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Ritual Purity in Islam

Myths legitimizing Female Circumcision *(khifad)* changing gender hierarchies in contemporary Egypt

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Abstract

This study uses Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) as a case study to explore changes in Contemporary Sunni Muslim society and highlight related religious narratives. The Western perspective views this practice as reinforcing the patriarchal systems of Islam and highlighting gender inequality. The traditionalist Muslim position emphasizes ritual purity and connection to sacred hierarchies. The study examines legal opinions about *legitimizing myths* in Egypt, including stereotypes about *unpure body parts, popular beliefs over hot climate, female desire, and differences between Western and Eastern women.* The paper employs Arabic Studies and some segments from the System Justification theory from social psychology. Looking for an answer to the question: *Do these myths reveal further layers of rationalization in religious law?* The example of FGM brings us closer to the internal responses of Islam to modernization.

Methodology: Qualitative content analysis of 47 related Arabic fatwas from different digital fatwa portals [1]

Keywords: Islam, modernization, harmonization, religious law, female circumcision, legitimizing myths, gender stereotypes.

Rituális tisztaság az iszlámban

Női körülmetélés (khifad), a mítoszok legitimálásaa nemi hierarchiák változása a mai Egyiptomban

Absztrakt

Ez az esettanulmány a női nemi szervek megcsonkításáról (FGM) szól. Ez a folyamatban lévő gyakorlat egyike azoknak az elemeknek, amelyek újraalkotják és fenntartják az iszlám mélyen gyökerező patriarchális és hierarchikus rendjét, és amelyeknek különleges kapcsolatuk van az iszlám rituális tisztaságával.

A női körülmetélés megfogalmazott „előnye" a női vágyak csökkentése, ami veszélyezteti a megfelelő társadalmi rendet. Ez a szempont önmagában is felhívja a figyelmet a kiugró egyenlőtlenségekre és a nemi hierarchiára. De a nemi aspektuson túl a szent hierarchiákhoz is kapcsolódik a rituális tisztaság törvényével való kapcsolata miatt.

Ez a kutatás a „legitimációs mítoszokra" összpontosít, mint például a szélsőséges női vágy, a túlméretezett csikló, a nyugati és keleti nők közötti különbségek, valamint a forró éghajlat hatása.

A tanulmány az arab tanulmányok keretrendszerét használja, érinti a rendszerigazolás szociálpszichológiai elméletét, és arra a kérdésre keresi a választ: Vajon ezek a mítoszok a vallási törvények racionalizációjának további rétegeit tárják fel?

A női nemi szervek megcsonkításának példája az iszlám világ modernizációra adott belső válaszait is jelzi.

Módszertan: 47 kapcsolódó arab fatva kvalitatív tartalomelemzése különböző digitális fatva portálokról, kiegészítve egy 2022-es kairói terepkutatással.

Kulcsszavak: iszlám, modernizáció, racionalizáció, vallási törvények, női körülmetélés, legitimációs mítoszok, nemi sztereotípiák.

1. Introduction

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) is a subject of lively debate in contemporary Egyptian society. The subject of the debate is the separation from sacred tradition and the reinterpretation of religious law, which would allow the abandonment of the custom, without violating the cardinal principle of ritual purity *(tahara)* in Islam. The example of female circumcision leads us to the deep layers of the value system of a changing Muslim society.

This study examines the myths that maintain and legitimize the custom, focusing on the significance of 'purity value' in Islam, and its Shifts, which reveal Islam's internal responses to the secular challenges of modernity.

"Many communities believed that FGM was a necessary practice to ensure that a girl is accepted

[1] The English Alphabet is used for transcription. English translation of Qur'an (M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, 2005) Translations of fatwas from Arabic original text are the work of the author.

socially and hence eligible for marriage. (...) By undergoing the practice,..avoids social stigma.(...) religious doctrine is often used to justify the practice" (Mukabi et al. 2022).

Muktabi examines the sustaining and supporting beliefs and highlights that, in addition to the negatives and enlightening arguments, the practice of 'mapping the positives' is a crucial element of the fight against FGM/C These believes explain the adherence to custom that can still be observed in social practice today.

As international campaigns have recognized, religious narratives that aim to eradicate the custom play a key role in weakening those beliefs.

"There is no evidence in Islamic law that necessitates female circumcision nor is it part of the Sunna (Prophetic traditions), nor an honorable act". The Egyptian branch of UNFPA summarizes the religious law opinion banning FGM/C (al-Awa 2006:10). This view, although it has the support of Azhar, the Egyptian state religiosity, and plays a prominent role in weakening beliefs, is only one among rival opinions.

Despite the prohibitive fatwas, the social practice of FGM/C is still widespread today; rival narratives emerge and strengthen their position, also with legitimacy drawn from religion.

To understand the social embeddedness of different narratives and their impact on practice, it is important to briefly review some key elements of the relationship between Arab modernization and classical religious law. It is also essential to highlight Egypt's significance and the impact of the narratives formulated on European and global Sunni Muslim diasporas.

In the 19th century, the entry of European states into the Middle East and North Africa highlighted the need for coordination between traditional systems and European modernity. While the territorial state alienated traditional society, colonizers acknowledged the importance of integrating traditional institutions, including religious authority.

Al-Azhar in Egypt is a leading authority on religious law and scholarship, influencing the state through its fatwa office (Dar al-Ifta'). It actively combats extremism and opposes global fundamentalist political Islam.[2]

The views of classical religious scholars shape Sunni Islam; however, fatwa offices have not achieved complete centralization, which permits a variety of religious legal opinions.

Religious intellectuals' positions influenced moral guidelines through legal opinions.

These opinions were never binding, but their power was always significant in determining social values. These opinions are the fatwas, *"a non-binding Islamic Sharia ruling"* (Salhein 2018:1).

Sunni Islam did not develop a hierarchically organized church. Historically, certain differences and distinctions have been recorded in religious legal opinions. Initially, the rituals of the law schools were tied to territoriality. In addition, communities often practiced local traditions as a custom prescribed by Islam. Talal Asad (2009) describes it as a system of *discursive traditions.*[3]

In modernity, the diversity of opinions has become even more complex. Individuals have chosen their values. According to their perceptions, they choose among the muftis representing the most sympathetic opinions. Furthermore, political proximity and distance to the state create political fault lines. A loyal and oppositional Islamic position emerged.

In addition, a new form, the digital fatwa, has appeared, disseminating different opinions even more chaotic. Rival narratives occur: *'fatwa-shopping'* (Salhin 2018:1) or *'fatwa war'* (Bunt 2009:117) began.

