The paper, “Female Circumcision: The Boundaries of Multiculturalism,” presents a confrontation between two worldviews with respect to the issue of female circumcision (i.e. female genital mutilation, or FGM): the liberal view, on one hand, and the multicultural approach, on the other.It can be said that these two worldviews are located on the same logical spectrum, and that they coexist in the democratic world.However, the multicultural view evolved during the late post-modern period, while the liberal view belongs to the modern era that preceded it.Therefore, the multicultural perspective constitutes a form of continuation of the liberal worldview, although it incorporates a more expansive conception of the notion of ‘rights.’This paper will make the following argument:

As a result of the entrenchment of the multicultural worldview, which offers a far-reaching interpretation of individual and collective rights, some ceremonies, rituals, and customs have reemerged, ‘through the back door,’ that until recently were considered outside of the consensus in the liberal world – for example, female circumsition, which was perceived as a barbaric act worthy of condemnation. An alternative view is heard today, among some proponents of the multicultural worldview, according to which the continued practice of female circumcision should be allowed, in light of the right of traditional Islamic culture to preserve its character and identity.This line of justification has placed the liberal worldview in the shadow of the multicultural approach, leading it to be regarded as ostensibly more rigid and, ironically, less liberal.While the liberal worldview supports the protection of the dignity of the individual, the multicultural perspective sometimes gives precedence to the right to a collective culture. One can therefore ask: When is it right and necessary for the liberal world to intervene in multicultural considerations, either overriding them or deferring to them?

In this paper, we will raise the various arguments proferred by many thinkers on both sides of this discussion, while clarifying the meanings of certain concepts, such as ‘the right to dignity’ and the ‘right to culture.’

The phrase ‘female circumcision’ is whitewashed terminology.In fact, the ceremony it denotes is one in which the female genitals are mutilated.This practice of ‘circumcision’ is widely accepted in African and Muslim cultures, including in parts of the Middle East - especially in Egypt and also among Bedouins in Israel.The average age at which it is performed ranges between four and eight years old, though there are cases in which it is carried out on adult women as well.In the mildest case, the ritual involves removal of the clitoris with a sharp instrument.It also includes mutilation of the outer lips of the vagina, as well as tearing the inner lips and sewing them together.After sewing, a small opening is left to allow menstrual bleeding and urine to pass.Following marriage, the husband cuts the seam in order to engage in sexual intercourse with his wife.

Over the course of this paper and at its conclusion, ways of resolving this issue are discussed that differentiate between two population groups: on one hand, female circumcision among a minority with a different culture that lives within a democratic society; and on the other, female circumcision in a non-democratic society.The guiding worldview in each case is that of a feminist approach which denies ‘cultural consideration’ when such consideration harms women and perpetuates discriminatory, oppresive, patriarchal patterns of behavior.