden by law, and often referred to as a harmful practice. However, while working towards ending the practice of FGC, employees explained how they encounter various forms of tension. These tensions exist in that even though employees acknowledge the importance of taking the reasons why FGC is practiced into consideration, they still hold on to the fact that FGC is a harmful practice that has to end.

The fact that employees agree on the fact that FGC is a harmful practice, has something to do with the fact that FGC is forbidden by law, as agreed upon by many countries, and incorporated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The concept of universalism relates to these agreements on human rights. Universalism is often perceived as an ideology that beliefs there is only one truth and that people have the same rights at all time regardless of one's gender, race, culture, nationality, religion, age, and sexuality (Danial 2006). Human rights are globally agreed-upon ideals, standards, and laws that strive to control each state and its residents, based on this universal worldview (Reichert 2006). While human rights are universally recognized, it is apparent that Western principles of individuality have influenced them, allowing everyone to enjoy the same rights regardless of their history or circumstances (Reichert 2006, 25). Universalists, such as Reichter (2006, 26-27) argue that governments are expected to assure that all citizens have equal access to human rights and that those rights and persons are equally protected (Reichter 2006, 26-27). Many organizations

working on FGC related programs rely on the universal definition of FGC based on the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN) standards, which is primarily concerned with health, and does not consider other factors such as culture and religion (Amnesty International, n.d.; World Health Organization, n.d.; United Nations, n.d.). Focusing on universalism provides an insightful framework for the examination of why employees of organizations find it important to work towards the universal goal of ending FGC. Hence, it provides a language to understand how employees work towards ending FGC, experience tensions by also finding it important to acknowledge, and understand cultural and traditional reasons of why FGC is practiced.

During the interviews I had with employees, we often spoke about the subject of FGC being a harmful practice. During the interview with Celeste, we were discussing the fact that social pressure can be a reason why FGC is being practiced. The conversation continued, by Celeste explaining that mothers often circumcise their daughters out of love. Celeste shared her thought about this. She said:

It is actually very unfair. Sometimes I think of those mothers who have been circumcised themselves and who know how much it hurts and what the consequences are... Then I think, how can you do that to your daughter? I have never understood that. I never had a good answer to that either. Yes, women who say that they did not know very well what they were doing at the time. You know, these kinds of answers... But I think that the social pressure is just very strong (Celeste, Interview, 21 April 2022).

Celeste emphasizes the fact that even though she knows that FGC is often practiced out of love, it is hard for her to understand why mothers who are circumcised themselves, make the decision to circumcise their children. According to Celeste, FGC is a hurtful practice with various consequences. In her view, the social pressure is part of the reasons why mothers decide to circumcise their daughters. Celeste is not alone in having these thoughts. During my fieldwork many employees I spoke to emphasized that FGC is a harmful practice that has to end. During my interview with Lyan, we discussed the difference between cultural relativism and universalism. She said:

Yes I get it and recognize it too. Because I had it at the time too. That you try very hard to look at it from the side of cultural relativism, that you think, what are we doing, thinking of colonialism, etcetera. But what it all comes down to is the rights of women and girls. Body integrity and in our organization we start from the rights of the child and the anti-discrimination law for women. If you go from that then governments have already

committed to the fact that they do not want harmful practices done like FGC and in some cases it is even literally in there. And in some cases you have to read between the lines and it is necessary that the legislation in that country is such that it starts to fall under the criminal law and not just from the family law. So that it is actually going to be punished. So if you look at it from the human rights approach, it is not us who are going to say this is bad for girls and women, you should not do that. Instead, it is just that every person has certain rights and every woman and girl have specific rights, children have specific rights and your governments have committed themselves to that. So we want to support you in standing up for those rights. When you look at it from that perspective, you get another point of view. Furthermore, the human right approach of course, because it is simply the right of the girl to have an intact body and not be completely mutilated beforehand just in black and white terms, so that the control of sexuality almost takes place from birth. Hey those girls have rights too. That is not only what we think, but of course we have all determined those rights. (Lyan, Interview, 31 March 2022)