The discourse in Egypt significantly impacts the global results of eliminating FGM/C. Egypt's relevance stems from several components.

(1) The prevalence of FGM/C is estimated at over 80% in 2023 despite government and religious prohibitions (UNFPA-UNICEF 2023).

(2) Al-Azhar is an influential organization of Institutional Religion located in Egypt. It influences Egyptian government decisions and fights extremism globally.

(3) Various radical narratives from the Muslim Brotherhood challenge Al-Azhar, appealing to local opponents and promoting Islam globally. The Muslim Brotherhood's origins in Egypt.

(4) The International Conference of Islamic Scholars, held at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, resulted in the fatwa (Gomaa, 2006) that banned

[2] . Since the 1990s, Azhar has been actively shaping public opinion but has been criticized for bias toward the state and challenged by opposing political Islam (Ayoob 2007; Barraclough 1998; Brown 2011).

[3] Rich sociological (Barakat 1993; Gellner 1995), and anthropological (Asad 2009; Bowen 2013; Trapper 1995) literature analyze the topic.

FGM/C, followed by stricter penalties in the Egyptian Penal Code in 2008 and 2016.[4]

(5) Yusuf Qaradawi (1926–2022) was a prominent Egyptian preacher known for his moderate views within the Muslim Brotherhood. He significantly influenced European and global discourse on various issues, was born in Egypt.

Three significant religious law narratives associated with Egypt have a strong influence on both the global and European Muslim diasporas. The European Council for Fatwa and Research, which also deals with minority religious law (*fiqh al-aqalliya)*, was significantly influenced by Al-Azhar and the Egyptian scholar Yusuf Qaradawi (Wollner 2021).

2. Terminology

The World Health Organization (WHO) uses the term Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), while other groups prefer 'cutting' to minimize stigmatization. *"The practice was known as female circumcision till the 1980's. In the 1970's, the name Female Genital Mutilation was coined by an Australian-American feminist, Hosken. The WHO recommended the use of it in 1991"* (Mukabi et al. 2022:1985). The term 'female circumcision' is avoided in the West due to its anatomical inaccuracies. A brief review of the English-language sections of the sampled Arabic fatwa portals indicates that FGM/C almost does not exist. It is mentioned once in an article- not fatwa-, when Dar el-Ifa' summarizing Al-Azhar's position to international organizations.[5]

The Arabic term *khafd* or *khifad* translates to 'reduction or appeasement' Behind the name is the belief about the danger of uncircumcised women, which is one of the myths, I will return to the analysis of this later.

In the empirical sample, the term khifad occurred eighteen times in the 47 fatwas examined, while the female versions of circumcision *(khitan al-banat, khitan al-'untha. khitan al-mara')* appeared more than two hundred times. Although there is a heated debate about the analogy or separation of religious law, the term *'circumcision of girls' (khitan al-banat)* remains widespread in both fatwas and social practice. Behind the terms appears a commitment to the orthopraxis of Islam, that is, the practices of ritual actions, and less to its dogma. My own interviewees used the term female circumcision *(khitan al-banat*) exclusively. (Wollner, 2024)

In the JSTOR database, the term Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting returned 1840 hits, FGM 3439, and the term Female Circumcision 13,217 hits, as of 2025.07.21.

That is, the term female circumcision, despite its anatomical inaccuracy and its strong rejection in human rights discourse, is still the most commonly used term today. Considering the criticisms, I also use the term for the reasons mentioned earlier.

3. The Social practice of FGM/C in Egypt

The practice of FGM is common in the Sahel belt and the Nile Valley, where it still occurs in some Christian communities. [6] Outstanding studies claim FGM/C is more strongly linked to ethnic traditions than religion (Farina – Ortensi, 2014; Knight 2001; Mackie 1996).

Mukabi et al. (2022:1985) asserts that certain customs should not be exclusively labeled as 'Muslim practices' because other communities also observe them.

UN reports (2008, 2018, 2023) describe three main types of FGM. Type I, partial or complete excision of the clitoris. Type II, excision of the clitoris and labia minora, with or without removal of the labia majora. Type III., the (infibulation or pharaonic circumcision), removal of the labia majora, narrowing and suturing of the vaginal opening. In Egypt, the urban sample, Type I, is typical, but there are also cases of the other two forms.

FGM has its roots in pre-Islamic antiquity. There is no evidence for infibulation (which can be defined as exaggerated pharaoh circumcision), but it has been proved that the practice was present in ancient Egypt. Mackie (2000) and Knight (2001) race the practice's origin to the Kushite-Meroite civilization, which existed in Upper Egypt and historical Nubia between 6 BC and 4 AD. In the Kushite region, both religions, Christianity and Islam integrated local customs and passed them on as religious traditions. Islam integrated the practices into the Shafi'i tradition

[4] The punishment under Article 242a (2016) of the Penal Code was tightened: 1) dedicates from a 'crime of desperation' to a 'crime', 2) criminal liability was extended, 3) cannot be settled by agreement of the parties (3.) The punishment was increased to five to seven years'; for escorts to three years imprisonment. In case of death, the punishment is 15 years (2018:19), source: Dar el-Ifta'– Sauqi 5832, 6711, 4678/14888.

[5] https://www.dar-alifta.org/en/article/details/40/female-genital-mutilation (checked: 2025.01.26)

[6] Jocelyn Murray (1976) presents a Kenyan Christian community, where FGM III (infibulation), the most drastic form, is performed.

of religious law, as Goldziher (1981) describes the incorporation of pre-Islamic traditions.

As a result of international campaigns, a wealth of literature is available on the practice of FGM/C. Garry Mackie (1996, 2000) uses game theory to analyze the possibility of eliminating the custom. Khafagi (2001) writes about breaking cultural taboos. Riegg (2009) explores the relationship between Muslim family law, marriage customs, and clitoridectomy. Grande (2010) proposes a rethinking of the critical issues raised between normative human rights and multiculturalism. El-Gibaly et al. (2019) analyzes the issue of medicalization. Farina & Ortensi (2014) study the passing on of tradition from mother to daughter. Mukabi et al. (2022) discuss Kenya and analyze the myths and misconceptions perpetuating customs.

International organizations are making significant efforts to end the FGM/C. But the achievement of international attention is a credit to Egyptian feminism, what were always vital for addressing taboo issues (Aoude 2014; Tzoreff 2014; Moghadam 2004). The issue of clitoridectomy was raised at the 1980 UN conference in Copenhagen, by Nawal es-Saadawi, an Egyptian feminist activist, and prompting UNICEF to add it to its agenda (Saadawi 1980) UN Women promotes a plan to eliminate FGM by 2030, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals, and addresses global gender inequalities by funding various reports and initiatives (Carter 2020).

