El fruto del baobab by Maite Carranza is a beautiful book, and it is also about feminine genital ablation. This is not an easy task to accomplish but this seasoned writer and anthropologist from Barcelona is able to deal with this subject through its various narrators: Aminta, a beautiful immigrant from Western Africa, and her daughters Binta and Fatou. It is also about Lola, the Spanish doctor who gets entangled in their lives to stop the youngest daughter Fatou from going to the process of ablation that her older sister had. It is also about Abdouliue, the husband and father who is caught between two worlds. In many ways he also a victim of his patriarchal culture.

Initially, Lola meets Aminta when she takes her daughter for a check-up and Lola encounters Binta, the first case she had seen of this form of mutilation. Lola had read and heard about it as part of the multicultural landscape of modern day Spain, but she now has the rebellious and beautiful Binta, who is a victim of this practice and is very resentful of her predicament and her family. Aminta is stoic but suffers in silence too until Lola makes her aware of the consequences for Fatou.

Aminta is a mother of four and is younger than Lola, who is already 39 years old and has no children and this has caused her great suffering too. The proud Aminta immigrant housewife who has never gone to school and Lola, the brilliant tub bahs (white impure woman) as the woman from Gambia call them, forge a strange alliance and ultimately a friendship with serious consequences for Aminta's family.

Aminta, unlike her overtly rebellious Binta, has also started to question her traditions in a more discreet manner. She hides her passport so her husband will not continue the tradition of getting another wife and finds out about his plan to take 7 year old Fatou to Gambia to perhaps purify her and how she foils his plot.

All of the female characters in this novel and strong ones even if they seem weak and oppressed by their traditional cultures, but the men are not necessarily happy with their roles either.

As Aminta's states that happiness is a Western invention. However, Lola's Western culture does not get a pass either as she remembers her own provincial mother and her disappointed that Lola is unmarried and childless. This book is not a blanket indictment of the “others” reasons or traditions but explores the nuances.

This book is a very good for translation not only for its beautiful and straightforward prose and its development of superb, memorable, and strong characters, but its theme of immigration, cultural assimilation, and the all too common clash of civilization. All wrapped up in a subject that is often discussed but only in abstraction. The author's good knowledge of African culture demonstrated in this novel, her past successes as a writer, who has already been translated into English, should render this book a very good choice for the US market.

Source URL: http://www.newspanishbooks.us/read-report/el-fruto-del-baobab