

**From the War on Terror to Femonationalism: Anti-Muslim Racism  
and the U.S. Moral Crusade Against Female Genital Mutilation  
(2017-2021)**

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## **Introduction**

On January 5, 2021, just a few days before leaving office, President Donald Trump signed into law the “STOP FGM Act of 2020” (H.R.6100). This new federal law prohibiting female genital mutilation (FGM)<sup>1</sup> in the U.S. was celebrated as a victory by anti-FGM activists, U.S. feminist grassroots, and the Republican-controlled Congress who voted unanimously in favor of the bill; it replaces and strengthens the penalties of the former ban of 1996 ruled unconstitutional during the 2017 federal criminal court case of FGM in Michigan involving several members of the Dawoodi Bohra community, a Muslim sect of Indian origin.

On the one hand, we can praise the will of the American government to help eradicate FGM. Since the 1990s, international organizations such as the World Health Organization and the UNICEF work for the abandonment of a wide range of genital modification practices on underage girls and adult females called homogeneously FGM. FGM comprises the pricking, nicking, cutting, or sewing together of one or several parts of the female external genitalia for non-medical reasons; it is most predominant in African and South-Asian countries, and because of immigration, within diasporic communities in the global North. FGM has been on Western feminists’ radar since the 1970s as many FGM forms lead to harmful consequences on women’s mental, sexual and reproductive health. Hence, most national governments, in both the global North and South, have made legal provisions to ban these practices.

On the other hand, this paper argues that we should be troubled by the fact that the U.S. president who signed the anti-FGM bill is the one who signed an executive order banning immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries, separated migrant children from their parents at U.S.-Mexico border, supported white supremacist groups, and made openly racist and sexist comments. Thus, how to understand Donald Trump’s will to protect immigrant, Black and/or Muslim women and girls from FGM? To answer this question, this paper examines Republican lawmakers’ massive mobilization for introducing anti-FGM state laws in the aftermath of the 2017 criminal court case. Drawing on publicly available material including national and local

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I use the term “female genital mutilation” and the corresponding acronym “FGM” (instead of “female circumcision” and “female genital cutting”) as I refer to the public discourses that use them.

newspaper articles, governmental texts, and lawmakers' official webpages and social media posts, this paper explores how Republican lawmakers frame their commitment towards ending FGM and argue the need to pass legislation in their state. To be sure, this paper does not suggest that outlawing or advocating against FGM is wrong. Rather, this paper hopes to show how the contemporary U.S. political anti-FGM debate is intertwined with anti-Muslim racism.

Although FGM is not an Islamic practice and is also carried out by non-Muslim groups<sup>2</sup>, I argue that the 2017 criminal court case of FGM, involving a Muslim group wearing distinguishable traditional clothing, has spurred a resurgence of the rescue narratives of Muslim women and discourses of "U.S. gender exceptionalism" (Puar 2007) that have come to fore after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks to legitimate the "war on terror". In fact, these discourses are also imposed on migrant bodies; both conservative lawmakers and liberal feminists mobilize women's rights to push for restrictive migration policies and discriminatory laws. This phenomenon, coined "femonationalism" by Italian sociologist Sara Farris (2017), has attracted much academic attention, especially in Western Europe on the debate of the veil. Yet, little is known about the mechanisms of femonationalism in the United States, not least in the FGM debate. This paper thus examines whether and how Donald Trump's signing, pinnacle of four years of intensive mobilization against FGM by Republican lawmakers across the country, reflects femonationalism in the U.S.

### **War on Terror and Femonationalism**

When Republican President George Bush embarked on the war on terror after the September 11, 2001 attacks, First Lady Laura Bush underscored in a radio address that the U.S. military intervention was also in the name of Afghan women's rights (Berry 2003). As Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood (2002, 340) show, Afghan women's living conditions under the Taliban regime were already a rallying concern two years before the 9/11 attacks, providing "a point of unity for groups from a range of political perspectives: from conservatives to liberals and radicals, from Republicans to Democrats, and from Hollywood glitterati to grass roots activists". The Bush administration thus capitalized on this emerging nationwide concern for

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<sup>2</sup> FGM is also common among Christian groups (UNICEF 2013) and has been practised by

Afghan women's cause to bolster the war on terror. The war on terror thus found legitimacy in Western eyes because not only did it counter the "barbarity" of Afghan men described as terrorists for Western nations, but also for their own women, who were perceived as imprisoned in a "backward" patriarchal culture that violated their rights (Berry 2003; Abu-Lughod 2013; Riley 2013). As Hirschkind and Mahmood (2002, 341) write: "The twin figures of the Islamic fundamentalist and his female victim helped consolidate and popularize the view that such hardship and sacrifice were for Afghanistan's own good." The invasion of Afghanistan was thus framed as "necessary" (Riley 2013, 2), even though it had little to do with the 9/11 attacks that motivated the military response (Riley 2013, 147).

The war on terror and its propaganda displayed what Robin Lee Riley (2013, 2) calls "transnational sexism", where ideas about Muslim women are "deployed, used and propagated" to Western audiences through popular culture. Muslim women were depicted in two contradictory ways, both as victims and dangers (Scott 2012). These dichotomous representations of othered women and the downplay of their agency is exemplified in Claudia Brunner and Daniela Hrzan's (2009) paper, where the authors show that whether considered as victims of FGM or perpetrators of female suicide bombing, othered women's actions are interpreted as constrained by patriarchal oppression. In both cases, they are not considered autonomous individuals. Furthermore, rescue narratives silence the voices of Muslim women who challenge their portrayal as victims. As El-Tayeb (2011) demonstrates with what she calls the "mute Muslima", Muslim women have no say in the Western debate about whether they are oppressed. Only unveiled Muslim-born women who adopt the Western mainstream critique of Islam are put on the front. The admiration shown by many U.S. and European right-wing politicians and liberal feminists for American-Dutch-Somali feminist and anti-FGM advocate, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, is a telling example of this tendency.

Depictions of Muslim women as under the control of male domination and patriarchal culture is a powerful narrative that upholds the representations of the U.S. as morally superior to Muslim nations. This narrative functions following a circular logic. First, the narrative of Muslim women as oppressed marks U.S. women as emancipated (Razack 2008, 86). As Riley (2013, 114) put it,

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Ethiopian Jews (Grisaru, Lezer, and Belmaker 1997).