In comparison to the complex varieties of why FGC is practiced, there is the logic of living up to law and regulations. Lyan expresses her thoughts on how human rights and regulations are most important in relation to FGC. She explained how she also thought a lot about cultural relativism, but that in the end human rights is what she and the organization she work for find most important. Furthermore, Lyan explains that within countries FGC is often also forbidden by law. With this fact Lyan explains that it is not only “us” who say FGC is a harmful practice, but this is also decided upon in the countries itself. According to Lyan, legislation of FGC and the support of the government is what counts and helps women and girls in order to claim their rights. Especially, because Lyan points to the fact that those rights are made universal and agreed upon. Therefore, holding on to human rights is important for Lyan while working towards ending FGC. As the conversation continued, Lyan explained the importance of that communities in which FGC is practiced get the right knowledge and skills in order to be able to change. In this case, Lyan points to the fact that norms, values, and cultures are changeable over time. In her view there is nothing wrong with raising awareness on FGC, and sharing knowledge on the theme since this will empower women and girls to make decision themselves (Lyan, Interview, 31 March 2022).

In opposition to Lyan, Shell-Duncan (2008) explains that legislation of FGC does not necessarily bring more empowerment to women in making their own choices. Shell-Duncan (2008), looked into the legislation of FGC and stated that criminalization as a result of legislation takes away women's rights to make their own decisions. According to Shell-Duncan

(2008), “efforts to end FGC through a human rights framework” by legislating against it can be seen as being in opposition to the goal of women’s empowerment (Shell-Duncan, 2008, 231). Instead, the legislation of FGC can take women’s rights to make their own decision of circumcision.

Gupta and Ferguson look at the distinctions between cultures and the dominance of one’s own morals and values, which is entangled in the ongoing debate surrounding universalism and cultural relativism (Darnell et al. 2015, 129). Especially through the concept of ethnocentrism, introduced by Franz Boas (1924), which refers to the inclination to see one’s own culture as superior and to judge others using one’s own standards and values (Boas 1924). When people believe their own cultural views are more true, more right, or more moral than those of other cultures, they are said to be ethnocentric (Darnell et al. 2015, 129). Therefore, working towards ending FGC can be considered ethnocentric, when seeing one’s own culture as superior over another. However, I would not consider the employees I spoke to as ethnocentric. I argue that, it is more complex. The employees I spoke to work for an organization that aims for ending FGC. Within their work, employees are constantly navigating between ending FGC, and continue to search for understanding why FGC is practiced. Employees know really well how important it is to acknowledge and respect cultures, are therefore not directly seeing their own culture as superior over others standards and values.

Employees work towards ending FGC, as it is considered a harmful practice. In doing so, employees are constantly navigating between ending FGC, and continue to search for understanding why FGC is practiced. Tensions exist in that even though employees acknowledge the importance of taking the reasons why FGC is practiced into consideration, they still hold on to the fact that FGC is a harmful practice that has to end. Employees consider the harmful consequences, and law and regulations as their reasons to work towards ending the practice of FGC. These reasons, are considered important to raise awareness about the practice. Within their work, employees know really well how important it is to acknowledge and respect cultures. Therefore, employees do not directly consider their own culture as superior over others standards and values.

The agency of employees

While employees do acknowledge the importance of understanding the practice of FGC from within the culture depending on the context and setting, they still work on FGC related programs that aim for the universal goal to end FGC. This places employees in between the two ends of the continuum of cultural relativism and universalism, within the structure of the organization

they work for. I argue, that the tensions that employees experience of being situated in the middle of the debate, makes that this influences their agency. First, I explain the definition of Agency. Secondly, I show what it means for employees to work with FGC related programs. Thirdly, I examine the tensions that employees experience around their position as Western individuals working towards FGC.

