

Ep 12: Circumcision | No Outsiders

Chris Sloggett spoke to NSS chief executive Stephen Evans and campaigns officer Megan Manson about the recent BBC documentary A Cut Too Far? and the ethics of ritual infant male circumcision. Did the documentary go far enough and is the tide turning against this abusive practice?

Video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jKa0ED12Y8&feature=youtu.be>

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(Chris Sloggett) Hello and welcome to the National Secular Society Podcast. I'm Chris

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Sloggett, Communications Officer at the NSS. In this episode we'll be discussing

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the ethics of male circumcision after a BBC documentary shone a spotlight on the

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issue. But first Alastair Lichten talks to Andrew Moffat, the teacher who devised

0:00:22.769,0:00:28.360

a program for inclusive education and has faced a backlash from religious groups.

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(Alastair Lichten) Welcome to the NSS podcast.

(Andrew Moffatt) Hello. Thank you for having me.

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(AL) You're delivering the 2019 Bradlaugh Lecture. Would you say this is the

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greatest honour of your life?

(AM) [Laughing] Absolutely! That and ...

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(AL) That's great to hear.

(AM) That, and I was once featured in

0:00:50.010,0:00:55.660

the interval of a Eurovision Song Contest, and so I think it's sort of on a par with that.

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(AL) Okay. So definitely top two.

The topic of this year's lecture is No Outsiders.

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Can you give the audience a quick rundown on what No Outsiders is?

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(AM) Yes, certainly. So No Outsiders is a primary school resource,

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and it basically teaches children, it prepares them for life in modern Britain.

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So it teaches children about the world that we live in today,

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which is a diverse world. It prepares children to be global citizens, because

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in the UK, and in the world today, our children need to be able to work

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alongside and live alongside anybody. It doesn't matter if you have

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different color skin or are of a different religion or have disabilities

0:01:36.990,0:01:41.600
or if you're gay or lesbian or transgender
or whether you speak a different language.

0:01:41.600,0:01:46.400
I can work alongside you, and
that's what we want to teach our children,

0:01:46.400,0:01:52.720
make them confident global citizens.
(AL) Okay so it's not a secret sinister plot

0:01:52.800,0:01:57.200
to turn five-year-olds gay, as part of a cultural
Marxist conspiracy to destroy religious family
values?

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(AM) Well, yes, that has been levelled,
possibly not the Marxist bit
(AL) I read that on Twitter!

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(AM) [Laughing] I have read that I have a
secret agenda.
I do have an agenda, actually. My agenda is

0:02:11.700,0:02:15.940
very clear: it's community cohesion,
and I'm very confident about that.

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So clearly I do have an agenda.
But, no, I don't think you can make

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children gay, funnily enough. No-one made
me gay, and so, no, that's not really

0:02:28.300,0:02:33.820
not in my scheme of things.
(AL) What do you think are some challenges in
creating

0:02:33.820,0:02:40.280
and then defending a robust, inclusive
school ethos, particularly when

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you have strong conservative views
within the school community?

0:02:43.820,0:02:47.160
(AM) Well, you may feed have seen on the
news

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recently, there's been some huge
challenges to this work. In my own school

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in the last six months, funnily
enough, those challenges weren't around

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for the last four years. And that gives
me confidence that this work is

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possible, that we can do this work,
because it's only in the last six months

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that this has come about. Maybe the
challenges
were always there in a background,

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but they certainly weren't surfacing.
So the challenge, really,

0:03:10.990,0:03:16.570
for schools today, is to work out a
way to bring everyone on board. And that

0:03:16.570,0:03:21.850
is why I wrote No Outsiders actually.
I went to that school deliberately,

0:03:21.850,0:03:26.380
four years ago, because I thought there might
be challenges to some of this work.

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I wanted to get it right. I wanted to work

with a community who I thought,

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maybe, might find some tension with
some aspects of this work, specifically

0:03:36.730,0:03:41.620
LGBT, I'll be honest, and the reason
why I wrote No Outsiders was to try

0:03:41.620,0:03:47.350
and find a way to to place LGBT equality
in context in schools with all of the

0:03:47.350,0:03:52.630
equalities, and try to sit it alongside,
to teach children that it's no more

0:03:52.630,0:03:57.790
important than any other equality, but
also no less important. So that's why I

0:03:57.790,0:04:03.320
wrote No Outsiders four years ago and I
wrote it when I first joined Parkfield School.

