RESEARCH ARTICLE

LOCATING MILLENNIAL FEMINISM BEYOND THE WESTERN CONTEXT
The Iranian Case

Rassa Ghaffari and Elisabetta Ruspini
University of Milano-Bicocca

This article aims to contribute towards an understanding of the notion of feminism among young Iranians born after the Iranian revolution, and specifically in the 1990s. Building on an in-depth analysis of the literature and narrative individual interviews with young women and men belonging to the so-called Millennial generation, the paper aspires to shed light on how these youths interpret the feminist ideology today in connection with the history of the women's movement in the country. As the perceived lack of interest in feminism among the Millennials is a subject of continued debate in the international sociological literature, the paper captures a snapshot of the various definitions of feminism from the perspective of Tehran's middle-class youths. Indeed, it unravels some of the complexities of identifying with feminism for youths born and raised in the 1990s, such as the difficulty in accepting the feminist label, the criticisms made to the movement and the persisting differences between women and men.

Keywords: Activism, Feminism, Iran, Millennials, Women, Youths**.**

CORRESPONDING AUTHORS: Rassa Ghaffari, r.ghaffari@campus.unimib.it; Elisabetta Ruspini, elisabetta.ruspini@unimib.it

1. Introduction

This paper analyses the relationship between Iranian Millennials – the term 'Millennials' defines women and men born between early 1980s and late 1990s – and feminism. We will try to understand what the main characteristics of Millennial feminism in Iran are, what do Millennial women and men think about feminism, whether or not they consider themselves feminists or in favor of gender equality and whether they think feminism is still necessary. We will also discuss how their engagement with women's rights is changing, that is, how Millennials' distinctive sociohistorical experience differentiates them from previous generations of citizens and activists. Specifically, we will focus on Millennials women and men born in the 1990s and belonging to the urban middle class of Tehran. Millennials are one of the most substantial social groups in Iran: youths born after 1979 constitute about 60% of the over 83 million inhabitants of the Islamic Republic, contributing to meaningfully lower the national median age (currently 32 years – Worldometer 2020a). Thus, understanding their attitudes and values is crucial to better appreciate social processes and the different ways in which, today, feminism(s) develop(s) in contexts other that the Western one.

The history of feminism in Iran is complex and controversial. The concept itself has taken many forms over the centuries and in relation to historical and political contingencies, but it has mostly been received with mistrust, if not open hostility, by the authorities both before and after the 1979 revolution. It is not surprising, thus, that the feminism of Millennials is a subject of continued debate as well, in Iran as well as in other contexts outside the country (Maurer 2016). The popular stereotypes have defined this generation as selfish, narcissistic and politically disengaged; more generally, Iranian youth are often associated with political apathy (Ahmadi Khorasani 2017; Rahbari 2019), while some authors have underlined their lack of a clear ideological framework (Dabashi 2000; Khosravi 2017; Sarraf et al., 2017; Bagheri 2018; Morgana 2018b). Indeed, disaffiliation from official institutions and the transition towards a fragmented, individualized type of activism constitutes a widespread phenomenon among the young people in several geographical and political settings (Farthing 2010; Camozzi, Cherubini, Leccardi and Rivetti 2015).

While we acknowledge some of these viewpoints, our starting point is similar to the one expressed by different scholars (Kurzman 2008; Chittal 2015; Milkman 2017; Winch 2017): Millennials constitute a new political generation. Our field research proves these youths are anything but uninterested in political and social debates; on the contrary, when it comes to discuss politics, gender issues and current events, they seem to have much to say and often express clear positions. Moreover, widespread connectivity gives

the new generations access to global events and crises, which, for example, led to millions of young people marching to demand action be taken to address climate change. In the last decade, also in Iran, despite the political aversion and the lack of proper domestic debate, it is possible to notice the rise of a new gender-conscious generation of young women and men (Kurzman 2008). Indeed, young people (and particularly young women) are significantly more likely to espouse feminist attitudes and views than other Iranians (Kurzman 2008). Despite their privileged social and economic background, however, the youths considered by this research are not immune from ambiguities and even reactionary positions, particularly manifest among men. If, on the one hand, Millennials' activism is changing compared to the past, and their attitude towards feminism is changing as well, on the other hand they also express contradictions towards feminism, its meaning and its practical applications. Indeed, one of our claims is that this apparent lack of a homogeneous feminist grammar is part of a global trend, but above all it can be traced back to the long-term effort undertaken by the Iranian authorities to repress, control and coopt feminism and women's activism, determining, over time, the plural and disaggregated nature of the movement and youths' disaffiliation.