International organizations (END FGM EU network 2020) (UNFPA-UNICEF 2017–2020) combating FGM/C acknowledge the significance of religious law.

The Matanda report (2022) reviews 115 peer-reviewed articles from 2008 to 2020 on FGM/C prevention, highlighting the successes and challenges of different campaigns and outlining key findings, and states, *"health education and community dialogues with parents and religious leaders can change attitudes towards FGM"*(Matanda et al. 2022:17).

A German NGO, TARGET, organized the International Conference of Islamic Scholars at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the results of which included the issuance of fatwas by Al-Azhar banning FGM/C. [7]

Despite the successes, however, social practice remains high in Egypt today. UNFPA-UNICEF publishes reports under a longitudinal research program (2008, 2018, 2021, 2023), and provide detailed documentation: UNFPA-UNICEF publishes reports and provides detailed documentation as part of a longitudinal research program (2008, 2018, 2021, 2023): Annual reports indicate a prevalence rate of over 97 percent in Egypt in 2021 and 80 percent in 2023. The Egyptian Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS 2015),also provides detailed statistics, indicating continued practice among girls aged 15-19, 79 percent among aged 15-49, 87 percent among those aged 45-49, and 97 percent among women aged 45-49. The Egyptian Family Health Survey (2022) shows a prevalence rate of 86 percent.

This study includes a small field research component in Cairo, collecting primary data from 33 participants about their experiences with FGM/C and their preferences regarding their daughters.[8] Nine in-depth interviews were recorded from those who agreed to tell the whole story. The results are summarized in (Wollner 2024). The sample is not representative due to the number of participants and social stratification, and the findings of the composition cannot be generalized to the entire population but are consistent with representative survey data.

Briefly summarizing the result, we can state that the prevalence rate is 27 out of 30 participants in the survey. Most women (42.4%) are between 20 and 35 years old [9]21 out of 30 respondents live in Subra (a middle-class neighborhood in Cairo), and 22 are married, and 28 members wear a headscarf (hijab); 20 participants have children, the average number of children among them is 3.1.

A practice widespread in the group faces opposition and support, reflecting a divide in opinions about its continuation. Signs of change are emerging, evidenced by an aunt rejecting the practice and a doctor questioning its necessity. Although a state ban is implemented, the reasons for individuals opting out remain uncertain. Analysis of

[7] The organization focuses on practices within the German migrant community and participates in global campaigns, noting that certain behaviors persist in specific immigrant communities in Germany. *"Africans often have their daughters mutilated in their countries of origin during holidays"* (TARGET 2002).

[8] 30 respondents were adults, 3 data on children comes from their mothers.

[9] The average age of the informants is 33.7 years, the youngest is 5 years old (3 people are younger than 18 years old), the oldest is 82 years old. Children were not directly involved; their mothers were asked about their preference for FGM.

qualitative interviews shows a significant link to 'purity as a social value' within social and ritual contexts.

My respondents mentioned common beliefs, highlighting purity as a key value in all interviews. Themes of *'appeasement,'* the significance of *'good'* women, and marriage suitability criteria emerged. Social purity largely dominated the responses, though examples of ritual purity also surfaced. Phrases like *'bad body part that needs to be cut out'* and '*My body should be complete'* reflect notions of restoration for a ritually pure body.

International reports and literature and primary research all indicate that a custom in contemporary Egypt evaluates female virtue and purity.

4. Social and Ritual Purity, FGM is a good example to detect shifts in Values

Female circumcision illustrates a notable cultural shift in Islam due to its contentious nature. It is important to examine a change in values where differences of opinion arise at the start of the research. In Islam, the practice of FGM/C encompasses two distinct controversial aspects:

Firstly, *territorial selective practice:* where it is not practiced, it is viewed as an old custom that is not obligatory. But, where it is practiced, it is tied to essential Muslim religious law and ritual purity, and abandoning it is not an option.[10]

Secondly, the *rejection of non-Sunnah practices is general.* All religious legal narratives, including traditional conservatives who support *khifad,* reject *non-Sunnah* practices known as *Pharaonic circumcision,* which stems from the pre-Islamic era labeled 'age of ignorance' *(jahiiyyal*) by Islam. In Western terminology, it means Type 2 or 3.[11]

Debate only exists about the Sunnah method, which is type 1, i.e., the excision of the clitoris.[12]

In the following section, I analyze the factors that set the *khifad* apart from other cases of ritual purity and make it an exceptional example for exploring shifts in value.

(1) Khifad related to a special case of ritual purity to fitrah

According to Simon(2024) and Gellner(1995), Gauvian (2005:372) defines ritual purity as a *'binder of social cohesion*'. Muslim sacred law (shariah) encompasses two primary categories: individual religious duties to God *('ibada*) and rules for co-existence among members (*mua'amala*). The laws of ritual purity *(Kitab at-Tahara*) are included at the start of the Personal Obligations (*'ibada*) section in Hadith.[13]

Several academic sources have analyzed the close relationship between social practices and religious law.[14] Burge (2010); Gauvain (2005). Strathern&Stewart (2004) explore the role of Muslim ritual purity law in shaping contemporary identity. Mariam Katz (2004) discusses the evolution of ritual purity law in Islam, highlighting three main categories: small impurity resolved with wudu, big impurity resolved with ghusl, and inherently

10 Mackie (2000, 1996) uses the example of Chinese foot binding to demonstrate the possible ways of elimination. He talks about changes in marriage customs, a critical community that did not practice the custom, and a turning point. In the Islamic world, the custom was never general, large communities that did not practice the custom were always present, yet no critical turning point was created for the abandonment of the custom, where it was practiced, it continued to be considered part of sacred law.

11 There is no example of type 3 in the fatwas, which is called Pharaoh Khitan, it corresponds to type 2: *"they cut off the entire clitoris along with the inner labia"* اوماق نيي لخادلا نيي رفشلا عم الماك رظبلا عطقب، (IslamQA 315983 (2019)).

12 The traditionalist narrative defines the Sunnah way around the correct, not excessive, measure of circumcision, since it does not consider the custom to be separable from ritual purity. However, when examining the fatwas, it becomes clear that the debates about the degree of circumcision are borderless. The traditionist narrative tends to consider the form fixed in practice as the 'Sunnah way', and even in the case of pharaonic circumcision, it prefers to make concessions to the custom practiced by the community. This phenomenon refers discursive tradition described by Tala Asad (2009). *"There is no doubt that women around you have gone through this practice. They too have gotten married, had children, and are living happy lives, and God willing, you will not be any different"* (IslamQA 315983 (2019)).