“Women who are highly placed in both governments are undertaking the work of empire-building. All of these ‘liberated’ Western women end up being little more than hand-servants to their husbands’, bosses’, or fathers’ colonial and militaristic aims. Of course, they are not forced to do this work, and they also benefit from doing it in many ways, not the least of which is they can feel superior to the poor oppressed Afghan women.” Second, the narrative of U.S. women as emancipated suggests that the nation where these women live champions gender equality. Finally, the narrative of a nation fully guaranteeing women’s rights legitimizes U.S. interventionism to “rectify” the situation of Muslim women worldwide (Riley 2013, 2).

Femonationalism functions likewise; the rescue narratives of Muslim women are transposed to migrant bodies, shifting discourses from saving Muslim women over there to save Muslim women over here. The war on terror becomes a “war on multiculturalism” within national borders. Multiculturalism is seen as a threat to liberal Western values by right-wing parties and some feminists who criticize the so-called Western *laissez-faire* of diversity tolerance and call for immigrants’ assimilation “in the name of women’s rights” (Farris 2017). As Bilge (2010, 9) put it, “Contemporary debates over citizenship and immigrant integration are increasingly characterized by the prescriptive normativity of gender equality and sexual freedoms, articulating women’s rights and gay rights to the nation to draw civilisational boundaries between Western modernity, framed as liberal and secular, and non-Western cultures, supposed to be illiberal and prone to religious fanaticism.” As Lépinard (2020) shows, the headscarf debate and the place to give to pious Muslim women in the Western world constitutes such a nerve point among feminists that it results in an ideological cleavage between white feminists and racialized feminists, the former rejecting the idea of any veiled feminist as their equal. In fact, in Western Europe, the discourse of Muslim women’s liberation has gained strength within national borders through the debate of the veil.

Both feminists who resent the veil and right-wing actors who cover up racist ideas in the name of Muslim women’s liberation thus mobilize femonationalism. As Yilmaz (2015, 12?) reports, “Successive chains of moral panics and crises around Muslim immigrants’ ‘cultural practices’ such as honor killings, forced marriages, headscarves, female circumcision and homophobia

create a sense of imminent threat and push progressive forces (e.g. feminists and gay movements) to forge unlikely alliances with right-wing groups against the insidious threat.” Indeed, as Jasbir Puar (2007) highlights, the war on terror was also sustained by members of the LGBTIQ communities who actively participated in the demonization of Muslim nations as homophobic and intolerant of sexual diversity. “U.S. sexual exceptionalism” (Puar 2007) was thus upheld through homonationalism, that is “the dual movement in which certain homosexual constituencies have embraced U.S. nationalist agendas and have also been embraced by nationalist agendas” (Puar 2007, xxiv). In contrast to femonationalism though, homonationalism is not an ideology that all right-wing parties in the global North have embraced. For instance, the framing of gay rights as national values is mobilized by the Dutch populist party, the Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid), yet is rejected by the conservative Swiss People’s Party who opposes gay marriage. Femonationalism is thus a powerful ideology, as it enables a wide adherence of right-wing parties, even if they do not share similar views on social policies.

By adopting the femonationalist rhetoric, right-wing lawmakers employ a feminist vocabulary and embrace feminist concerns within a racist and anti-immigration discourse. In so doing, they promote (cultural) racism “under the guise of feminist liberation” (Al-Saji 2010, 887), by suggesting the “insurmountability” of cultural difference between people (Balibar 1991). As Hogan and Haltinner (Hogan and Haltinner 2015, 531) point out about right-wing populists, “most arguments are carefully colourblind, focusing on irreconcilable cultural differences or the refusal of today’s immigrants to assimilate.” Given the idea of the “incompatibility” between local and immigrants’ culture (Yilmaz 2015, 39; Balibar 1991), female immigrants are expected to adopt Western lifestyles or—if they do not or *cannot* assimilate because being purportedly “prisoners of traditions” (Kaya 2012)—, need to be “saved” (Abu-Lughod 2013). Rescue is thus implemented through legislative measures to force cultural change (meaning assimilation) and to prosecute those who allegedly resist change. The feminist vocabulary thus enables the public acceptance of restrictive migration policies and discriminatory laws. Indeed, like for the war on terror, the rescue narratives of Muslim women, and ultimately of non-Western women, within a femonationalist framework serve instrumental purposes: to legitimate state intervention, whether military as in the war on terror or legislative in the “war on multiculturalism”.

Yet, femonationalism produces adverse outcomes for immigrant women by constraining their rights, despite rescue narratives. Like Afghan women's conditions that have worsened because of U.S. military intervention (Rich 2014, 1; Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002, 341), a similar observation can be made with immigrant women affected by FGM. As I have shown elsewhere (Bader forthcoming), the U.S. 1996 federal law against FGM was passed under the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, a Republican-authored law restricting the rights of asylum seekers in the United States (including women claiming asylum because of FGM). Likewise, Switzerland seldom grants asylum to families escaping FGM in their home country, while introducing the 2012 FGM Act, which was enthusiastically supported by the Swiss People's Party, to "protect" women and girls from FGM (Bader forthcoming). The discrepancies between femonationalist discourses and migration policies regulating the entry and stay of immigrant women and girls affected by FGM shed light on the fact that rescue narratives upholding a femonationalist ideology primarily aim at serving the nationalist project rather than at improving immigrant women's living conditions.

Conservative lawmakers' use of the femonationalist rhetoric serves not only to push their anti-immigration agenda, as highlighted above, but also increases the popularity of their party through electoral success. As Farris (2017) points out, the combination of gender and immigration issues enable right-wing parties to achieve a double combo in terms of electoral gain: it ensures the votes of both women eager to push the feminist agenda and white citizens afraid of the potential repercussions of immigration on their daily life. As Mayda et al. (2016) show, U.S. Republican votes increase when immigration is perceived as a major issue because of the rise in the number of migrants, and decrease when migrants, after obtaining U.S. citizenship, are allowed to vote. Mayda et al.'s findings echo researches showing the higher vote choice of minority groups for the Democratic party (Ocampo, Dana, and Barreto 2018; Lee and Pachon 2007) and the subsequent defection of white Americans from the latter to the Republican party (Abrajano and Hajnal 2017). Henceforth, the "*threatening immigration*" frame that promotes restrictive and punitive measures ensures the Republican party's electoral successes (Hout and Maggio).