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I think it was reasonably successful,
but I think what the last six

0:04:07.750,0:04:14.709
months show is that this work is not
done and and there's a

0:04:14.709,0:04:20.290
massive need for this work. I think
that i was maybe naive,

0:04:20.290,0:04:26.260
thinking that I had this sussed. I think
that the last six months demonstrates how

0:04:26.260,0:04:31.180
important this work is in schools.
(AL) Do you think that Community Schools ,

0:04:31.180,0:04:33.720
so those are schools that don't have really

0:04:33.720,0:04:40.180
clearly defined and protected ethos in
the same way that faith schools do,

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lack the confidence or find it difficult
to set out and say "This is our ethos.

0:04:47.000,0:04:51.380
At this school we value these things
and we promote these values"?

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Because I notice the subtitle
of No Outsider's is Reclaiming Radical

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Ideas in Schools.
(AM) That's a different book. I've got two
resources

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The first one, the main one is No Outsiders,

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and then I and then two years
later I wrote Reclaim Radical Ideas.

0:05:10.099,0:05:14.330
The idea of that really was saying
that as schools we are

0:05:14.330,0:05:18.590
becoming the radical ones because we are
saying communication works,

0:05:18.590,0:05:23.389
we can coexist, and at the
same time we're almost battling

0:05:23.389,0:05:29.599
with Brexit and Donald Trump.
A new Prime Minister today that talks

0:05:29.599,0:05:33.979
about Muslim with letterboxes,
for goodness sake, if

0:05:33.979,0:05:38.750

this language becomes acceptable, filtering down into our

0:05:38.750,0:05:43.250

communities, then teachers fighting for communication are becoming the

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radical ones.

That's where that title

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came from. In answer to your original question, no, my experience is

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that teachers generally a very comfortable with this kind of work.

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There's actually nothing new about us work, is there, really? Teachers have been teaching this

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kind of stuff for many, many years and many schools are very confident in

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teaching about equality. What No Outsiders does is it gives it a framework,

0:06:07.819,0:06:14.870

and gives a new sort of language to use to tie it all together. Maybe in

0:06:14.870,0:06:18.560

the past, maybe some schools would have been nervous about teaching about LGBT

0:06:18.560,0:06:22.669

equality, for example. Certainly in many schools

where I've been in the past, that was the

0:06:22.669,0:06:26.180

case. What No Outsiders enables schools to do is teach LGBT

0:06:26.180,0:06:29.750

equality within a framework, in a context with all the

0:06:29.750,0:06:34.189

characteristics of the Equality Act.

(AL) The Bradlaugh Lecturer often takes a look at

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issues that are both historic and contemporary.

What do you think is the

0:06:38.270,0:06:41.900

best historical parallel to today's protests against RSE?

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(AM) I was reminded when the first protest that we had at my school

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which was a deafening, frightening, 300 children chanting outside my school

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"Get Mr. Moffat out!" over and over again, children banging on windows at the

0:06:59.000,0:07:04.580

school with placards. It was really frightening, and I was reminded of a

0:07:04.580,0:07:10.160

lesson that I teach. Every year we teach in year 6 that Elizabeth Eckford.

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Elizabeth Eckford was one of the Little Rock Nine in Arkansas, in the US.

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This is a story about segregation when school started to to desegregate. This

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school in Little Rock had nine black students that had

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to be bussed in, under national guard, to be protected in that school. And there was a

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massive demonstration against them. Elizabeth missed the bus, but she was so

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determined to go to school that she walked round the blockades. She

0:07:44.000,0:07:47.180
walked in to school herself. There's a really famous photo, that I show the children

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every year, of Elizabeth with her books, and she's got her books

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close to her chest, and she's walking through a mob and there's a woman who's

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spitting at her, and there's mobs, and they're chanting and shouting at her.

