

On March 7, 2015, we arrived at Lady Margaret Hall in Oxford, England; different races, different colors, of varied educational backgrounds, we gathered to address FGM. Lawyers, doctors, writers and artists, we represented many fields, pulled like spores of hope into the province of dreams and action.

Women who had been mutilated began the day, speaking their brave stories. As we listened our hearts opened in sisterhood. We all have the same anatomy; you see, vaginas have no passports. Lurid with hate, this sordid act of amputation transcends the artificial barriers of geography, class, age and race, causing the entire web of womanhood to shiver.

And then, one after the other, come the pictures. Dr. Foldes showed us how he performed clitoris reconstruction and we saw first-hand what FGM looks like. Some women had to turn away. We will always be branded by what we saw. In one photograph, the woman's painted fingernails floated dainty and ladylike over her frayed, violated vagina, the plea to be beautiful there to be read in her painted nails. Dr. Foldes unclenched her angry hurt flesh; beneath his skilled fingers the beautiful cursive folds of a full petaled orchid once more bloomed.

It was personal, this presentation, the most vulnerable area of us cut, scraped and stitched. Those pictures of cut vaginas were like mirrors held up to our own most private parts. As we watched Dr. Foldes' slides, this practice, so eloquent with misogynist dread, moved across all those continents, arrived ringing to our own bodies. You are wrong – the dictate those mutilated vaginas had absorbed. Your sexual appetite is wrong, your sensuality and ardor are wrong. We will cut off the berry of your clitoris, slice your labia minora and labia majora, bury the cut parts of your body beneath the dirt. Make yourself tidy, submissive and mine.

'The most sexist crime on the planet', French lawyer Linda Weil-Curiel tells us. 'The only organ made just by woman, grown just for her pleasure, cut from her body'. Pushed by the hands of mothers, grandmothers and aunts, the violation is so crafty and well-designed, it is perpetrated, not by the oppressors but by the oppressed themselves. Don't they know when they cut away a part of their daughters, their granddaughters, they are cutting away something of themselves?

Yes, they know.

Girl, woman, mother, grandmother; the more I deepen into the assignment of womanhood, seasons notched with my own story, the more I understand the seriousness of what has been cut away. Both home for the seed of life and the spill of longing, those private undulant lips serve as a gateway for new life, shelter the source that began us all.

But in 2015, this ugly crime is now rinsed with hope: there is a drumbeat sounding around the world. No more cuttings, women are saying with one voice, no more dirt fertilized with women's parts. Nothing beautiful or strong comes from bodies that have been cut.

We want to live full lusty lives, ardent, moaning, praying, crying, kissing and coupling, singing the music of our sighs, speaking with all of our parts.

All those girls delivered trussed, sewn and pared to a man, the entombed light of sexuality forever stitched inside of tattered vaginas ... no more!

Our dream made sibilant by all those girls' unspoken cries, stewarded by Tobe Levin, Maria Jaschok, and so many others on March 7, 2015, in Lady Margaret Hall, we dreamt our dream of wholeness. ...

We spoke so that those who have died will be remembered, we honored their lives with these words.

No longer will we be silent: our silence serves only those who cut. We will move out through the somber English sky into the ears of all those mothers and grandmothers. We will speak with one voice.

We are human, we are women, we sang. No more cuttings, no more blood. This is our incandescent song for sisterhood.

And beneath the dirt all those buried lips began to sing as well.