Starting off from these considerations, our paper aims to give a contribution to the debate on Iranian youths and the cultural and social changes they are experimenting also in order to deconstruct common stereotypes that represent young Iranians through two opposite and irreconcilable poles: radicalized and backward *versus* Westernized, groundbreaking and defiant (Danesh and Kashefi 2012; Debeljak 2013; Olszewska 2013). Furthermore, by focusing on Iranian Millennials we will contribute to overcoming one limitation in the existing studies, reports and surveys on Millennials, feminism and gender issues that tend to consider mostly white youth from Western countries, underestimating the experience of migrants, minorities and non-Western youths. The paper is composed of two parts.[1] Section 2 explains the methodological choices taken in this study, while section 3 focuses on the current academic debate on the Millennial generation within and outside Iran and the peculiarities of this generation's activism. The second part (sections 4 and 5) focuses on the Iranian context. More specifically, these sections offer an analysis of the complex relation between the Iranian authorities, the concept of feminism and the women's movement before and after the 1979 revolution, trying to comprehend Millennials' understanding of feminism and the criticisms they make.

---

[1] The article is the outcome of a joint research. Elisabetta Ruspini wrote the introduction and section 3; Rassa Ghaffari sections 2, 4, and 5. Conclusions were written by both authors.

2. Methodology

The arguments presented in this paper are based on a literature review on the Millennial generation and on the history of feminism and women's activism in Iran over the last two centuries (see for example: Afary 1996, 2009; Najmabadi 1998, 2005a, 2005b; Moallem 2005; Kurzman 2008; Kian-Thiébaut 2012), as well as on interviews with twelve Millennial women and twelve Millennial men born in the 1990s and belonging to the urban middle class[2] of Iran's capital city. The interviews, collected in Tehran between 2018 and 2019, were aimed at understanding perceptions of gender roles among young women and men and to collect their opinion on a number of issues such as feminism, patriarchy and gender relations, also in order to assess the presence of a shared view and bring out potential contradictions. Reporting their own narratives and thoughts is of crucial relevance as one of our goals is to dismantle some hegemonic discourses that incorporate and standardize Iranian youths' experience into homogeneous macro categories (Olszewska 2013; Khosravi 2017).

The type of interview chosen is the narrative interview elaborated by Fritz Schütze (1983, 1984). The purpose of this technique is to recollect personal stories, experiences and subjective elaborations from the standpoint of the participant. It is an in-depth and not standardized interview in which individuals are encouraged to build a spontaneous narration. The dialogue is not structured by the scholar; instead, the interviewees are left free to build their own systems of relevance (Leccardi 2000; Magaraggia 2015).

The participants were either current or former university students with a completed higher education degree and were selected using non-probabilistic sampling methods. Albeit we recognize that the relatively small number of interviews precludes any absolute conclusions about Iranian youths, we believe that the opinions expressed are helpful to understand these young people's views of feminism, also because they indicate a relative convergence of opinions and beliefs.

The research focuses on the middle-class youths of Tehran. Today, Tehran and its metropolitan area include nearly one quarter of the country's total population (over 83 million people): more than 7 million people live in the city (Worldometer 2020b) and 15 million in the larger metropolitan area of Greater Tehran. Since its foundation, Tehran has been the most cosmopolitan city in Iran, from which the greatest part of the political

---

[2] According to Kian-Thiébaut, the particular distinguishing feature that differentiates members of the modern middle class from other social groups is their possession of cultural competence and capital. With a background in higher education, this group consists of salaried employees in the public and private sectors and the liberal professions. Thus, it includes among others, teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, army officers, journalists, writers and university students, etc. (Kian-Thiébaut 2012).

and social influences and movements have originated and propagated to the rest of the country. As well as being Iran's political capital, the city is also its beating cultural and economic heart. Consequently, its middle class has historically defined, more than other groups, the cultural, political and economic traits that prevail in society and has been the main protagonist of social movements and political activism (Harris 2012; Sreberny-Mohammadi and Massoumeh 2013; Bagheri 2018).