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But she carried on, she went in to school. What I show the children at the end of that lesson,

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when we talk about the impact on Elizabeth, why did people keep shouting at her,

0:08:09.000,0:08:11.460
and why didn't they want to sit next to a black person,

0:08:11.460,0:08:15.280
why didn't they want black kids in their school,

where those ideas

0:08:15.290,0:08:20.630
come from, but also how can those ideas change? Because now, in the U.S., you

0:08:20.630,0:08:23.840
haven't got schools like that. Schools are where black and white kids

0:08:23.840,0:08:27.890
sit together, so how does that change happen? The way the plenary is a

0:08:27.890,0:08:33.110
lesson I show a photo of Elizabeth next to the woman that spat at her, but 40 years

0:08:33.110,0:08:37.460
later, and they're hugging and they're outside the school. It shows that

0:08:37.460,0:08:42.830
ideas can change, that woman now campaigns with Elizabeth

0:08:42.830,0:08:47.240
Eckford, and goes into schools to do talks. She changed her mind.

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Because all ideas can change. Anyone can change their mind. When

0:08:51.980,0:08:54.260
the children at my own school had those protests

0:08:54.260,0:08:59.690
against me and against LGBT people in school, I just thought "Wow! The

0:08:59.690,0:09:04.880
parallels here are phenomenal. These are huge parallels. What I

0:09:04.880,0:09:10.130
want to happen, and I hope will happen,

in years to come, is that people will
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remember this, the children involved will
remember this
0:09:14.540,0:09:20.500
time, and will change their minds,
because anyone can change their mind.
0:09:20.500,0:09:25.220
You just have to get through dialog and
discussion.
(AL) We can hope. Before
0:09:25.220,0:09:28.490
we go, and especially for those who might
not be able to make it to the lecture,
0:09:28.490,0:09:33.230
can you give us a little bit of hope?
Do you think that inclusive RSE is going
0:09:33.230,0:09:38.120
to be successful? How is it going to
win over, even just overcome
0:09:38.120,0:09:45.470
this minority of hardcore opposition?
(AL) Oh, I'm full of hope. My CEO, Hazel
0:09:45.470,0:09:49.550
Pulley, the head teacher, had this phrase
back when it started, and
0:09:49.550,0:09:53.690
she said she "has a reservoir of hope".
I think that's a really good line, and I'd
0:09:53.690,0:09:57.470
like to use that line, because I do have
a reservoir of hope. Because
0:09:57.470,0:10:01.400
we're not going back people, are we?
We're not going back
0:10:01.400,0:10:05.930

even 30 years ago, 1980's, when
you were not allowed to talk
0:10:05.930,0:10:11.600
about LGBT people in schools.
We've moved on from that now. And I tell you
0:10:11.600,0:10:14.690
what it gives me hope, Alistair, is that
this was on the news this
0:10:14.690,0:10:19.080
morning, about a school in Nottingham
0:10:19.080,0:10:23.120
where some of the protesters
from Birmingham have gone to
0:10:23.120,0:10:26.810
this school, and are standing outside
with placards in the same way that they
0:10:26.810,0:10:31.370
did with my school, and it's like 12
of them outside the school saying "Stop
0:10:31.370,0:10:35.210
sexualisation of children" and all this. But
what's really good is that
0:10:35.210,0:10:39.800
parents in that school walked into
school, past them, with rainbow flags.
0:10:39.800,0:10:44.150
Parents walked in, they were not
put off, and they walk past them and
0:10:44.150,0:10:47.150
there's footage of them all over Sky
News this morning.
0:10:47.150,0:10:51.710
Parents are saying "These ideas don't
belong here. We want our
0:10:51.710,0:10:57.140
children to be educated." That gives

me hope, because that shows that, yes,

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there's difficulties, there's challenges,
but that's good, isn't it? It's good

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because it means that this dialogue, this
debate, is happening nationally now.

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It's not under the carpet.
It's out there so let's talk about

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it, let's work together. No, I'm absolutely
confident that we can find a way forward.

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I know how this is gonna end.
It's gonna end with all schools doing

0:11:20.370,0:11:24.080

this work, maybe not No Outsiders, but all
schools doing work around equality.