In the following sections, I first describe the 2017 Michigan criminal court case and how it shifted the U.S. FGM debate from an African issue to a Muslim issue. Then, I show how Republican lawmakers were intensively involved in the U.S. movement against FGM in the aftermath of the Michigan case. Finally, I analyze how Republican lawmakers use FGM as a scarecrow to support their femonationalist rhetoric on the alleged “backwardness” of Muslims’ culture and the “oppression” of Muslim women. Their rescue narratives highlight how anti-Muslim racism is tied with legislative measures introduced to combat FGM, yet without explicitly name Islam.

### **The 2017 Michigan Criminal Court Case**

In April 2017, the first federal court case under the U.S. 1996 FGM law began. A 44-year-old female physician and American citizen, Jumana Nagarwala, was charged with the nicking of the clitoral hood of 9 girls; a second male physician, Fakhruddin Attar, was prosecuted for allowing this procedure to be carried out in his clinic in Michigan and for assisting Nagarwala during the interventions. The 7-year old girls from Michigan, Minnesota, and Illinois were brought by their mother to undergo what Nagarwala claimed to be “a religious procedure, not FGM” (Snell 2017). All the protagonists involved (i.e., physicians, parents and children) come from the Dawoodi Bohra community, a Muslim sect from India.

Despite the strong emotional impact that a first federal FGM case triggers on the public, the Michigan case challenged major mainstream preconceptions about FGM that are reproduced in the Western press (Bader 2019): neither the procedure was an invasive form of FGM leading to severe complications, nor was it performed in unhygienic settings by an untrained practitioner, nor were the protagonists of African origins. Indeed, the procedure carried out by the Dawoodi Bohra community of a nicking of the clitoral hood is considered as one of the less invasive types of FGM, according to the WHO’s (2016) classification. Moreover, by framing the procedure a religious duty and arguing for parents’ religious freedom rights, prosecuted physicians and parents echoed the commonly accepted rationale for male circumcision. Although the comparison between FGM and male circumcision is fiercely rejected by international and



feminist organizations<sup>3</sup>, the overlapping of both the procedure as carried out by the Dawoodi Bohra and the custom of male circumcision were highlighted before the court. As explained in the *New York Times* by the Harvard Law School professor, Alan Dershowitz, who joined the defense team:

*“You write that I was hired ‘to help the defense.’ In fact, under no circumstances am I defending female genital mutilation. To the contrary, I am consulting with a religious group and advocating the practice’s total abolition and the substitution of a benign, sterilized, symbolic pinprick in the hood covering the clitoris, which is much like the foreskin of the penis. The symbolic pinprick is modeled on the longstanding Jewish tradition used when a non-Jewish child has been secularly circumcised and then converts to Judaism. The pinprick itself, like cosmetic ear piercing, has no medical benefits or harm. But it is much less intrusive than procedures practiced by some groups while protecting the constitutional right of its religious practitioners.”*  
(Dershowitz 2017)

Furthermore, the procedure was performed in a clinic by a Johns Hopkins University-trained physician practicing emergency medicine at the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit. Therefore, Nagarwala’s profile opposed the mainstream portrayal of FGM as being performed in unhygienic settings by older women holding razor blades or rusty instruments (Bader 2019). For instance, the *Dayton Daily News*, covering Ohio’s initiative to adopt a state ban against FGM after the Michigan case was revealed, refers to the “Somali culture” and describes FGM as follows:

*“FGM is accepted in some cultures and it is performed without anesthetic by a traditional practitioner with crude instruments, according to a guide to Somali culture published by the Ohio Department of Homeland Security.”* (Bischoff 2017)

As the excerpt suggests, FGM is strongly associated with Africa, even though the protagonists of the case that gave rise to the legislative movement in Ohio come from another continent. As

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<sup>3</sup> Arguments given for rejecting the comparison are the hygienic benefits and lower harm of male circumcision, unlike many forms of FGM.

Brière (2005, 166) explains, FGM has become associated with African women since many African women have sought asylum in the United States to escape the practice. My analysis of the U.S. daily newspapers since 1980 further confirms this interconnection: media coverage of FGM focuses primarily on African countries (e.g., Togo, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Egypt).

For lack of being African, the Dawoodi Bohra case confirms at least one presumption: that Muslims perpetrate the practice. As my findings suggest, the U.S. media coverage of the Michigan case provides plenty examples for the readers to assume a connection between Islam and FGM. First, the convicted physicians and parents mobilize the religious argument to explain their act. Second, the picture of Nagarwala, the female physician, in the media shows her wearing a veil. Third, Nagarwala's husband was a leader of the Farmington Hills mosque, the place of worship of the Dawoodi Bohra community. The media, indeed, reported that the court tried to assess whether and how the mosque was supporting Nagarwala's actions. Fourth, the case triggered a controversy as to whether FGM is a practice required by Islam. Imams of several states have been interviewed in the media on the matter, all of whom rejected the practice but one: a leading imam of a Virginia mosque supported the argument of equally "circumcise" boys and girls. He was eventually fired.

Hence the public debate around the 2017 Michigan criminal court case has added a layer on the figure of otherness embodied by Black and brown immigrants affected by FGM, by shifting the debate on FGM from an "African" to a "Muslim" issue. This paradigm shift, I argue, is what will push Republican lawmakers to be at the forefront of passing anti-FGM legislation in their state.

### **Specific Legislation and Symbolic Politics**

The Michigan court case had an astonishing yet disappointing outcome for many anti-FGM advocates expecting a spectacular victory for their combat: Instead of convicting the perpetrators of the confirmed FGM, federal Judge Bernard Friedman dropped the charges against them on November 2018 and declared the 1996 U.S. ban on FGM unconstitutional.<sup>4</sup> He declared that

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<sup>4</sup> The 1996 FGM ban stipulates that "whoever knowingly circumcises, excises, or infibulates the whole or any part of the labia majora or labia minora or clitoris of another person who has not attained the age of 18 years shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than 5 years, or