3. The Iranian Millennial Generation: Global Forces, Local Lives

The historical, cultural, political and economic environment in which each generation grows up during its formation years impacts its values, attitudes, interests and behaviors (Mannheim 1928; Pilcher 1994; Gilleard 2004; Wyn and Woodman 2006). This conceptualization of a 'generation' is rooted in Mannheim's (1928) theory that recognizes the implication that events have on individuals/groups within a specific context. In Mannheim's view, a generation is not only a birth cohort: is a social entity, members of which have a certain 'bond' and 'generational consciousness' due to sharing a common place in history. Social and historical events (especially if they occur during the 'formative' period, i.e. during adolescence) may determine a whole generation's capacity for cultural elaboration, stimulate a common world view and, consequently, encourage the development of the consciousness of being a sociocultural group. According to Strauss and Howe, "the year in which a person is born and the year in which he/she comes to age" as well as "the last, fundamental event in the collective memory of a society occurred before the birth of the oldest members of that cohort", are important in defining the common age location of a generation (Strauss and Howe 1991, 65).

Currently, there is no consensus about how to precisely define Millennials: the exact dates of the generation vary among researchers. Moreover, scholars have warned against the attempt to make generalizations about an entire generation (Furstenberg 2017). If, on the one hand, it is not at all easy to define a whole generation, on the other hand Millennials are different in many ways from earlier generations due to their specific socio-historical location (Mannheim 1928; Gilleard 2004; Wyn and Woodman 2006; Pilcher 2016). Millennials have been shaped, more than the previous generations, by the interactions between global and local/national events. Unlike their parents, they have worldwide simultaneously experienced massive technological change and the challenges posed by globalization, including increasing interconnectedness between countries and cultures, unequal economic development and a growing sense of insecurity over the present and the future. The − 1990s − a central period for Millennials' formative

experience – was characterised by the rise of multiculturalism and the growing importance of ICT.

The tension between global and local forces is also a defining characteristic of Iranian Millennials. Their most important feature is unquestionably not having experienced firsthand the 1979 revolution; at the same time, they have grown during the post-war reconstruction, in the midst of profound political and social reforms and the advancement of new and emerging technologies that have radically changed the way people interact and communicate (Khosravi 2017). Thus, it is not surprising that their forms of activism and citizenship differ from those of previous generations. There are however relevant differences among the various post-revolutionary cohorts that lie in the dissimilar political, economic and social context in which they have grown. While the so-called '*daheye shasti-ha'*[3] were born in a decade saturated by the pervasive ethics of sacrifice, martyrdom, the aesthetics of modesty advocated by the government, the survival economy and the scarcity of primary goods (Khosravi 2017), the 1990s were marked by economic growth, market liberalization, technological progress and a new consumerist logic resulting from the ongoing capitalization and globalization process (Sohrab Zadeh 2009). As Rivetti (2020) points out, some scholars have defined those years as 'the era of distraction' (Saghafi 1994; Adelkhah 1998), characterized by a depoliticization of the public and the youths, grown up more attracted by consumption than by politics, while others (Siamdoust 2016) have highlighted the new opportunities to socialize and make politics emerged in that period. Young people born in the 1990s have no direct experience of the conflict nor of the political, social and civic activism of the reformist period of Khatami. Most of them were too young to actively participate in the 1999 and 2009 protests and, according to Morgana (2018b), it is not risky to assume that they would have decided not to do it.

Indeed, literature explains that one of their most interesting features is the apparent lack of a coherent ideological framework and strong landmarks. According to Dabashi, for example, they have developed a post-ideological character in response and opposition to the highly politicized and ideological nature of the revolution and the generation that lived it (Dabashi 2000). Azadarmaki (2010) uses the expressions 'uncertain', 'anonymous' and 'devoted to pastime' to designate the new post-revolutionary cohorts whose main feature would be precisely the absence of commitment to social issues, which represented instead the dominant feature of the previous generations. In Iran, Millennials

---

[3] Literally, 'those of the 1960s', meaning individuals born in the 1980s in the Gregorian calendars.

have been labelled by many analysts and by part of the population itself[4] as passive, devoid of ideologies and social involvement (Azadarmaki 2010; Khosravi 2017), a generation "who postpones social activism to do the manicure" (Ahmadi Khorasani 2018, 1). Morgana (2018b) notices their radically different approach towards politics and active engagement, highlighting their discharge of official ideologies and collective action.