13 Its first summary was given by al-Ghazzali (1853) Hadith collections: Sahih al-Buhari, Sahih al-Muslim,Sahih al-Nis'ai, Abi Dawoud, Tirmidi, Majah, al-Mutawwah, Musnak Ahmad, source: https://sunnah.com.

14 The literature on Muslim society (Barakat 1993; Gellner1995) analyzes the relationship between legal systems and practices from a sociological perspective. The literature on the anthropology of Islam (Asad 2009; Bowen 2013; Trapper 1995) interprets the different representations and social embeddedness of Islam).

impure substances such as alcohol, pork, dogs, and carrion. She connects the idea of impurity to a loss of bodily control (Katz 2004:15). Classical instances of ritual purity regulate the believer's personal relationship with God, and their observance (or violation) falls within the historically changing scope of the Muslim private sphere.[15]

The classic examples of ritual purity do not serve as good indicators of a shift in values when not accompanied by widespread and public violations of norms. There may be occasional instances of alcohol consumption or neglect of prayer times, but this is not a public and widespread practice. There may be individual, secret violations of norms, but these do not represent a change in values.

However, on the other hand, FGM/C encompasses an additional dimension that extends beyond personal practices. Among the categories of ritual purity, there is a unique element, the fitrah. According to Qur'anic anthropology (cf. Qur'an 30:30), God created humans in a pre-existing state after a contract acknowledging God's divinity. Fitrah can be defined as the *involuntary attachment to the original religious human nature created by God.* The fitrah refers to specific actions that a believer must actively perform on his or her body. These actions, defined by the fitrah, ensure the body is ready for further ritual purity. In religious law, fitrahs are covered in the chapter on ritual purity *(tahara)* and believer duties (*'ibadah)*, which include five purification methods, including circumcision.[16] Religious law generally views male circumcision (*khitan)* as fitrah and part of personal ritual purity. If female circumcision is viewed similarly to male, and linked to fitrah, it may be seen as a contributor to ritual purity, making prohibition unfeasible.

The elimination requires a religious interpretation that does not consider female khitan analogous to male, does not consider it fitrah, and separates it from ritual purity.

(2) Khifad includes all sides of the purity value - social and ritual, (and even hygienic).

Mukabi (2022:1987) organizes the beliefs supporting the custom into three groups, of which religious ritual purity is just one of the pillars. The Muktabi article also mentions beliefs related to hygiene, i.e., physical purity, and the importance of virtue and good marriage, good reputation, i.e., *social purity.* Purity appears as a value in all three pillars.

While the male *khitan* is related to fitrah and personal ritual purity, the female version is a blend of personal purity (hygienic, and ritual) and social purity. It ensures a *ritually pure female body* and a *pure marital and social life*. The value of social purity (and its subcategory, the female modesty (good behavior) *(suluq)*) is more likely to be linked to the other branch of religious law –the rule of co-existence (*mu'ammala)*. Modesty (*suluq)* includes e.g. public female decent behavior, dress codes, marriage customs, issues of honor, and protection of virginity. These are often analyzed aspects of FGM/C, as elements embedded in the group's traditions. If FGM/C is classified as modesty, (*suluq*) then it is part of customary law ('urf) and not ritual purity law *(tahara)*. The consistency of the classifications in the fatwas shows the issue's importance. In each case, the supportive narrative, discusses *khifād* under the religious law categories of '*ibādah-taharah-fitrah, link it to ritual purity,* The rejecting narrative places it in the *mu'amala* category, link it to customer law *('urf)*. The common dimension of the purity value gives the passage.

(3) Significant clashes with Western values exist, which strongly influence the debate on religious law. Western human rights, based on secular science and individual freedom, pose an unprecedented challenge to the system of Muslim religious law, which is based on the primacy of Divine law. Institutional religiosity aligns more closely with Western human rights by rejecting the analogy of the male *khitan*, distinguishing custom from ritual purity, and placing the principle of prohibition of harm *(darar wa dirar)* at the forefront of the arguments, which is most compatible with Western human rights. In contrast, the traditionalist position emphasizes the analogy of the male *khitan,* linking it to ritual purity and fitrah. The *khifad* is an excellent example for examining the shift in values, because on this issue the value clash between the Western and traditionalist positions is exceptionally sharp.

(4) In the case of khifad, significant disagreement exists in Sunni Muslim religious law.

Differences *(ikhtilafat*) between schools of jurisprudence (*madhab*) have been fundamental phenomena of legal interpretation throughout the

[15] Cook (2003: 57-65) *Forbidding wrong in Islam analyses the legal principle: al Amr bi al-Ma'ruf wa-l-Nahy an al-Munkar*

[16] 1. circumcision *(khitan*), 2. cutting the nails (*taklim al-adzfir)*, 3. pulling out the armpit hair (*nataf al-ibt*), 4. shaving the pubic hair *(istihdad)* and 5. trimming the mustache *(qass as-sarib)*'Sunan an-Nasai 5044, Jami at-Tirmidhi 2756, Sunan Ibn Majah 292.

history of Islam. The strength of arguments is determined by the level of consensus *(ijma'*) or differences *(ikhtilafat*) among the dominant *madhabs*. The possibility of differences is slight in cases with a high consensus rate of previous scholars—e.g., in the Quranic cases. Variations increase in the case of prophetic stories *(hadith*) or interpretations of analogies *(qiyas*). The matter of individual interpretations *(ijtihad*) permanently sparks debates. Historically, *madhabs* were tied to territory; in modernity, competitive narratives emerge.

The historical Cushitic region, origin of pre-islamic custom, located in the Nile Valley. This region follows the *Shaf'i* rite among the Sunni madhabs, which considers female circumcision to be similar to male circumcision and obligatory *(wajib*). (al-Awa 2006:8) The other three madhhabs (hanafi, hanbali, maliki) consider *khifad* as a desirable (*mustahabb*) or honorable right *(haqq muhtaram)*, a privilege that allows women to participate in the Abrahamic covenant, equally with men in this issue. Al-Azhar also represented this position during the time of Grand Imam Jad el-Haqq in the 1990s (Barraclough 1998:248).

Changes in religious law began at the turn of the millennium. International campaigns influenced state Islam and moderated religious leaders.