Congress “had no authority to pass this statute”<sup>5</sup>. First, he underscored that the FGM statute could not be considered as enforcing treaty obligations such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which demands “protection of children without discrimination” (Article 24). Since the FGM statute only addresses bodily practices on girls, it fails to protect boys from the U.S. custom of male circumcision on infants.<sup>6</sup> Second, the Judge stressed that FGM was a local criminal activity and should thus be prosecuted under state law. He challenged the assumption that FGM is an interstate commerce and hence, that Congress could pass legislation under the Commerce Clause. He writes, “the government’s only evidence of such a market is the fact that it has alleged nine FGM victims in the present case, five of whom were brought to Michigan from neighboring states. [...] This is not a market, but a small number of alleged victims. If there is an interstate market for FGM, why is this the first time the government has ever brought charges under this 1996 statute?”<sup>7</sup>

By emphasizing that FGM must be punished under state law, the 2018 ruling generated a flurry of legislation in states to address FGM. At the end of 2020, 25 states had introduced 27 FGM-specific bills since 2017<sup>8</sup> (see Table 1). In other words, more than one-third (15 of 39) of state laws on FGM have been adopted within 4 years, raising the number of U.S. states with an FGM-specific criminal law to 39 (out of 50).<sup>9</sup> Even pioneering Minnesota, which enacted the first anti-FGM state law in 1994, followed suit to strengthen the penalties (including parents’ loss of custody) after discovering that two Minnesotan girls were among the “victims” in the Michigan case. Moreover, as Table 2 shows, Republican lawmakers were massively involved in the process; they are primary sponsors of 23 anti-FGM bills out of 27, in either a partisan (17) or bipartisan (6) bill.

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both” (§ 116, Sec. 645 of IIRIRA Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act 1996). For a detailed analysis of the development of the U.S. FGM ban, see Bader (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> *U.S. v. Nagarwala*, Dismissal Order of November 20, 2018, 17-CR-20274, p.26.

<sup>6</sup> On a discussion of the comparison between male circumcision and FGM under the U.S. federal law, see Earp (2020).

<sup>7</sup> *U.S. v. Nagarwala*, Dismissal Order of November 20, 2018, 17-CR-20274, p.21.

<sup>8</sup> N.B. Idaho and Virginia have each passed 2 bills within 2 years

<sup>9</sup> The total excludes pending and dead bills introduced since 2017.

Table 1: Number of anti-FGM state bills introduced between 2017 and 2020 (including newly enacted laws and amendments to previous laws)

Status	N Specific laws	N Amendments	Total
Introduced	19	8	27
Enacted	15	7	23
Died	3	1	4
Pending	1	0	1
Total of states with an FGM-specific criminal law as of 2016	24	-	-
Total of states with an FGM-specific criminal law as of 2020	39*	-	-

Note: \*excludes pending and dead bills.

Table 2: Party’s sponsorship of FGM-specific criminal laws per state, year of enactment and status between 2017 and 2020

Democratic	Bipartisan	Republican
Alabama (pending), Illinois ([1998] 2019), Massachusetts (2020), Vermont (2020)	Connecticut (2020/died), Hawaii (2019/died), Iowa (2019), North Dakota ([1995] 2019), Pennsylvania (2019), Wyoming (2020)	Arkansas (2019), Idaho ([2019]; 2020), Kentucky (2020), Maine (2018/died), Michigan (2017), Minnesota ([1994]; 2019), Missouri ([2000]; 2020/died), New Hampshire (2018), North Carolina (2019), Ohio (2018), South Carolina (2019), Tennessee ([1996] 2019), Texas ([1999]; 2017), Utah (2019), Virginia ([2017]; 2018)

*N.B: Brackets signal the year the first state law was enacted. The second year is the year of the adoption of an amendment to the previous law. For each column, state laws are listed alphabetically*

However, in arguing that FGM is a local crime, the judge did not suggest that a *specific* state law on FGM should be enacted so that the crime could be punished, but rather that the crime should be prosecuted in state courts. In fact, there are two ways to ban FGM, either with existing laws or by introducing a specific legislation. France, for instance, which in 1979 became the first

Western country to ban the practice and has the highest number of prosecution cases to date in Europe (42 as of 2010, Nijboer, Van der Aa N., and Buruma 2010), prohibits FGM under its general law on assaults. By contrast, the UK has established a specific law against FGM in 1985, and yet has only one conviction to date, established in 2019 (Bader and Mottier 2020). As French attorney general Linda Weil-Curiel, who enabled the first conviction of a circumciser in France in 1999, argues in the press “As a lawyer, I explained that we did not need a new law since the penal code already provides for all kinds of sanctions for bodily injury and that mutilation is defined as a crime punishable by the Assize Court. Moreover, the creation of a specific law condemning excision amounts to pointing the finger at immigrant populations. The existing law is sufficient, and it applies universally to all persons living on French territory, even if the mutilation took place outside of France”.<sup>10</sup>

Condemning FGM under existing laws is also possible in the U.S. Indeed, the first conviction of FGM in the U.S. dates back to 2006. Khalid Adem, a 30-year-old gas station employee of Ethiopian origins, was convicted in Georgia for his daughter’s clitoridectomy that he would have performed himself at his place when his daughter was 2.<sup>11</sup> Adem was charged with aggravated battery and cruelty to children and sentenced to 10 years in prison. After serving a decade-long sentence, Adem was deported in 2017 to his native Ethiopia.

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<sup>10</sup> Source:

<https://madame.lefigaro.fr/societe/excision-mutilation-genitale-interview-linda-weil-curiel-en-france-des-proces-on-est-passe-a-autre-chose-060219-163488> (Accessed Sept 8, 2020; my translation)

<sup>11</sup> As Steffen (2011) pointed out, Adem was found guilty despite puzzling facts. First, FGM is known to be a strict women’s affairs and fathers are forbidden during the procedure, even though they have a word in the decision to whether pursue or abandon the tradition. Thus, a father who would perform FGM on his daughter is considered as “never heard of” (Steffen 2011, p?). Second, the mother, a South African native and anti-FGM activist, claimed that she hadn’t notice her daughter’s clitoridectomy for more than a year. When asked about how it is possible that a mother who change, clean, and bath her toddler wouldn’t notice her daughter’s wound for so long, she argued that her husband may have found on the Internet a “new technique” to avoid both bleeding and postoperative complications (Steffen 2011, 38). Third, the mother had a record of physical abuse against her husband and rarely gave him the opportunity to be alone with their daughter (Steffen 2011). Since the medical evidence presented to the court indicates that the girl was circumcised, the question is: by whom? Steffen’s investigation clearly puts in doubt that it was Adem. Rather, Steffen (2011) argues that the strongest evidence against Adem was the sole fact that he is a citizen of Ethiopia, a high-prevalence country of FGM.