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It might take a couple of years, it might
take five years, six years, but it will

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happen, because what's the alternative?
The alternative is just to say "Well, okay,

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you don't belong." And schools aren't gonna
say that.

(AL) That's a really great note to leave it on.

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We'll obviously have links to all those stories in
the

0:11:44.310,0:11:48.150

show notes, and, Andrew, we look forward to
discussing this in more detail at the

0:11:48.150,0:11:54.200

Bradlaugh Lecture. Thanks so much.
(AM) Thank you.

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(Chris Sloggett) So now we turn
o the issue of male circumcision.

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Historically religious groups,
particularly Jews and Muslims,

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have been given carte blanche to cut the
genitals of healthy boys to fit in with

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long-standing traditions. But now there
are signs of change on the issue.

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The release of the recent BBC documentary
A Cut Too Far was the latest sign that the

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tide may gradually be turning on this issue.
Shortly after the documentary was published,

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the NSS's CEO, Stephen Evans, had a piece
published in The Independent, arguing that
medically unnecessary

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infant genital cutting should end.
Stephen joins me now along with our

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Campaigns Officer, Megan Manson.
(Stephen Evans) Hello.
(Megan Manson) Hiya

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(AL) So, Stephen, defenders of male
circumcision often say this is a

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religious freedom issue. Your argument is
that they've got a blinkered view of

0:12:43.830,0:12:50.440
what religious freedom means and what it involves.
Would you mind just explaining why?

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(SE) Sure. Well, it is for sure that those

0:12:53.460,0:12:58.560
advocating for the right to cut children, for them this is an issue of religious

0:12:58.560,0:13:03.089
freedom. They want the right to do this for religious reasons. Certainly when

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Iceland proposed legislation to outlaw infant circumcision

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last year, religious leaders across Europe united to claim this was an

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attack on religious freedom. But, of course, as is so often the case with

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these sort of things, they're only really looking at that from their own narrow

0:13:20.020,0:13:24.660
point of view. There seems to be an assumption, I think, on their part that

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children don't have human rights, too. But the reality is that children do have rights.

0:13:28.780,0:13:32.860
They have the right to bodily integrity, to be protected from harm.

0:13:32.860,0:13:38.060
They absolutely have their right to their own independent religious freedom too.

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Circumcision, don't forget, is in many ways a stamp of religious

0:13:43.570,0:13:48.820
identity on a child. It's an irreversible marker of identity. So, clearly, you see

0:13:48.820,0:13:52.480
that we have some sort of clash of rights developing here. As a society I

0:13:52.480,0:13:55.990
think we need to balance competing rights and freedoms, and not forget to

0:13:55.990,0:13:59.350
consider the rights of the child.
(AL) So, Steven, what you're really saying here

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ties in with a lot of the points that we were making at our recent

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Secularism 2019 Conference, where we were saying religious freedom is a qualified

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right, and it's a right that actually belongs to everybody, and you don't have

0:14:12.399,0:14:17.230
the right to impose your view of religious freedom on others. Is that fair?

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(SE) Yeah, Absolutely. That's absolutely it. So whilst you have the

0:14:21.010,0:14:23.440
right to your belief, you don't necessarily have the right to impose

0:14:23.440,0:14:27.399
those beliefs and others. As argued in the blog, you certainly shouldn't

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assume to have the right to impose those beliefs with a pair of scissors or a sharp knife on the genitals of a non-consenting child. So unless you're the kind of person that thinks anything religious should demand some sort of automatic or unqualified respect, then ritual circumcision is something that we should, as a society I think, consider carefully, because it does represent a violation of the rights of the child. (AL) There's a reluctance to compare male circumcision to FGM. This was something that was brought up in the BBC documentary, but as soon as that happened I noticed that the presenter referred to the comparison as controversial. What do you think explains this reluctance? What's the relationship between the two? Because there are nuances, of course, and I suppose we want to just unpick that. And do you think the two can becombattted together?