Qaradawi classified FGM from desirable (*mustahabb*) to permissible (*mubah)*, and al-Azhar, under the leadership of the Grand Imam, Sayyed al-Tantawi, declared FGM as forbidden *(haram).*

In addition, there is a noticeable *shift in responses to secular science*, whose rising recognition can be seen in every narrative and forces all positions to respond. Azhar and Qaradawi are exploring possibilities for harmonizing Western values and scientific arguments. In contrast, conservative leaders justify their beliefs by legitimizing myths. But, both phenomena indicate the rising reputation of secular science.

5. Content Analysis of Fatwas

The dissemination of neo-conservative religious interpretations through digital fatwas draws attention to the complex historical relationship between Islam and innovation. Throughout Islamic history, views on innovation (*bida')* range from *'practical innovation'* to '*heresy*' (Goldziher 1966; Kamrava 2011; Simon 2024). Progressivism flourishes in prosperous times, while conservatism emerges during crises. Shafi'i noted in the 8th century that *'religious ideas must align with practical life'* (Goldziher 1981:215), endorsing beneficial innovations (*bida' hasana)* and rejecting harmful changes. Modern innovations challenge previous beliefs and reinforce secular science's validity. Digital fatwas, due to their unique nature, are valuable for analyzing these shifts within Islam.

5.1. The sources of digital fatwas

Sunni Islam has no central religious authority, leading to diverse opinions and the emergence of fatwa portals and prominent muftis that influence public views. An appropriate sample was chosen by filtering various portals based on specific selection criteria. (1) the sample should include three types of religious legal opinions – 1. Institutional State Islam, 2. Non-territorial Identity Islam, 3. hybrid portal (2) the selected sources should attain a regional and global perspective, (3) achieve a significant influence on the formation of opinions.

After filtering, the following sources were included in the sample:

1) Dar al-Ifta (dar-alifta.org) is the Institutional Fatwa Office of Al-Azhar, representing Egypt's official stance, which is supported by state religious law.

2) Non-state Islamic portals operate similarly to civil society organizations, aiming to grow their audience and influence discussions. Two key opinion leaders from these portals were identified.

a) Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926-2022) preached a moderate form of fundamentalism and was associated with the Qatari branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. He aimed to combat 'misinterpretations' and he significantly influenced the Qatari narrative and the perception of minority Islam in Europe.

b) Muhammad Saaleh al-Munajjid (1960-) established the IslamQA portal in 1996, which advocates for Wahhabi Salafi views associated with the radical branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. IslamQA has been remarkably successful in spreading its own narrative in cyberspace. The site is a serious ideological challenger to Saudi state Wahhabism, and has been banned by the state on its own territory.

3) Hybrid Source, as Islamweb claims to provide balanced and moderate views free from bias and extremism, focusing on the state mufti's role and territorial conversions (*da'wa*). Although it doesn't name a specific Grand Mufti, Sahlin (2018) notes that a team of Qatari-funded religious scholars operates the site.

5.2. Methodology of qualitative content analysis of fatwas

Guidance of Sántha(2022) was used to set up the research protocol, profile matrix, and code scheme. For coding, a priori, axial, and occasionally in vivo coding was applied, and for analysis, MAXQDA software was employed (2022, 2024)[17] Time interval of fatwas is 1998-2022. Fatwas were filtered for (*khifad*, *khitan- al-banat,-al-untha', -al-nisa, -al-mara'*) categories. Reviewing the exact number of hits, the most relevant fatwas were added to the sample. When the fatwas no longer generated any new codes or once they referred to each other, it was considered that sample saturation was reached. 47 fatwas were selected from various sources after filtering out ones that did not thoroughly discuss the topic of female circumcision. *Table 1* contains the fatwa selection criteria.

2006-2009 he considers khifad as permissible *(mubah*), which sharia category refers to things that are permissible but can be prohibited in justified cases. In its later fatwa in 2012, he shared Azhar's position and committed to the ban.

3) *The Azhar's progressive narrative,* represented by Grand Mufti Ibrahim Sauqi al-Allam, prohibits certain practices, distinguishing them from ritual purity. After 2006, the Azhar reinforced this ban due to global campaigns.

The three narratives,can be organized into four major panels of themes.

Panel 1 contains the religious legal arguments. These include,

a) Quranic interpretations of the Abrahamic covenant, especially the *'millet Ibrahim'* in Quran 16:123, refer to Abraham's community

b) The authenticity and reliability of the prophetic stories (*hadith*[18]) from Aisha[19], Um Attiya[20] Habiba[21]

Khifad fatwas (Arabic)	**islam QA**	**islamweb.net**	**Qaradawi**	**Azhar**	**Target**	**All**
Selected fatwas	**12**	**20**	**4**	**8**	**3**	**47**
Further hits on keywords						
khitan al-banat	72	23	3	78	0	176
khitan al-nisa	74	33	3	600	0	710
khitan al-untha'	28	18	7	49	0	102
khitan al-mara1	70	32	6	600	0	708

Table 1. *Fatwas selection criteria: islamqa.info, islamweb.net, qaradawi.net, dar-al-ifta.org target*

5.3. Results of qualitative content analysis

Fatwas can also be typified by Questions and Answers in the research material. In this study presents a typology of answers that organizes the muftis' responses to questions posed by the questioner. Based on the responses, three main narratives can be distinguished:

1) *The conservative narrative on khifad,* as represented by Muhammad Saaleh al-Munajjid (IslamQA) and Islamweb, views khifad as part of ritual purity and fitrah. Although, may can be some restrictions on the extent of cutting, a complete prohibition is deemed impossible

2) *Moderate fundamentalist* position, represented by Yusuf Qaradawi: in his initial fatwas

c) Categories of permissible (*halal*) or forbidden (haram) (Qaradawi, 1999). Regarding to permissible (halal) category, it is divided into subcategories: obligatory (*wajib*), recommended *(mustahabb*), permissible *(mubah*), and hatred (*makruh*). The shifts between these categories conceal essential aspects of values.

[17] Detailed research documentation is available from the author.

[18] Goldziher (1981, pp 181–597)) elaborates on the development of hadiths and their authenticity.

[19] 'The two circumcisioned' (*mass al-khitatnan)* Jami` at-Tirmidhi 109, Sunan Ibn Majah 608, Sunan Ibn Majah 611, Muslim 349 (sunnah.com).

[20] 'Smell it, but do not go tried' *(isamm'a, wa lá tanhaki)* Sunan Abi Dawud 5271, Mishkat al-Masabih 4464.

[21] 'What was in your hand? Is it still in your hand today?' islamweb 4487 (2001), 48958 (2004).