Although the Adem case shows that existing state laws are effective in criminalizing FGM, the case produced a moral outrage that led Georgia to adopt legislation on FGM in May 2005. Just like for the federal bill a decade earlier, the Georgia anti-FGM law is the result of the passage of a Democratic-authored bill in a Republican-controlled state Senate (Steffen 2011). As Steffen (2011) wisely points out, this law was merely “symbolic politics”. He writes:

*“Why was such a statute needed? Not because it imposed a stiffer penalty on the circumciser, or because it would make it easier to win a conviction. Indeed, the bill that the state legislature was then debating stipulated that an individual convicted of the crime of ‘female genital mutilation’ would serve a prison term of no more than twenty years, compared to the forty years that Khalid was then facing for the two counts against him. The D.A. wanted the new law for reasons that went well beyond the practice of female genital cutting per se, to the larger problem of assimilating Gwinnett County’s exploding immigrant population. ‘Clearly, a black-and-white statute that says we don’t care what you do in your country, it’s illegal here, would make it easier,’ Porter told reporters. As the D.A.’s comment made clear, the prosecution of Khalid would send an unmistakable message that Old World culture was no excuse for breaking Gwinnett’s New World laws” (Steffen 2011, 43).*

Despite evidence showing that in many countries FGM can easily be prosecuted under existing laws (Johnsdotter and Mestre i Mestre 2015), many western legislators work for introducing a specific law. As several scholars have stressed, a specific law to ban FGM results from “symbolic politics” as it merely serve the purpose to “send a message” towards the immigrant population (Steffen 2011; Mona 2014; Bader and Mottier 2020). This message suggests that Western countries fully guarantee women’s rights and that immigrants who would like to stay in the country need to conform to “national” values such as gender equality. Yet, this message is problematic as it suggests a civilizational hierarchy and sustains racialized notions of belonging by assuming that Black, brown and/or Muslim immigrants have a moral burden to overcome through their integration into the host society. Sending a “clear message” for immigrants is a common discursive pattern grounding many legislative actions leading to the adoption of a *specific* law on FGM, whether in the U.S. (Bader forthcoming) or elsewhere (e.g. Switzerland,

see Bader and Mottier 2020). Thus, the specific law on FGM is not intended to fulfill a legal vacuum that allows a publicly condemned bodily practice to continue. Rather, it sustains an ideological and moral boundary-work (Dahinden, Duemmler, and Moret 2014) between “us” and “them”.

Table 3: Primary bill sponsors per gender, state, and year of enactment since 2017

<b>Female</b>	<b>Tandem</b>	<b>Male</b>
Arkansas (2019), Idaho ((2019]; 2020), Illinois ([1998] 2019), Kentucky (2020), Minnesota ([1994] 2019), New Hampshire (2018), North Carolina (2019), North Dakota ([1995] 2019), South Carolina (2019), Texas ([1999]; 2017)	Alabama (pending), Connecticut (2020/died), Hawaii (2019/died), Iowa (2019), Maine (2018-died), Massachusetts (2020), Michigan (2017), Ohio (2018), Pennsylvania (2019), Tennessee ([1996] 2019), Wyoming (2020),	Missouri ([2000]; 2020/died), Utah (2019), Vermont (2020), Virginia ([2017]; 2018)

Furthermore, the results indicate that Republican lawmakers who engage against FGM in the aftermath of the 2017 Michigan criminal court case are mostly female and white. As shown by Table 3, female lawmakers outnumber their male fellows among the primary sponsors of anti-FGM state bills, whether as sole sponsors or in tandem with a male counterpart. Only 4 bills out of 27 had only male lawmakers as primary sponsors. Like Laura Bush 16 years earlier, the profile of the Republican white female mobilizing rescue narratives to “save” Muslim women and immigrants of color from FGM, echoes the historical figure of the “imperialist feminist”. “Imperialist feminists”, whether English feminists of the nineteenth century in India (Grewal 1996) or American feminists committed in “international feminism” (Abu-Lughod 2013), sustain the construction of the nationalist project (Grewal 1996, 9): working either for empire-building (Riley 2013) or, as after the Michigan case, in nation-building. As Meyda Yegenoglu (1998, 111) writes, “[T]he imperialist feminist desire to emancipate the Muslim woman is part of a system based on the disciplining and normalizing gaze of modern colonial disciplinary power.” Against this background, FGM, which represents the “arch-symbol of Southern inferiority” (Razack 1998, 6) and is combated by all Western nations, provides a

perfect because uncontested feminist issue on which Republican lawmakers can rely to show American women's emancipation and, ultimately, American nation's moral superiority.

### **The Construction of the Muslim Threat**

The representations of the Muslim “threat” reproduced in the U.S. anti-FGM movement led by Republican lawmakers were constructed upon the feminist anti-FGM vocabulary and a conspiracy theory endangering the national security. First, as femonationalist theories underscore, right-wing lawmakers use a feminist vocabulary to depict non-Western citizens as dangerous, and ultimately, to sustain restrictive migration policies proposals. My content analysis of the local and national press shows that Republican lawmakers refers to three repertoires of evilness to describe the actions of the Muslim community implicated in the Michigan case. The first repertoire is deviance (“an attack on little girls” (Sen. Rick Jones, Oosting 2017b) “physical abuse [...] emotional abuse” (Sen. Margaret O’Brien Oosting 2017b). The second is human primitiveness (“act of barbarism” (Sen. Tonya Schuitmaker, Gerstein 2017), “horrific and barbaric act” (Sen. Margaret O’Brien, Oosting 2017c), “barbaric practice” and “these horrors” (Rep. Mary Franson, Karnowski 2018)). The third repertoire is inhumanity (“brutal and inhumane act” (Rep. Michele Hoitenga, Oosting 2017a), “a very evil, horrific, demonic act” (Sen. Rick Jones, Oosting 2017b)).

As such, these repertoires range from describing *deviant*, and indeed criminal, actions of *ordinary* human beings (“attack”, “abuse”), to the designation of *ordinary* actions of *deviant* humans (“barbarism”, “barbaric”), to the denial of their humanity (“inhumane”, “demonic”). Such qualifications of the Others recall past colonial discourses (Harries 2007; Steffen 2011), yet have long been “normalized” (Young 2006) by the global anti-FGM discourse and the Western media which publish shocking and old photographs when covering FGM (Bader 2019). Although the use of this feminist anti-FGM vocabulary promotes anti-Muslim racism and anti-immigration sentiments, Republican lawmakers can confidently state that the use of this vocabulary does not testify to racist positions towards immigrant and Muslim populations, but to their adherence to an international cause.