(SE) Well. Yeah. Let's be clear . FGM is a barbaric practice that needs to be eradicated. Millions of girls and women around the world bear the scars. Thankfully progress is really being made on that issue I think. It's understandable that some FGM campaigners, I think, fear that equating infant circumcision, which is lawful and even respected in some quarters, could undermine the efforts to tackle FGM. so the current situation we have is that any form of FGM is illegal in the UK, and indeed in many other countries, and typically regarded as barbaric. Now, on the other hand, we have this thing called male circumcision which has, at least until recently anyway, being regarded as something that's quite benign, or even beneficial on health grounds, although we have to say that the supposed health benefits are weak, they're contested, and are

actually largely irrelevant in a Western

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context. So to listen some people you think the two things have

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absolutely nothing in common, they're totally different,

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you shouldn't even talk about them in the same breath. But I don't really buy that.

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You don't need to compare them, but I think it is quite reasonable to

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point out the similarities between the two practices.

Because they are many and varied.

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Both involve painful, usually permanent, surgery on a non-consenting child.

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Both procedures vary in severity. Many people don't actually realize

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There are many different forms of FGM, and FGM at its "mildest", for want of a better word,

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is actually less invasive than the average male circumcision.

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But both procedures, too, are medically unnecessary,

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they both can result in injury, complications, and even death,

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as we've seen, including here in the UK. It's not about comparing them,

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but I would suggest that we should take the same consistent

0:17:21.780,0:17:26.660

and ethical approach to all forms of ritual genital cutting.

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(AL) So there's an ethical similarity in the case against male circumcision and the

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case against FGM, in that both boys and girls, indeed all children, have the right

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to bodily integrity, and the assumption should be that children's bodies are

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their own, and that if they want to alter them, they could do it when they're

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older. I suppose I would say that making that case consistently,

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strengthens the case against both male circumcision and FGM, because it's a

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clear ethical line that you don't cross.

(SE) Absolutely. What we're saying really is

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the principle of bodily integrity should apply equally to

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all children, irrespective of sex.

We accept that FGM is a violation of human

0:18:11.889,0:18:15.789
rights of girls, so what we're saying is
non-therapeutic male circumcision is a

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violation of the rights of boys. So we've
got a gender double standard in the way

0:18:19.360,0:18:23.200
the law deals with them. I think
that's what we're saying needs to be
addressed.

0:18:23.200,0:18:29.320
Don't forget that a rising tide of human rights
will float all boats so this is

0:18:29.320,0:18:34.180
something that, I think, FGM campaigners
should be able to get behind.

0:18:34.180,0:18:38.320
(AL) So, Megan, turning to you,
you've noted that powerful people are

0:18:38.320,0:18:44.350
often at pains to suggest that FGM has
nothing to do with religion, and you

0:18:44.350,0:18:48.639
recently wrote a blog on our website
arguing that this was a misguided view.

0:18:48.640,0:18:52.300
Do you mind explaining why?
(Megan Manson) Sure. I was quite struck by
the fact

0:18:52.300,0:18:57.540
that during discussions in Parliament about
FGM,
politicians would say again and again

0:18:57.549,0:19:03.549
that FGM has nothing to do with religion.
The reality is FGM does have something

0:19:03.549,0:19:07.269

to do with religion, and there are
certain Muslim sects, for example, around

0:19:07.269,0:19:11.740
the world, who assert that the reason
why they cut their daughters is because

0:19:11.740,0:19:16.330
they consider it's a religious requirement.
And no doubt politicians and

0:19:16.330,0:19:20.889
other stakeholders are well-meaning when
they say that FGM is not a religious

0:19:20.889,0:19:25.000
practice. At the local level,
campaigners may tell people in

0:19:25.000,0:19:29.409
communities that practice FGM, that it's
not a religious requirement, to try and

0:19:29.409,0:19:35.980
deter them from doing it. But what
actually happens is that this entrenches

0:19:35.980,0:19:41.230
the idea that something that's religious
cannot be harmful, because religions are

0:19:41.230,0:19:46.420
seen to be benign or beneficial and so,
therefore, FGM cannot be religious.