Panel 2 contains arguments on the principles of religious law and explores the internal reasoning behind Muslim religious law. The panel highlights principles such as "Forbidness of change God's creation' (*tahrim taghayyar khalaq Allah*) or the public interest (*maslaha)*, which is often linked to the interests of women. However, the most significant principle in the issue is the principle of '*prohibition of harm' (darar wa dirar)*, which is closest to Western human rights and on which Azhar imposes the ban.

Panel 3 analyzes the shift between the religious and the secular in the case of FGM/C.

It shows how religious reasoning responds to the challenges of secular science. It presents a general perspective that can be linked to the given narrative of secular science and summarizes the specific medical arguments about *khifad.* This panel highlights, the increasing recognition of secular science and the challenges that conservative religious law must address.

Panel 4- focus of this study analyzes and explores the Legitimizing myths and fixed beliefs that maintain the custom, explains the regional differences, and appear in fatwas.

This area reveals another layer of rationalization associated with European-based *'modernization'*. In the myths of the conservative position, in contrast to traditional rationalizations, a new technique related to modernity also appears: system justification through stereotypes (Jost 2003). Legitimating myths reveal further nuances of rationalization linked to moderation.

6. Myths legitimizing FGM/C in the examined fatwas

Fatwa narratives can be analyzed through Arabic studies, but legitimizing myths require insights from social studies.

The concept of 'legitimizing myth' is introduced by Sidanius and Pratto (2001)) to describe how ideologies justify the oppression of certain groups. Jost (2003) expands the hierarchy view of Social Dominance Orientation (1993) in the concept of system justification.

He argues that power structures maintain hierarchies and that marginalized groups actively support them. *"System justification theory builds on dissonance theory by focusing on the rationalizations, such as stereotypes and ideologies, that we use to justify the status quo and rationalize behaviors"* (Jost 2003:202).

Although rationalization has always been a part of religious law, its novelty in modern times can be seen in the systemic challenges posed by secular science and human rights. Traditional religious law, such as Qaradawi and Azhar, seeks to rationalize in a way similar to the European model, which is conceived through the harmonization of new ideas and religious law.

The theoretical framework offered by Jost broadens this notion of rationalization. The growth of the reputation of secular science also appears in conservative narratives. But, instead of harmonization, myths supporting system justification play a significant role in maintaining the status quo, alongside religious arguments.

Although, in the case of Islam, we must be careful with deeply secular and Eurocentric areas, and we must take into account the unique aspects of the Muslim ethos and worldview (Geertz 1973; Asad 1993), we can consider certain elements of this new type of rationalization.

The field of legitimizing myths reveals the rationalization technique of the conservative narrative, which goes beyond the rationalization of classical law. At the point where it draws in legitimizing elements from the field of secular science, rationalization can be seen as a system-justifying stereotype. Purely religious reasoning is no longer sufficient.

6.1. Unpure, harmful body parts: -Qulfa, Badzra

First, I examine the beliefs related to the body parts that are circumcised, considered impure.

The Arabic name for the practice, *khafd* or *khifad,* means' *reduction and appeasement.* The benefits of reducing female sexuality are already indicated in pre-Islamic tradition. 'Lane's Arabic Lexicon also mentions nuances, with meanings *"to make oneself noble, to make life easier"* (Lane 1863). The Encyclopedia of Islam also discusses the dangers associated with uncircumcised (unmutilated) women. *"The son of a woman with a clitoris (ibn al-badzra) or an uncircumcised woman (lahna) was considered an insult and included the meaning 'son of a whore', referring to the excessive sexuality that remains in a woman as a result of not being circumcised"* (Donzel et al. 1997:913). Traditional conservative interpretation in three fatwas, seven timers refers to those terms: *"Arabs use this term as a derogatory mean."*[22]

[22] Islamweb 176621 (2012), Islamweb 48958 (2004), Islamweb 31783 (2003.)

The Islamic Encyclopedia (Donzel et al. 1997:913) makes further arguments for the pre-Islamic roots of the practice and describes a myth from Black Africa and Ancient Egypt that highlights the duality of the soul. It suggests that parts of the soul related to the opposite sex are located in an area affected by circumcision, known as *qulfa*. In the case of a man, this is the foreskin, and in the case of a woman, a body part is identified with it. Removing these parts is thought to help form a purely feminine or masculine identity. Pre-Islamic myth speaks of the removal of the *qulfa*, which is beneficial for both males and females, to ensure a pure gender identity. Islamweb 176621 (2012) argues for the integration of pre-Islamic tradition into Islam *"because Islam has approved it"*.[23]

Qulfa', the part of the body that is circumcised, appears in six fatwas sixteen times, but the definition is imprecise. In the case of men, it refers to the foreskin, and in the case of women, it refers to some analogy of a male body part.

"The purpose of male circumcision is to purify him from the original impurity (najasa) that is engraved in the foreskin (qulfa), and the purpose of female circumcision is to modify desire, because if she had a foreskin (ida kanat qulfa'), she would be overwhelmed with intense desire, so they say (as a curse) that he is ibn al-qulfa', because he is a son of a woman who has a qulfa', who looks at a man with greater desire.' [24] The quote is also included in two fatwas, Islamweb 48958 (2004) and Islamweb 31783 (2003), in which the male foreskin and the female clitoris are referred to - anatomically inaccurately - with the same word.

Nawal es-Saddawi gives an example of the presence of anatomical ambiguity in social practice from her medical practice, in which a village barber mistakenly *"cut off the head of the penis instead of just removing the foreskin of a small boy"* (Saadawi 2018:107).

To clarify the qulfa', fatwas often use the analogy of a rooster's comb, but this is not an anatomical reference. 'Khitan, which is the right of women, - is the cutting of the skin above the pubic bone, (...) which resembles a nucleus or a cock's comb.'[25] *"(Female) Khitan is performed by cutting off a small piece of skin, which resembles a cock's comb, above the exit opening of the trachea (fauq makhruj al-bul). According to the Sunnah, it is not necessary to cut off the whole thing, but only a small part of it.'* [26]

At this point, traditional fatwas engage in a never-ending debate about the measure of cutting, in which they seek, in principle, to define the *correct and moderate* way according to the Sunnah. In practice, however, they tend to legitimize current local practices.

Next to the qulfa' (foreskin), the specific term, meaning clitoris (*badzra*) appears on the Islamweb and IslamQA pages, but mainly in a 'medical' context.