Such depiction of FGM which underscores the alleged threat posed by immigrants ensures the alliance to the anti-FGM movement of Republican male lawmakers who otherwise oppose women's rights. For instance, Virginia state Senator Richard Black voted against the criminalization of spousal rape (Kaltenhauser 2019), is a pro-life advocate, and writes on his website that "Immigration by criminal elements strains law enforcement. [...] America mustn't be a dumping ground for violent criminals from foreign countries"<sup>12</sup>. Yet, he argues:

*"This female genital mutilation is an absolutely horrid process, and I'm not a shrinking violet, I was in fierce combat in Vietnam [...] I've seen a lot of carnage on the battlefield, but I must say that when I read what was being done to these little girls, it really sent chills down my spine."* (Sen. Richard H. Black, Thoet 2017)

By this excerpt, Senator Black suggests that the nicking of the clitoral hood as carried out by the Dawoodi Bohra community is an act unbearable and illegitimate in contrast to the "carnage on the battlefield" he has witnessed during the U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Such comparison sparks yet rejects any parallel between American violence and violence committed by Muslim populations. It suggests the "evilness" of the latter, unlike the U.S. military intervention, since they target innocent victims, the "little girls" echoing the American civilians who died on September 11, 2001. The Michigan case thus reinforces the rhetoric of Muslim "terrorism". As Riley (2013, 1) points out, "The concept of terrorism in this discourse is something that only happens to the West. It is never perpetrated by the West."

Second, the popularization of the conspiracy theory disseminated by the federal government facilitated the construction of the Muslim threat for the national security. During the trial of the Michigan case, the federal prosecutor declared that the 9 identified girls were the victims of a "conspiracy" that has possibly harmed 100 girls from different states over a decade. As reported in the *Detroit News*:

*"The Michigan House on Thursday approved bipartisan legislation that would create a new 15-year state felony for female genital mutilation, extend the statute of limitations for*

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<sup>12</sup> Source: <http://www.senatorblack.com/Issues/immigration/> (Accessed Sept. 6, 2020)

*victims and revoke the medical license of doctors who perform the procedure. The vote came a day after a federal prosecutor said as many as 100 girls may have had their genitalia mutilated during a 12-year conspiracy involving three Metro Detroit doctors<sup>13</sup>.*” (Oosting 2017a)

Furthermore, the presumption of a situation out of control accompanied the government’s conspiracy theory. In the trial and the media, it was underscored that the growth of certain immigrant populations equally increases the number of women and girls considered “at risk” of FGM.<sup>14</sup> As reported in the *Detroit News*:

*“As many as 200,000 girls are ‘at risk’ for female genital mutilation in the United States each year, a national expert [Lori Post] said Tuesday, calling Michigan a ‘hot spot’ for a criminal procedure state legislators are working to end.”* (Oosting 2017c)

Introducing legislation was thus interpreted as not only an attempt to contain a “threat” that was promised to increase proportionally to the number of immigrant women affected by FGM but also to “close loopholes created by a recent federal court case that struck down the 1996 federal statute outlawing the practice nationwide”<sup>15</sup>, as argued here by Republican U.S. Representative Scott Perry of Pennsylvania. As mentioned earlier, the 2018 ruling generated the assumption that states, without a specific provision against FGM, would become “hot spots” or a “destination” for parents who would like to continue the practice. As stated in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*:

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<sup>13</sup> This is an erroneous information as only two physicians were prosecuted. The third individual implicated is one doctor’s wife working in the clinic

<sup>14</sup> Extrapolation of the prevalence of FGM in countries of origins onto the diasporic communities is the primary measure used in international and national reports. Extrapolation is, however, a problematic technique as it does not consider cultural changes observed in immigrant communities (Belmaker 2012; Johndotter and Essén 2016; Vogt, Efferson, and Fehr 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Source: <https://perry.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=398709> (Accessed Sept. 7, 2020)

*“Advocates warned after the federal judge’s ruling in Michigan that states like Connecticut, without laws on the books, could become ‘destination states’ for the practice.”* (St. Louis Post-Dispatch 2019)

The impression of a legal vacuum in states without a specific law against FGM is further stressed in the media when reporters presume that FGM is “legal” in the states where no such state law exists. As stated in the *Dayton Daily News*:

*“A federal ban on the practice has been on the books since 1996 but was ruled unconstitutional earlier this month by a federal judge, who held that only states can regulate the activity. The practice is prohibited in 26 states, but not Ohio.”* (Bischoff 2018)

While the U.S. are accustomed to receiving asylum claims of women fleeing FGM in Africa, the Michigan case thus suggests that the “threat” of FGM is also within the nation. Passing legislation on FGM is therefore interpreted as building a symbolic fortress around the states to repel a bodily practice that, as stated in the *Bangor Daily News*, “*virtually nobody in the Western world wants to see here or elsewhere.*” (Shepherd 2018) As Republican State Senator Rick Jones of Michigan stated in the *Detroit News*:

*“I’m angry that the federal judge dismissed this horrific case that affected upwards of a hundred girls who were brutally victimized and attacked against their will. [...] This is why it was so important for Michigan to act. We set a precedent that female genital mutilation will not be tolerated here. ... I hope other states will follow suit.”* (Snell 2018)

In response to the “treat”, American lawmakers provided an immediate response, often with a unanimous plebiscite across the political spectrum. As mentioned earlier, 27 states hastened to introduce legislation on FGM; some passed legislation with a speed of adoption that shows not only the level of consensus but also the lack of in-depth discussion on the matter. As an earlier quote indicates, Michigan passed legislation “*the day following*” the prosecutor’s conspiracy theory. In Texas, the vote lasted a few minutes:

*“With lightning speed, the Texas Senate on Wednesday approved increased penalties for the long-banned and ritualistic practice of female genital mutilation. Senate Bill 323, which shot through a Senate committee after being filed just a week ago, was approved in a final vote of 31-0. All eight women senators were co-authors. The vote took less than three minutes.”* (Ward 2017)