0:19:46.420,0:19:52.299
But this is really quite simplistic thinking.
Many religious practices, both past and

0:19:52.299,0:19:57.519
present, can be very harmful.
So denying that harmful practices like

0:19:57.519,0:20:01.120
FGM have anything to do religion is a
way of shielding religion

0:20:01.120,0:20:05.740

from criticism, and in turn that shields male circumcision from criticism, because

0:20:05.740,0:20:09.460
everyone knows that circumcision is strongly connected with religion,

0:20:09.460,0:20:14.920
particularly Judaism. Politicians and other stakeholders need to be braver and

0:20:14.920,0:20:19.900
they need to call out harmful religious practices, rather than just denying that they're religious.

0:20:19.900,0:20:22.900
(AL) So, we need to tackle this way of thinking, don't we? That

0:20:22.900,0:20:27.940
religion is automatically a good thing, and the religious practices can't be

0:20:27.940,0:20:33.550
harmful, and I think that there's a sort of short-termism about it sometimes,

0:20:33.550,0:20:38.050
isn't there? Where I think, politicians think to themselves "Look, if we say that FGM

0:20:38.050,0:20:44.710
has nothing to do with religion, then FGM is seen as further beyond the pale than

0:20:44.710,0:20:46.480
ever" - obviously it's beyond the pale in the

0:20:46.480,0:20:53.460
first place - but it pushes it even further away, and therefore we're going to tackle that.

0:20:53.460,0:20:59.080
(SE) I think it also reveals a reluctance to challenge

0:20:59.080,0:21:02.620

people's religious freedom, or restrict people's religious freedom, and so that

0:21:02.620,0:21:07.100
feeds into this narrative that religious freedom is something that is absolute,

0:21:07.100,0:21:10.920
that it's sacrosanct, that you can't challenge, when we all know, but I don't

0:21:10.929,0:21:14.170
think enough people realize, that religious freedom is

0:21:14.170,0:21:18.340
very much a qualified right, and can be set aside in certain circumstances.

0:21:18.340,0:21:22.510
I think we need to be a little bit less squeamish about making clear to

0:21:22.510,0:21:26.470
people that their religious freedom is not absolute, and actually sometimes

0:21:26.470,0:21:33.010
the state has as a duty to interfere with that right,

0:21:33.010,0:21:37.420
if it's to protect the rights and freedoms of others.

0:21:37.420,0:21:42.730
(MM) There is another point as well. I keep hearing that these people who say

0:21:42.730,0:21:46.420
that FGM has nothing to do with religion often say it's to do with patriarchy,

0:21:46.420,0:21:50.620
it's to do with subjugating women. Now the problem with that argument is that

0:21:50.620,0:21:56.110

every culture that practices FGM also practises male circumcision. So, although

0:21:56.110,0:22:01.150

it might be the case that there is a form of patriarchal control involved,

0:22:01.150,0:22:05.770

it goes deeper than that. There is more going on here, because the genitals of

0:22:05.770,0:22:09.580

both children, of both sexes, are cut. (AL) It's perhaps just more of a fashionable case

0:22:09.580,0:22:14.480

to make I suppose, whereas actually saying "Look this is,

0:22:14.480,0:22:17.450

at least in some cases, or at least to some extent, a religious tradition, but

0:22:17.450,0:22:21.200

that doesn't make it okay." I think that actually strengthens the case against

0:22:21.200,0:22:27.020

both FGM and male circumcision and sometimes we just need to be clear that

0:22:27.020,0:22:31.130

the state needs to be prepared to stand up to religious practices. That

0:22:31.130,0:22:34.880

doesn't mean hiding behind the sort of cop-out, that all this isn't truly

0:22:34.880,0:22:39.170

religious, because sometimes it is. Obviously, any religious challenges to

0:22:39.170,0:22:44.390

these practices we do welcome, but, at the same time, pretending that they are

0:22:44.390,0:22:49.490

not religious is, I think, a fool's errand. So there are differing opinions about

0:22:49.490,0:22:57.460

how best to bring about an end to infant genital cutting.

The presenter of the BBC's documentary concluded

0:22:57.460,0:23:02.940

that regulation, rather than outright legal restrictions, would be appropriate.

0:23:02.940,0:23:09.560

What's your response to that line of argument, and

what do you think is the best way to approach this?

