

Pre-Treatment

by Owolabi Bjälkander

Don't judge me, or my country, or my people.
Of course, I want you to know, most of all understand.
I want you to treat this issue carefully, with some grace, not wrath and prejudice.

I come from a country in Africa, where we perform female circumcision. It is a tradition....

Female circumcision, for you that don't know, involves removing or damaging a large or small part of the woman's external genitalia because of culture or tradition,
It is impossible to describe the pain.
It is done so that a girl can become a woman.

I know that you want INFORMATION, FACTS...
I have these in fact, lots, that I can share with you
But first.
It is important that I give you the background
I want to prepare your thinking, but more importantly,
Your hearts.

I want you to treat us African women gently, with dignity
Don't ask us if we have been circumcised,
Don't tell us that we are barbaric and stupid,
Don't call us idiots, uncivilised.

Don't judge me or my country
Of course, I want you to know, most of all understand.
I want you to treat this issue carefully, with some grace, not wrath and prejudice.

Owolabi Bjälkander is from Sierra Leone where female genital mutilation (FGM) is performed as a rite of passage into womanhood. Owolabi is now a researcher on FGM located in Sweden but working globally. The poem was written when the author started working in the Global North where people were often mesmerised by the topic and expressed indignation and anger, describing Africans as "barbaric and uncivilised". This poem was written for these audiences - the title, "Pre-Treatment", comes from the need to "treat" or prepare the hearts of the listeners.