Interestingly, primary sponsors of state bills try to temper this impression of sudden reactivity. As reported in the press:

*“Sponsoring Sen. Margaret O’Brien said she began working on the legislation before the Michigan case made national headlines, calling it ‘unfortunately good timing’ considering the ‘horrific and barbaric act (that) was done in our state.’”* (Oosting 2017c)

*“Minnesota state Rep. Mary Franson received a note from a friend last year urging her to draft stricter legislation against female genital mutilation. The state had banned the practice in 1994, so the Republican worried that a new law would seem ‘Islamophobic,’ given its target audience. One case changed her mind. Federal prosecutors last month charged a Michigan doctor and his wife in connection with performing the procedure on two Minnesota girls.”* (Hauslohner 2017)

By explaining to reporters that the issue was on their spot well before the Michigan case happened, Republican lawmakers’ narratives suggest that they are not trying to fix an issue they failed to avoid but that they were already aware of the “problem”. In so arguing, they indicate that their bill is not a response to the Michigan case but on the contrary, the latter is shedding light on the topicality of their bill. Moreover, as the excerpt above shows, the line of argumentation supporting Republican lawmakers’ proactivity rather than reactivity enables them to dismiss any criticism of anti-Muslim racism.

## **Islamophobia in the Name of Muslim Women's Rights**

Although overtly anti-Muslim positions are absent from Republican lawmakers' anti-FGM discourses, the press highlighted the relationships of some Republican lawmakers with Islamophobic organizations. As reported in the *Bangor Daily News*:

*“An Islamophobic group has joined the Maine fight against it. The Southern Poverty Law Center published emails on Monday between the LePage bill’s sponsor, Rep. Heather Sirocki, R-Scarborough, and a Maine member of ACT for America, a group that SPLC has deemed ‘the largest anti-Muslim hate group in the United States.’ Sirocki dismissed the report on Tuesday as ‘typical reaction from people who disagree on this issue’ and her cosponsor, Senate Majority Leader Garrett Mason, R-Lisbon Falls, made clear on Tuesday that cutting it is ‘a cultural issue, not a religious one.’”* (Shepherd 2018)

Two Islamophobic organizations are particularly involved in the criminalization of FGM in the United States. As mentioned in the quote above, the first is ACT for America. ACT for America was founded by Brigitte Gabriel (born Hanan Qahwaji), a Maronite Christian Libano-American citizen who called in 2017 for nationwide demonstrations against FGM (Pulliam Bailey 2017). As reported by *The News & Observer* about the North Carolina state bill:

*“On its website, [ACT for America] says it has helped pass legislation in Arizona, Kansas, Louisiana, South Dakota, Florida, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma and Virginia. It is unclear if ACT for America is pushing the legislation here [in North Carolina], but the group has ties to [Lt. Gov. Dan] Forest. Forest’s chief of staff, Hal Weatherman, once worked for the organization.”* (Horsch 2019)

The second Islamophobic organization is the AHA Foundation. The AHA Foundation was founded by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the American-Dutch-Somali critic of Islam who was subjected to FGM in her childhood. On its website, the AHA Foundation declares being committed “to pass

legislation in all 50 states”.<sup>16</sup> To show their influence, the website quotes Republican State Senator Jane Nelson of Texas:

*“When I heard Ayaan Hirsi Ali talking to Tucker Carlson on Fox News about the case in Michigan, I was so horrified that I immediately reviewed our existing state laws to determine whether this could happen in Texas. While we had laws against the practice of FGM, we did not have anything in law to punish those who help facilitate the FGM practice by transporting girls to undergo this gruesome act. I introduced legislation. Every woman in the Texas Senate signed on as a joint author, and we overwhelmingly approved a new law making it a felony to transport girls for FGM procedures. I am so grateful for Ms. Hirsi Ali for courageously speaking out about this important issue. There is no place in our society for this barbaric practice.”<sup>17</sup>*

In other words, ACT for America and the AHA Foundation are coaching U.S. legislators on how to frame and present the issue by providing them with model legislation.<sup>18</sup> While Republican lawmakers claim that their anti-FGM bill is devoid of Islamophobic and xenophobic intent, members of the targeted religious and/or national communities share a different opinion. As reported in the Minnesotan and Michigan press:

*“Brikti Hiwet, an Ethiopian-American elder and reproductive health lecturer at the University of Minnesota and St. Catherine University who attended Monday’s hearing, said she felt lawmakers had a ‘knee-jerk reaction’ to the issue. She says existing state and federal laws prohibiting the practice are effective. ‘How can you protect children when you take them away from their families and put them in foster care?’ she said.”*  
(Koumpilova and Mahamud 2017)

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<sup>16</sup> Source: <https://www.theahafoundation.org/female-genital-mutilation/fgm-legislation-by-state/> (Accessed August 20, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Source: <https://www.theahafoundation.org/female-genital-mutilation/fgm-legislation-by-state/> (Accessed August 23, 2020)

<sup>18</sup> For instance, the document titled “model FGM legislation” can be downloaded from the AHA Foundation’s website. See: <https://www.theahafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/AHA-Foundation-Model-FGM-Legislation-08.2019.pdf> (Accessed March 26, 2021)

*“Dawud Walid, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Michigan, said there’s nothing wrong with mirroring federal law in a state statute. But he said the proposed stiffer penalty for genital cutting is ‘questionable.’ Walid added, ‘My sense is that it’s a harsher type of sentencing ... because the individuals involved don’t appear on the surface to look American enough. They look foreign.’” (Gerstein 2017)*

Doubts about the actual intentions behind the criminalization of FGM are not limited to the targeted communities, but are also expressed by the first allies of the anti-FGM campaign. As the *Washington Post* reports:

*“Some activists and Democratic lawmakers have argued — in lieu of hard data about the prevalence of FGM — that racism, Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments have played a role in fueling enthusiasm for the new policies.” (Hauslohner 2017)*

One prominent figure of these critics is U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, the first Somali-born and veiled woman elected to Congress. As reported by *Fox News*:

*“When [Mary Franson’s] bill first hit the floor in 2017, it faced tough questioning from several lawmakers – among them then-state legislator and current U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar, who suggested Franson was using the bill as a bid for press attention. ‘What I don’t want us to do is to create laws because we want to get in the media,’ Omar stated in a committee at the time. ‘What I would like to have been done is to have (the parents) charged with laws that already exist.’” (McKay 2019)*