0:23:09.560,0:23:13.100

(SE) Well, I suppose there are three approaches you can take:

0:23:13.100,0:23:16.260

- you can just leave well alone
- you can regulate the practice, or

0:23:16.260,0:23:19.480

- you can ban it.

Now there's no question that bringing in

0:23:19.490,0:23:23.920

legislation to outlaw genital cutting would be difficult politically,

0:23:23.920,0:23:27.710

particularly in the context of rising anti-semitism and anti-muslim bigotry

0:23:27.710,0:23:33.730

across Europe. The idea of regulating a human rights violation

0:23:33.730,0:23:39.530

doesn't strike me as a sensible way forward either. Circumcision, as with any

0:23:39.530,0:23:43.370
other religious or cultural tradition, is something that is carried out quite

0:23:43.370,0:23:47.720
often unthinkingly, you know, "This is something we've always done",

0:23:47.720,0:23:51.860
"We do things this way because we've always done things this way."

0:23:51.860,0:23:55.220
So I think what we really need first is a conversation. We need to encourage people

0:23:55.220,0:24:00.200
to think about this, to question it. Some people are. Within some

0:24:00.200,0:24:06.280
Jewish faith traditions, the Brit Shalom ceremony is being increasingly

0:24:06.280,0:24:12.610
adopted by Jewish parents. Now this is a ceremony that, like infant circumcision,

0:24:12.610,0:24:17.740
welcomes children into the world, but it doesn't involve cutting their genitals.

0:24:17.740,0:24:21.700
I think the tide is, perhaps, beginning to turn, and this needs to happen.

0:24:21.700,0:24:25.020
But I think we certainly need to change hearts and minds,

0:24:25.020,0:24:28.480
we need to have conversations, we need people to question the practice,

0:24:28.480,0:24:33.340
and I think that needs to be a precursor to any attempt to outlaw genital cutting,

0:24:33.340,0:24:38.680
But ultimately I think that's where we need to go.
(MM) I think that campaigners against FGM

0:24:38.680,0:24:42.650
should also be very, very wary about arguments regarding regulation.

0:24:42.650,0:24:47.810
Because advocates of more minor forms of FGM,

0:24:47.810,0:24:52.220
where only a pinprick incision is made, or small amount of tissue is removed

0:24:52.220,0:24:56.330
from the clitoris, those people, who are advocating for that, would argue that if

0:24:56.330,0:25:01.190
we tolerate a regulated form of infant male circumcision, it would be

0:25:01.190,0:25:06.230
discriminatory to not tolerate a regulated form of FGM. And they sort of

0:25:06.230,0:25:09.890
have a point. But the solution, obviously, is not to weaken our

0:25:09.890,0:25:13.490
protection for the rights of girls to bodily integrity, it's to strengthen

0:25:13.490,0:25:17.930
the protection of both boys and girls from non-consensual forms of religious

0:25:17.930,0:25:22.840
and cultural genital cutting.
(SE) Yeah. This is something which we're seeing a lot,

0:25:22.840,0:25:28.360
in America in particular, where FGM is

0:25:28.370,0:25:33.020
managing to become a sort of
controversial issue legally. And I think

0:25:33.020,0:25:37.360
a lot of anti-FGM campaigners would have
thought that was very, very unlikely

0:25:37.360,0:25:41.600
to happen. And it would be horrifying to
see, well it is horrifying to see,

0:25:41.600,0:25:48.000
potentially backward steps on that, but, as you
say,
the logic has to be applied consistently

0:25:48.000,0:25:53.600
in order to protect children.
(AL) Okay. So, Steven, Megan, thank you very
much.

0:25:53.600,0:25:57.300
(SE) Thank you.
(MM) Thank you.

0:25:57.660,0:26:01.960
(Chris Sloggett) Thank you for joining us on
the
National Secular Society podcast. Have a look
in

0:26:01.970,0:26:05.149
the show notes for more details on the
Bradlaugh Lecture, the articles we've

0:26:05.149,0:26:08.509
discussed on male circumcision, and
links to our website, where you can get

0:26:08.509,0:26:12.909
involved with the NSS's work.
We'll see you next time.