Within anthropology, agency is studied by many scholars. Kockelman (2007, 375) explains that agency is a type of human ability that can be expressed as a faculty like free will or choice, as well as an instinct for hope or rebellion. According to Hareven et al. (2000, 326), absolute agency is not always possible, because structure and circumstance have an equal impact on people's lives. In relation to this, Sewell (1992, 4) explained how “structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures.”. Similarly, Giddens’s (1976, 1979) argued that structure, rather than being separate from or in contrast to agency, is constantly created through collective agency and agency takes inspiration and resources from structure for further action. Hence, structuration is the process by which agents develops structures that are then utilized for more agency. In relation to this power refers to an agent's capacity to create change. Ortner (1989, 117) defined actors as individuals that partake in practice. She established the notion that actors are not only impacted by structure and power dynamics. She claimed that history, both personal and social, had a significant impact on how actors behaved. Furthermore, different individuals influence, create and change the world they live in. There is a relationship between the “system” and the individual. The system shapes the way individuals experience certain things and how they respond to them, but individuals also play an important role in the functions and changes of society. Focusing on the agency of employees provides an insightful framework for the examination of how employees act within the organization they work for, in relation to the debate surrounding cultural relativism and universalism. Hence, it offers a language to understand how employees behave in working towards the universal goal of ending FGC, while finding it important to understand the practice of FGC from within the culture.

During my interviews with employees, I always asked what they like most about working on FGC related programs. Employees often shared how they got involved, and what it means to work with FGC. Various employees who I spoke to got involved with FGC as a coincidence. Lyan for example, worked in Africa for a few years and saw the importance of the theme. Another example, is how Mandy and Nova first had jobs that focused on other subjects in relation to harmful practices and were asked within the organization to shift their focus to FGC (Lyan, Interview, 31st March 2022; Mandy, interview, 24th of February 2022; Nova,

Interview, 16th of May 2022). From the interview with Florian, I learned that being in contact with local partners and being able to follow the projects internationally are part of the reasons why working with FGC, is meaningful for her. Florian said; It really inspires me when I work with them and hear how their projects are turning out there. Furthermore, Florian explained that the most important thing is the impact that your work has. In her view, it is about what kind of change you achieve and how many women you were able to help improving their lives (Florien, Interview, 30 March 2022). Florian was not alone in acknowledging that the impact is one of the reasons that makes that employees love their job. Mandy, who I introduced in chapter one, explained how even though programs do not always work out, the little results are beautiful. She explained that during fieldtrips you can see the impact a program has. She said: “What touches me most of all is to see that such a girl really blossoms.” Therefore, working with FGC means something to Mandy, because it touches her as an individual (Mandy, Interview, 24 February 2022).

The fact that working with the theme means a lot to Florian, Mandy, and Lyan, also pointed me to the dedication and energy that they put in their work in order to get that step further in ending FGC. Simone, who I introduced in chapter one, made clear that she did not see herself do anything else due to the importance of the theme; “we started this project and I am never going to stop with it. If my director says you have to stop then I'm going to make a big protest.” The many examples show what it means for employees to work with FGC, such as Simone explained her perseverance and strong drive (Simone, Interview, 31 March 2022). Concluding, what it means to work with FGC influence the behavior of employees to act within the structure of an organization.

While talking about what it means to work with FGC related programs. Various employees also pointed me to their own position as an employee in the Netherlands working on FGC related programs. For example, Stefanie, a researcher as introduced in chapter two, explained that understanding why FGC is practiced is most important to herself in really understanding the practice of FGC. Especially, since she found that the people in question do not read her academic papers and that if she really wants to have an impact she must first understand FGC well. Stefanie explained:

So I thought, if I want to have an impact, I have to get my feet in the clay and those are the meetings with traditional leaders. With imams, with women in remote villages who present me with dilemmas. These are the moments that make me think: this is what I'm going to

take with me, and this is what I am going to use when I have to give another presentation to the UN. (Stefanie, Interview, 22 April 2022)

Stefanie expresses that in order to make an impact, it is important to really find out what FGC is, and why FGC is practiced. In doing so, she explains that having conversations with traditional leaders, imams, and women in remote villages is an important aspect. The moments during conversations when Stefanie is presented with dilemma's herself, is when Stefanie comes to the realizations of what is most important about FGC that needs to be shared. According to Stefanie, it is important that you are confronted with dilemmas in relation to FGC yourself, in order to think about your own position. Stefanie stated: "I am very aware of my own whiteness." (Stefanie, Interview, 22 April 2022). What Stefanie refers to with her own whiteness is the importance of acknowledging the fact that she is an outsider who needs to learn about another ones practices. Stefanie is not alone in this thought. Anouk, thinks very similarly by referring to herself as being white when working on FGC. She said:

I also think that you really have to look at the cultures and start from there, and yes, I would not have been so quick to join an activity to talk to these women in Sierra Leone, because you stand out so much. You are so white you know. It is not up to me I am not some kind of missionary or something, but I do like to support the colleagues and I do support more equality for women and that they also just and do not have to deal with that. Because very often they are so young that it happens and so they do not really have a choice in that at all. So I am sure you have to start from the culture and study it well before you start working in the country, and that is why it is good that I don't carry out these activities with my Western eyes but that we work with people who live there and were born there and know the context. (Anouk, Interview, 16 March 2022)

Similarly to Stefanie, Anouk also points to her whiteness. Anouk emphasizes that as a Western women it is important that you understand the cultures of the communities you are working with in order to work on FGC. According to Anouk, this helps her to support colleagues, and more equality for women. Interestingly, is that various employees find it important to acknowledge their whiteness as a reasons to understand why FGC is practiced. Employees, such as Stefanie and Anouk, find this important because they work with a the practice of FGC, which is not part of their own culture. Therefore, acknowledging the awareness of others cultures and their own cultural background is important. Employees own historical background has an impact on their behavior while working on FGC related programs.

Employees encounter tension between working towards ending FGC, and respecting the

practice. In doing so they take various cultures and contexts in consideration, and acknowledge their own position as employees, while working with the practice of FGC that is not part of their own culture. This makes that employees are constantly navigating between ending FGC, and acknowledging the practice of FGC being part of people's feelings of belonging and establishing a cultural identity (Monahan 2007, 32). Taking ends in consideration influences employees agency, by the ability to act freely. Various aspects within the structure of the organization, such as norms and values of the organization and employees own cultural background impact the behavior of employees and thereby the way they act.

In sum

Employees are working towards ending FGC, as it is considered a harmful practice. In doing so, employees find it important to understand and consider the different cultural and traditional aspects of why FGC is practiced. However, employees encounter tensions, because they struggle in navigating between understanding the various reasons why FGC is practiced, while working on ending FGC. In doing so, employees do not directly consider their own culture superior over others standards and values. Instead, employees are constantly navigating between ending FGC, and acknowledging the practice of FGC being part of people's feelings of belonging and establishing a cultural identity (Monahan 2007, 32). Constantly taking both ends into consideration influences employees agency, by the ability to act freely. Structures in the organization makes that norms and values as well as each individual's personal cultural background, has an impact on how each employee behaves.

Conclusion

This thesis looks into employees working with FGC related programs in the Netherlands. In this thesis I examined that employees working on FGC related projects, are constantly navigating power dynamics. These power dynamics refer to tensions in relation to FGC, that have to do with traditions, customs, knowledge, behavior, and norms and values. Throughout this thesis, I showed that power dynamics are encountered by employees in various ways. For example, by how employees struggle with living up to their organizations norms and values, how power dynamics make that employees subconsciously participate in a world in which stigmatization continues, and how power dynamics affect employees' own agency. Thereby, this thesis answered the main question of my research: How do employees of organizations working on programs related to FGC in the Netherlands navigate power dynamics?

My thesis takes central the debate between universalism and cultural relativism that has been going on for years within anthropology in relation to FGC. It does so, by looking into various power dynamics that influence employees from living up to their organizations strategies in relation to FGC, such as collaborations, financial flows, and crisis situations. Moreover, it contributes to the debate by studying power, knowledge, and various forms of opposition. Furthermore, this thesis is related to cultural relativism, by showing how employees constantly try to understand what the reasons are why FGC is practiced. However, at the same this thesis looks at universalism and how employees work towards ending the practice of FGC, since it is considered as a harmful practice. In doing so, employees are positioned in the middle of the debate surrounding cultural relativism, and universalism. Their acknowledgments of their own position in relation to this debate, make that this impact employees own agency. This research contributes to theory by filling up the gap between studying not only the power dynamics of organizations in relation to FGC, but also how this influences employees who experience these power dynamics while working on FGC related programs. Studies often focus on the macro-level of studies, while this thesis is an ethnographic study on the micro-level (Kaur 2007, 2). Therefore, this thesis is a complement to the theory where knowledge is missing about how employees, working as individuals at organizations with programs on FGC, are stumbling on various power dynamics.