Omar eventually voted in favor of the bill, yet she declared on her Twitter account on March 2018:

*“FGM is outlawed in every country, the [U.S.] has one of the most aggressive drivers advanced laws in the books already.”<sup>19</sup>*

Hence, to counter criticism, Republican lawmakers mobilize the “*protection of little girls*” frame as a rationale for their actions. As reported by the *Star Tribune*:

*“Rep. Mary Franson, who introduced the House bill, said the Senate is bowing to pressure from groups ‘more concerned with perception than doing the right thing and protecting girls.’ ‘Watering down the bill really does a disservice to the little girls who are in danger,’ she said.”* (Koumpilova and Mahamud 2017)

The “*protection of little girls*” frame allows Franson to dismiss criticism of her bill as superficial concerns, unlike her. Likewise, State Representative Heather Sirocki of Maine, in a quote mentioned above, suggests that those who oppose her bill are actually in favor of FGM (“*typical reaction from people who disagree on this issue*”). Furthermore, as argued earlier, the “*protection of little girls*” frame functions as a powerful metaphor for a secure and welcoming nation that protects innocent and vulnerable children from foreign dangers. As Republican State Representative, Mary Franson of Minnesota, declares in the *Star Tribune*:

*“‘America is the land of the brave and the home of the free,’ she [Franson] said. ‘Little girls who moved here from other countries have the right to be free from the oppression of female genital mutilation.’”* (Koumpilova and Mahamud 2017)

Framed as a genuine intention to “save” Black, brown and/or Muslim girls from their “abusive” parents, Republican lawmakers thus intertwine cultural racism with the party’s principles of “family values” (Steffen 2011). As such, Republican lawmakers’ commitment against FGM show the complexity of femonationalism as FGM allows them to mobilize feminist claims without weakening the party’s social conservative policies. Therefore, FGM seems the ideal political issue to signify national unity, beyond political divides, and generate national pride and patriotism through femonationalist narratives.

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<sup>19</sup> Source: <https://twitter.com/IlhanMN/status/976314841211260928> (Accessed Sept. 8, 2020)



## Discussion

Contributing to the growing scholarship on femonationalism, this paper offers a unique analysis of the mobilization of U.S. Republican lawmakers to pass anti-FGM legislation. Drawing on publicly available material, the findings show that the 2017 Michigan criminal court case, which represents the first and only prosecution under the 1996 U.S. FGM ban, has elicited a moral crusade in which Republican lawmakers, mostly white and female, were at the forefront. From 2017 to 2020, 27 state anti-FGM bills have been introduced, 23 of which had Republican lawmakers as primary sponsors (including partisan and bipartisan sponsorships). This flurry of Republican-authored legislation, which was actively supported by Islamophobic organizations, was sustained by the presumptions of a nationwide conspiracy that may have harmed more than 100 girls from different states over a decade and a legal vacuum that would lead states without a specific FGM ban to become destinations for FGM. I argue that the presumption of a legal vacuum works as a powerful metaphor, suggesting that the absence of a specific law leaves the U.S. states vulnerable to the foreign “threat”. Yet, this fear ignores the facts. In 2006, Georgia convicted Khalid Adem, an Ethiopian father—who was deported ten years later—, of aggravated battery and cruelty to children, showing that existing laws are effective to criminalize FGM in the U.S.

Establishing specific laws against FGM is thus a matter of symbolic politics (Steffen 2011; Mona 2014; Bader and Mottier 2020). The Michigan case resurrected rescue narratives of Muslim women that were mobilized during the war on terror launched by another Republican president, George Bush. Although FGM is not an Islamic practice, the fact that the people involved in the Michigan case are members of a Muslim community has arguably bolstered the Republican mobilization for four years, resulting in the signing of a new federal law by Donald Trump. Yet, the figure of Dr. Jumana Nagarwala, the main defendant in the Michigan case, raises up the ambivalences of discourses about circumcised and veiled women. As a Johns Hopkins University-trained physician, Nagarwala challenges the mainstream representations of both the “FGM circumciser” as the African old, poorly educated woman holding a rusty razor blade (Bader 2019) and the Muslim woman as the “passive victim” whose actions are driven by “false consciousness” (Bilge 2010). Instead, she embodies what Joan Scott (2012, 155) has described as the representation of the “aggressive” veiled women, “their veil taken as the flag of a terrorist

insurgency.” As such, Nagarwala seems to represent what Republican lawmakers think of veiled women and Islam, just as they blame the (veiled) U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar and applaud (Islamophobic) Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

Focusing on the plight of women affected by FGM, by stressing cultural rather than structural causes, seems a savvy political strategy for Republican representatives. Indeed, sponsoring bills that tackle a feminist issue such as FGM and criminalize immigrants of color ensures the support of both the female electorate and white conservatives. Hence, supporting the criminalization of FGM, which ultimately leads to the deportation of convicted immigrant parents (as in the Adem case), is a significant political tool for the Republican party. As Sherene Razack (2008, 84) puts it, “The eviction of groups of people from political community begins with their *difference*, coded as an incomplete modernity that poses a threat to the nation.” Moreover, the results show that anti-FGM bills, whether at the state or federal level, often generate unanimity of votes. Thus, sponsoring an anti-FGM bill appears as a savvy, indeed easy, personal tactic for ambitious politicians to write a legislative success in their political resume. To be sure, I am not arguing here that FGM bans are racist or that FGM should be legal. Rather, I contend that anti-Muslim racism and political opportunism are the analytical lens to comprehend Republican lawmakers’ massive mobilization to criminalize FGM. In fact, Republican lawmakers’ commitment is neither part of a long tradition of political activism for Muslim women’s rights, nor are they involved in the global anti-FGM campaign.

In conclusion, femonationalism seems a promising concept to understand contemporary political discourses against FGM in the U.S. U.S. Republican lawmakers’ commitment to end FGM by mobilizing rescue narratives leading to the deportation of immigrants echoes similar findings observed in Switzerland (Bader and Mottier 2020; Bader forthcoming). Yet, the question of how left-wing NGOs and health care professionals working with women and girls affected by FGM perceive the commitment of such powerful yet controversial political allies remains open. Further research is needed to examine the impact of the intertwining of both the anti-FGM and the anti-immigration debates on the outcomes of prevention programs within diasporic communities.

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