IslamQA 455828 (2005), fatwa on the benefits of female circumcision, identifies the badzra as a body part that is harmful to health: "*Among the benefits of circumcision is that it advises the appearance of the so-called female orgasm (n'aádz al-nisa), which is a harmful swelling of the clitoris (tadakham al-badzra)* which is accompanied by recurring pain *(alam mutakarrar*).' IslamQA 455828 (2005), besides using myths, borrows arguments from secular science, which it places in a strongly discursive framework.

It cites a WHO note from 1979, which, according to the fatwa, states that *"Female circumcision originally meant the excision of the clitoral foreskin (qulfa al-badzra), which is similar to the male khitan, and has no harmful effects on health."*[27] This is the most precise anatomical definition in the fatwas, which could indeed be considered analogous to the male version, but the debates over the extent of the cut refute this.

The debate surrounding the measure also reveals that there is no definition of what exactly constitutes a 'rooster's crest', which sometimes has to be cut off completely, sometimes only the top. So the specific practice of female Khitan is not defined, either in conservative fatwas. The belief in the *'bad quality'* of the mentioned body parts is, however, justified.

Qaradawi and Al-Azhar, although they discuss the issue by citing previous opinions, completely reject the debate over the measure and argue for the elimination of FGM/C. They consider the lack of clarity in definition as an argument for its elimination.

[23] Islamweb 176621 (2012).

[24] Az islamweb 48958 (2004), Islamweb 31783 (2003). Két fatva is idézi.

[25] Islamweb 15803 (2002)

[26] IslamQA 315983 (2019)

[27] The fatwa refers to a book published by the WHO entitled 'Traditions that Affect the Health of Women and Children.' The WHO did indeed issue an official report in 1979, the Kharoum Report, which denounced the practice.

6.2. Popular Beliefs: Hot climate, extreme female desire, oversized clitoris

The impact of climate on civilizations, since Ibn Khaldun (1995), has a long tradition in Islam, and offers a compelling argument for explaining regional differences. Five conservative, tradition-keeper Fatwas[28] uses the beliefs to rationalize why, in certain regions, the practice should be considered as part of the *fitrah,* while in others not. *'As for circumcision by girls, it is required in hot regions (munatiq al-harra) because the clitoris (badzar) is relatively large, which increases lustfulness (sabaq) and sensual desire (ghulma). As for cold and temperate regions, the clitoris is normal' ('adiyan), and therefore, the circumcision process for them becomes unnecessary'* (Islamweb 48068 (2004)). *'the connection between female circumcision and hot areas is due to the fact that in scorching climates, when a girl walks, her dress or clothes lead to friction with the external genitalia, which arouses her sexual desire'* Islamweb 433177 (2009), 'A questioner quotes a hadith *inaccurately*, and states that *woman's desire is ninety-nine times greater than man's* (Islamweb 48958 (2004)). Islamweb 433177 (2009) discusses the effect of *a hot climate on puberty* and attempts to explain excessive desire. Although the fatwa rejects a scientific connection between hot climate and puberty, it acknowledges that the practice is based on such beliefs associated with it. The variations in the hot climate and the hot nature of women are mentioned in IslamQA 427 (1998), 3159883 (2019). '*This varies depending on the nature of women (khilqa an-nisa'), and this varies between hot and cold countries'* (IslamQA 315983 (2019)).

The Islamweb 31783 (2003) and Islamweb 48958 (2004) distinguishes between male and female circumcision, linking male circumcision to ritual purity and cleanliness, while female circumcision is aimed at reducing female desire.' *The purpose of circumcision of a man is to cleanse him of the impurity (najasa) engraved in the foreskin. The purpose of circumcision of a woman is to modify the desire for pleasure because if the foreskin (qulfa') is there, then intense desire permeates it'* (Islamweb 31783 (2003)).

This fatwa already blurs the concepts of the clitoris (*badzra*) and the foreskin (*qulfa*'), and although it apparently distinguishes between the male and female versions, it certainly also blurs the content surrounding the value of purity.While the excision of the clitoris fulfills the requirements of social purity, *qulfa',* as the same category as the male foreskin, meets the requirements of ritual purity. The fact that *qulfa'* is given both meanings in the fatwa also links the two concepts of purity.

Similar argumentation can be found in Islamweb 48958 (2004) '*The purpose of male circumcision purifying him from the impurity (najasa) that is trapped in his foreskin (qulfa'). The purpose of female circumcision is to regulate her desire (ta'adildil suhutiha). If she is uncircumcised, she will be a woman with intense desire*'. Islamweb 48958 (2004) '*This is the right of a woman: its ultimate benefit is that it reduces her lust (ghulmatiha), that is, her desire (suhutiha). This is required for perfection (talaba kimal), not to do injury*' (IslamQA 9412 (2002)). 'Perfection' reference connects the argument to fitrah.

The effect of the hot climate, extreme female desire, and an oversized clitoris are mutually reinforcing and mutually legitimizing each other, which are reinforced by authority in traditional fatwas. Because fatwas generalize women, they can also be considered stereotypes. *Qaradawi* follows pure religious law argumentation and does not cite beliefs to justify the custom. In his early fatwas (2006, 2007), he states that the concerns of fathers who circumcise their daughters must be respected if they fear possible later involvement in sin. Qaradawi emphasized that this cannot be prohibited according to religious law. *'Therefore, no one should denounce anyone who circumcises his daughters in the manner described in the hadith, nor should call it a barbaric crime (jarima wahasiya'* (Qaradávi 4261 (2007)).

Qaradawi faintly alludes to myths. He leaves the necessity determination to doctors and religious jurists and ties admissibility to three criteria (not excessive, sterile conditions, and medical assistance.) In my empirical data, one of my respondents, herself, was spared the need to remove her clitoris precisely because the doctor did not consider it *'oversized'*.

In another argument, he has not yet introduced a complete ban..*'Some religious jurists or doctors consider circumcision of girls to be beneficial, fearing that sexual desire will increase during puberty, leading to falling into sin or approaching it*. Qaradawi5121 (2006).

He criticized Azhar's 2006 position in his early fatwas, but in 2012, he aligned more with Azhar, arguing for the abandonment of the practice without declaring it as forbidden *(haram).* '*I call everyone*

[28] IslamQA 315983 (2019), 427 (1998), Islamweb 48068 (2004), 433177 (2009), 31783 (2003).

to spare their daughters from this custom, which is meaningless and unnecessary. If they get rid of it, they will have nothing but good in their religion, with their Lord, with their daughters, with their marriage life, and in the entire community' (Qaradawi (2012)).