These analyses seem consistent with the international literature on Millennials' involvement in social activism and feminism. Several studies (Buschman and Lenart 1996; Maurer 2016; Genforward 2018) underline that progress in gender equality seems to have led some Millennials to dismiss the feminist movement: they seem to support women's rights and gender equality but do not identify as 'feminists'. This apparent absence of a homogeneous and coherent engagement in feminism among Millennials is a highly debated issue in the sociological literature (Williams and Wittig 1997; Myaskovsky and Wittig 1997; Liss, O'Connor, Morosky and Crawford 2001; Crossley 2017). As our research shows, these tensions and contradictions persist among Iranian middle-class Millennials, as well. Nevertheless, this does not mean this generation does not engage in activism at all and does not even mean that it has not developed a political consciousness yet. Bayat defines Iranian youth as a 'social category', an essentially modern, mostly urban, phenomenon that experiences and develops a particular self-consciousness that connects them as young people to contextual politics and makes them 'transformative agents,' with a potential to rebel against the existing structures (Bayat 2017). These agents are described as a group of largely well-educated youth who are increasingly connected through cyber technologies to each other and to transnational cyberspace. According to some opinions (Moallem 2011), in Iran, also because of the political restrictions in public spaces, technology has functioned as a major site of social negotiations, cultural discussions and political interventions: social media and ICT are expanding the notions of both cultural and political citizenship.

In the last decade, in fact, activism for women's rights seems to have assumed innovative shapes and strategies (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010; Sadeghi 2010). Although they have frequently been accused of being de-ideologized and of not participating in the political and social life of the country, Millennials' role has proved to be crucial in the development of new forms of political expression and struggle (Morgana 2018a). The recent series of protests against compulsory hijab arose since 2017 is a fitting example of the changing aims, tools and modalities at the basis of women's rights activism and the alternative forms of political strategies implemented by this generation. The protests were

---

[4] This sentence is the outcome of one of the author's field research in Tehran, where extensive interviews with men and women of different generations revealed a widespread scepticism about youths' activism, interest and role in current political and social events.

inspired by a 30-year-old woman called Vida Movahed. On 27 December 2017 she took off her headscarf, tied it to a stick and waved it silently as a flag, while standing in the crowd atop a utility box on Tehran's Enghelab Street (Revolution Street). Her act of civil disobedience was recorded and widely disseminated on social media, prompting other Iranian women to stage similar public protests and express their desire for individual freedom and personal autonomy. These women are described as the 'Girls of Enghelab Street'. Since then, a growing number of women, above all young girls, have begun to replicate the gesture and share it on social networks. Although there are documented cases of women acting together, most of them are portrayed alone.

Demonstrations against the compulsory veil have marked the history of the Islamic Republic since its birth. One of the elements that differ in the latest protests is the innovative, effective use of new media and virtual spaces along with social networking such as Instagram and Telegram that have been major elements in the success of the phenomenon. This form of dissent and the most recent news about women's activism – such as the protests against the imprisonment of a teenager accused of spreading subversive contents on Instagram, or the demonstrations against the stadium ban – show that young people's current social participation mainly takes place directly and primarily through social media platforms. Ahmadi Khorasani (2018) identifies the young women involved in the 'Girls of Enghelab Street' (non)movement as a 'new generation of social activists' different not only from the revolutionary generation, but also from those who lived the 2009 protests. The intense use of social media and the individualistic, direct and transitory nature of their protests make it difficult for older generations to understand Millennials' political engagement and activism. While the previous generations are accustomed to a form of common protest that resorted primarily to face-to-face meetings and collective agencies such as newspapers, organizations or NGOs, today the dissent occurs autonomously and instantaneously, without a coordinated organization, often individually[5], and is driven by a multiplicity of stances these youths feel relevant for their personal, everyday life (Sadeghi 2008; Hoodfar and Sadeghi 2009). The advent of new communication tools liberated more room for non-institutional activism and online feminism through social media such as Instagram and Twitter. As a consequence, these dynamics have de-centralised gender activism (Norton et al. 1997; Le Renard 2014; Camozzi, Cherubini, Leccardi and Rivetti 2015). As Melucci (1996) points out, social movements in the so-called 'Information Age' are often categorized as fragmented and heterogeneous, assume dynamic forms of collective action and are continually

---

[5] Already in 2004, Mahdi noticed a greater individualism in the Iranian women's activism than had existed any time before in the past century, and linked this attitude to the globalization forces of modernity (Mahdi 2004).

reconstructed through diffused, decentralized and subterranean networks (Hoodfar and Sadeghi 2009).

To better comprehend this development, the following section recalls the development of the Iranian women's movement struggle with the State throughout the last 60 years.