Employees navigate various power dynamics in various forms of tension. These tensions make that employees struggle with living to organizations' norms and values. Employees encounter tension in relation to collaborations. Schuller (2012, 175) argued that the dependency of others to achieve goals, is related to power. Funding organizations have the

power to be decisive, because employees are dependent on the funding of projects. These dependencies make that employees are constantly navigating power dynamics to adhere to their organizations norms and values, related to increasing the involvement of country offices, and collaborations with key persons.

Another way how employees struggle to adhere to the organizations norms and values, is because of tensions in relation to financial flows. The behavior of employees can be influenced by funding organizations to adhere to organizational standards and ideals. Instead of allowing employees to have an impact by involving national offices, these financing organizations have the authority to request donor conditions that align with their own beliefs. Additionally, employees feel tensions by worrying about the continuation of their projects. These worries come from the constant search for access to needed resources, which is very dependent on the Dutch governments decisions on subsidies. Therefore, employees are constantly navigating power dynamics by the ability of actors surrounding their organization that have the ability to control their decision-making and behavior (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). Employees have also experienced tensions in relation to crisis situations, while working on FGC related programs. These tensions create a feeling of a sense of stuckedness (Hage 2002). Employees therefore struggle to uphold their own norms and values, which recognize that other issues may be more urgent during times of crisis than FGC, as well as the organization's common goal of working towards ending FGC.

Employees are subconsciously part of a world in which stigmatization continues. During my research employees frequently spoke about the unawareness of local communities of FGC being a harmful practice. According to employees, an increased awareness in communities that practice FGC, will help towards ending FGC. Employees constantly navigate power dynamics through forms of opposition (Hall 1993, Said 2003, Gupta and Ferguson 1997), assumptions what is right or wrong knowledge (Foucault 1991), and continuously referring to FGC as a harmful practice. Another topic that was often discussed during my interviews, was the fact that employees encounter that Dutch health professionals are often unaware of what FGC is, and struggle with being culturally sensitive. Employees often use the term shyness of action, which refers to health professionals being unaware, and uncomfortable to act in relation to FGC. Constantly referring to the unawareness of FGC being a harmful practice, and using the term shyness of action makes that employees subconsciously contribute to a world in which stigmatization continues.

Employees are constantly navigating between understanding the various reasons why FGC is practice, while working on ending FGC. In doing so, employees navigate power

dynamics by experiencing tensions while at the one hand they working towards ending FGC, and on the other hand acknowledgement that the practice of FGC as a part of people's feelings of belonging and establishing a cultural identity (Monahan 2007, 32). Constantly considering both ends has an impact on employee's agency and freedom of action. Because of organizational structures, each employee's behavior is influenced by organizational norms and values as well as their own cultural background.

During my research I came across one topic that I would consider valuable to do more research on. In chapter two I described how imparting knowledge can have an emotional effect on women from communities where FGC is practiced. I aim for more ethnographic research that delves deeper into how the awareness of FGC being a harmful practice affect circumcised women. Within the Netherlands there are several after care programs for circumcised women. Therefore, I would aim for ethnographic research within these after care programs, to find out more about what these after care programs mean to circumcised women. I believe, that more research on the effect of circumcised women, will help in a better understanding of FGC as a practice, and its impact.

Afterword

I would like to use this part of my thesis to explain the background of how I got interested in FGC. I watched the documentary called *In the name of your daughter* (2 Doc 2019). This triggered me in wanting to learn more about the topic, because there were many things I did not understand and remained unclear for me after watching the documentary. For example, what is the background of the practice and why is this practice still being done? Especially a conversation with my friends saying how terrible and Barbaric it is made me think about what it would mean to circumcised women, that people in the Netherlands would talk about the practice like that. During my master I got the opportunity to actually study this complex practice, and one of the quotes that continuously comes back in my memory is the quote by Walley (1997, 429) who states that “the diverse geographic locations, meanings, and politics in which such practices are embedded, and rhetorically constitutes a generic ‘they’ who conduct such practices and a generic ‘we’ who do not.” (Walley 1997, 429). I realized that books, documentary’s, articles, academic literature, personal experiences, and much more can send our minds into a certain directions that can help people make opinions. Studying FGC helped me to better understand FGC, and the way people deal with cultures, traditions, and practices that are unknown to them.

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