Azhar does not deal with myths at all, but builds its argumentation and rationalization technique in the system of classical religious law. Azhar considers FGM as a medical issue, removes it from religious law, and places it under the scope of secular science.

6.3. Regional differences: Western and Eastern women

In fatwas from a conservative traditionalist perspective (Islamweb, and IslamQA) the distinction between Eastern and Western women is framed within the context of the Muslim-non-Muslim context.

'*Because an uncircumcised woman looks more at a man. That is why there are immodest, vulgar acts (fawahis) by Tatar (here means: Asian) and Frank (ifrangi- here means: Western) women that are not found in Muslim women* Islamweb 48958 (2004) Fatwas from Islamweb state that female circumcision differentiates Muslim women from non-Muslim women in terms of personal ritual purity and modesty (Islamweb 48068 (2004) and 48958 (2004)).

The division between East and West also appears in the fatwas of Qaradawi and Al-Azhar, but here, the context of the Muslim West (Maghreb) and East (Mashreq) appears.

Qaradawi addresses regional division in fatwas from 2006 to 2009, using regional differences to justify permissibility (*mubah*)' '*That is why we have seen several Muslim countries where women are not circumcised*' (Qaradawi 5121 (2006)). '*Circumcision something that is considered good by customary law (mustahassa 'urfan), but there is no specific text on it in religious law regarding its advantage or desirability*' (Qaradawi 6016 (2007)). He argues in his all fatwas, that regional differences demonstrate that religious law does not clearly define the approach to female circumcision. His first fatwas (2006-2007) explain regional differences by inherent differences in religious law (*ikhitlafat*). The classical schools of religious law inherently hold differing opinions on certain issues. *"It has not become clear to us that there is evidence that it obligatory or preferable for Muslim women to be circumcised"* (Qaradawi 2012).

These fatwas suggest that the practice can vary by region and individual choice. Qaradawi states that FGM is not part of fitrah, as he does not see men and women as analogous in this context (Qaradawi 5121, 2006).

In his late 2012 fatwa, he mentions regional differences as an argument for elimination. If female circumcision is not part of fitrah and is merely customary law (*'urf*), it is permissible. However, if it is proven that it causes harm, it can be prohibited. *"But it is known by Islamic jurists that parts among the permitted matters may be prohibited completely or partially if it is proven that there are deprived (fasada) or harmful (dararan) things behind them* (Qaradáwi 5121, 2006). Qaradawi also proves that local customs and not specific religious legal regulations are behind the regional differences. *"My appeal to my Muslim brothers and sisters (...) to spare their daughters from this meaningless and unnecessary process"* (Qaradawi 2012).

He discusses legal principles in the context of a final elimination, focusing on the prohibition of harm (*darar wa dirar*) and the restriction against altering Allah's creation (*tahrim taghayyar khalaq Allah*). However, he notes approaching the prohibition of harm cautiously, suggesting that *ear piercing* might also fall under this prohibition. *"Finally, we find jurists who would prohibit even piercing the ears of little girls, on the principle that it causes harm because it is painful"* (Qaradawi 5121 (2006)).

The Azhar argument highlights the complexity and virtuosity of religious law in explaining territorial differences between the Arabic East (Mashreq) and West. (Dar Ifta' Sauqi4678/ 14888 (2011) The text discusses how regional differences in classical religious law influenced views on women's khitan, categorizing it as a 'secular' issue rather than a religious one. It highlights that while religious jurists may have once accepted certain myths about khitan, these concepts were associated more with modesty *(sulúq)* than with fitrah or ritual purity *(tahara)*. '*Many Islamic countries do not know circumcision (la ta'arif al-khitan) and do not practice it, such as the countries of the Arabian Gulf, North Africa, and many of the people of Egypt. Hence, we find that when the jurists mentioned it, they differentiated between the women of the East and the West. This indicates that the issue is related to existence* (*bijanib al-wujud')*' (Dar el-Ifta' 6711, 2022). Azhar's rationalization technique is based on legal principles, not myths.

Azhar acknowledges that classical religious law justified territorial differences based on popular beliefs, but now advocates for change. The text discusses a reasoning approach distinct from *khifad*

supportive tradition-keeper position, likening it to the '*living constitution*' technique used in case law (Corwin 1928). The essence is to carry out the necessary reform while maintaining the spirit of continuity. To underpin the change, Azhar uses the following argumentation:' *Legal scholars searching for the truth agree on that: if a new custom ('urf) arises on timeless time then the mufti may issue a fatwa that is appropriate for his time, even if it contradicts what is stated in the books of his school .'Those later scholars who rejected what was written in the books of their predecessors did not do so only because the custom changed with the change of time. Furthermore, they knew that those who came before them, if they had been in their time, would have issued the same fatwas as they issued* (Dar el-Iftá' Sauqi 5832 (2021)). Azhar, with its traditional technique of striving for harmonization, would pave the way for adaptation to changed circumstances.

7. Conclusion

In examining beliefs, we can discover important elements of the internal change in Islam.

Although religious elements continue dominating Islam's system, new segments of society transformed by modernity are already emerging.

The existence of myths can also be seen in the empirical sample taken in my research.

The empirical responses confirmed that the myths mentioned in traditional fatwas were widespread in society, and people still cite them today as explanations of the custom.

Beyond the traditional arguments, the debate on religious law reveals an additional element and a concept of rationalization similar to the European term, also in conservative reasoning.

The conservative narrative uses beliefs about circumcision to justify the legitimacy of the status quo, in which they function as system-justifying stereotypes. Here, they use techniques borrowed from secular reasoning. They want to support their position with medically apparent arguments and to present legitimate evidence widely known in society to support their position to justify the benefits of the practice.

This technique is more straightforward than seeking internal harmonization based on legal principles chosen by Azhar and Qaradawi, which forces systemic changes.

However, it can be stated that through the framework of system-justification, it can be interpreted that the conservative narrative, despite its archaic rhetoric, is part of (secular) modernity. The need to support the arguments from outside religion appears. Purely religious arguments are no longer sufficient. The role of legitimizing myths is still strong, but mainstream state religious law is moving away from them. These myths are the arguments of narratives that support custom, but another aspect of rationalization appears, related to system-justufication.

The *khifad,* as a case study, presents an alternative, still vivid pre-modern attachment to the system of sacred hierarchies. Ritual purity marks points of connection to deep layers of identity. These points are connected to sacred hierarchies. FGM/C is an excellent example of examining the value shift that can now be seen in all narratives. Changes in Egypt play a vital role in shaping the success of efforts to combat FGM/C.

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