

British Theatre Guide

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Cuttin' It

Charlene James
Young Vic/Royal Court
Young Vic Theatre
20 May–11 June 2016

Charlene James's new play *Cuttin' It* deals with the difficult issue of Female Genital Mutilation and brings it closer to home.

According to recent figures, over 135,000 women in UK have undergone such a horrifying procedure, but this is only an estimate. There could be many more. Figures aside, FMG is another of these pseudo-religious practices that seizes the most vulnerable, children and in this case young girls, and condemns them to a life of physical pain and psychological suffering.

FMG is another sign that, in the 21st century, violence against women and children is still part of engrained cultural and religious practices.

James's play looks at this right in the face and shows us the depth of such cultural roots where perpetrators of FMG are often women themselves. James lets two teenagers, Muna (Adelayo Adebayo) and Iqra (Tsion Habte), tell their stories and their experiences of FMG and also their two very different perspectives.

Muna, born in Somalia but raised in the UK, is the pleasantly extrovert ordinary teenager, while Iqra, who had moved to the UK from Somalia after enduring the deaths of her family, is a shy, gentle, and can't-do-anything-wrong type. Things are not all what they seem. This is not a story of happy friendship, shared life experience and cultural bonding, even though both come from Somalia.

The play slowly unfolds the darker side of both characters and reveals the deep division between the two, the imprint of cultural affectations.

James resorts to a heavy narrative style that sees both characters recounting their deep thoughts and describing their actions in long, expository monologues and asides. Direct dialogues between the two are very few and far between.

This delays the dramatic impact on stage, especially in the initial sections of the play, but luckily the superb acting by the young Adebayo and Habte and Gbolahan Obisesan's subtle directing create enough dramatic crescendos to keep us on the edge of our seats.

Much praise, also, must be given to the lighting by Azusa Ono and the sound by Adrienne Quartly, which strengthen the play's theatrical impact.

By the end of the show, it is a range of mixed emotions, between shock, disgust, and infinite sadness that moves us to open our eyes on a reality that is much closer than we might have ever thought.

This production will definitely move many more audiences across the country in its UK tour this summer, thanks to the brave choice from the Young Vic / Royal Court (together with Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Sheffield Theatres and The Yard Theatre) to produce this play about such a delicate subject.

Reviewer: [Mary Mazzilli](#)