

Women will not follow a law they believe will eventually lead to their own material insecurity. Over the years they have become aware that crossing certain boundaries entails questioning male authority which, in turn, will result in undesirable consequences, socially and economically. Elimination of FGM without addressing the inferior status of women in Sudanese society will not, therefore, succeed through state imposed legislation nor through intervention by international organizations.

The battle against FGM is a political one. Breaking the chains of dependency and the hereditary forms of power is imperative for women across the world that are bound together with the string of subordination. What we need to build is a consensual oppositional consciousness to demand that the state first and foremost consolidate women's education

and training, provide the opportunity for equal labour force participation, access to health and birth control services, access to legal rights and political participation. Once these demands are met, women will be able to halt the practice of female genital mutilation.

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*Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf completed her doctorate in anthropology at the University of Connecticut in 1994. She is researching the diaspora and migration from the Sudan to the new world.*

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## VIRGINIA ADAMSON

### Pledge to Mother

My mother,  
her rail of a body  
flat on her back.  
My father put her there again.  
The red and white tiles  
next to her  
still glisten.  
She polished the floor on Monday,  
it is Wednesday night  
and upstairs  
Don Messer's Jubilee  
is playing  
on the CBC.  
My father  
and my brother  
wrestle  
with vicious determination.  
Their angry footsteps  
mark the shiny floor,  
flip the handmade rug  
with the golden viking ship  
trapped  
in the embroidered centre,  
Eric the Red standing at port  
side.

My father's arms,  
are skinny  
next to his potbelly body,  
and scramble and punch  
at my brother  
and mother.  
The smell of his sweat  
coats the walls.  
My brother  
pushes back a tear  
a tiny trickle.  
My sister trembles,  
her soft white skin  
turns crimson against her silk  
hair.  
She and I sit on the frozen  
stairway,  
our numb eyes watch  
and that winter Wednesday  
I make a vow  
a silent pledge—  
I will never be a victim,  
I promise you mother!

My brother,  
like a frightened monster

slips away  
into his cave.  
The lonely television  
is playing Hockey Night in  
Canada  
and my father retreats upstairs.  
We collect ourselves off the  
steps,  
my sister and I,  
and drag our mother  
like a huge rug  
to the bedroom.  
Pulling at her beanpole arms,  
her hair rubs the floor,  
dusts like a mop,  
wipes up  
a familiar despair,  
soaks up  
the tears that fell  
from my brother's eyes  
and the sweat that dripped  
from my father's forehead.

*Virginia Adamson lives in Toronto in a large co-op with two wonderful cats.*