4. The Iranian State and Feminism: A Century-Long Battle for Hegemony

The development of the concept of feminism in Iran is understandable as continuous back-and-forth exchanges and dialogues between foreign – and mainly Western – influences, ideas and inspirations and Iran's own trajectory and peculiarities (Tohidi 2002). The relation between the Iranian State and feminism has developed over the decades through a combination of repressive tactics and partial openings in the face of the incessant female activism. Thus, the aim of this section is to analyze the historical roots of the State's anti-feminist formulation both during the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic Republic and the attempts to face, alter and ultimately suppress feminist politics and involvement. This will help us to better understand some of the contradictions emerged from the interviews and is related to two of our main arguments: the apparent lack of a coherent and univocal feminist grammar among Tehran's middle-class Millennials and their ambivalence towards the native/Western forms of feminism.

Both the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic Republic have employed legal and political discourses designed to incorporate women's rights and requests as either secular, modern and Westernized or, alternatively, as Islamic and anti-imperialist (Naghibi 2006). The Pahlavi's era (1925-1979) witnessed the growth of women's organizations whose demands and requests, however, found echoes only when they matched the government's goals and ideals. Women's rights continued to be used as political tools in the power confrontation between the modernizing regime and conservative religious leaders (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010). At that time, the discourses of feminism, nationalism and modernity were exploited by Western movements and Iranian elites to argue in favor of the emancipation of the Iranian woman, who would thereby assist in the development of the country's nationalist goals (Naghibi 2006). If the years following Reza Shah's abdication (1941) had seen the proliferation of organizations such as the Women's League, the Women's Party and the Center for Ladies sponsored by Mohammad Reza's sister, their effectiveness and autonomy were gradually subordinated to more relevant political parties and were anyway under governmental control (Naghibi 2006; Eskamani 2011; Afary 2012). In what Saranarian (1982) defined the 'co-optation and legitimation' period

of the women's movement, these organizations promoted activities designed to both depoliticize the women's activism and shape their involvement and participation as a sign of modernity, the latter being a key concern of the Shah (Mahdi 2004). Although it officially aimed to improve the women's status by aligning it with Western standards, this 'State feminism' was realized without much grass roots participation by women's groups and popular political organizations; actually, it hindered full female empowerment and failed to fully achieve its goals. Mohammad Reza Shah's statements over the years proved he was not a feminist, but he was convinced that women's education and greater participation in the labor force were "economically beneficial and would contribute to his modern image" (Afary 2009, 38).

The manipulation and control of women's social identities, appearance and activism remained a powerful political strategy also after the overthrow of the Shah. If the monarchy promoted an image of feminism as a wholly Western phenomenon divorced from Iranian cultural traditions, the Islamic Republic reversed this trend by forcing women:

> "To choose allegiances, but again it was a spurious choice since to declare oneself a feminist was to declare oneself a member of the 'counter-revolutionary' Westernized elite who were purportedly at the root of all the nation's problems" (Naghibi 2006, 567).

Much like the Pahlavi monarchy, the Islamic ruling class implemented immediately multiple strategies to appropriate the feminist ideology and to fragment women's organization. Instances of this logic were the decision to celebrate the Women's Day in coincidence with the birthday of Fatemeh, the Prophet's daughter[6], the expulsion in 1979 of the well-known feminist Kate Millet, identified as the symbol of Western imperialism, and the mobilization of Islamic associations against the spontaneous women's protests (Paidar 1999). Perceiving women's demands as a political challenge and a provocative issue, the State appointed itself as the patron of women's rights and major source of social change in their status (Mahdi 2004). For the authorities (and many political parties), feminism and women's protests posed a danger to the revolutionary front and questioned the legitimacy of the new system. As women had been targeted the markers of the new national and Islamic identity, feminism constituted a foreign interference to be stifled (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010). Feminism was supposed to distract women from their primary responsibilities (social reproduction, housework and family

---

[6] Depicted as a dutiful daughter, mother and wife, Fatemeh was celebrated as the correct role-model for Iranian women and an invitation for them to actively participate in the Iranian revolution under the aegis of the Islamic faction (Paidar 1999; Fazaeli 2017).

care) and to destabilize the Islamic order; it was labelled 'bourgeois' and therefore "divisionary in the nation's fight against the Shah and his Western supporters" (McElrone 2005, 316).

Since its foundation, hence, the Islamic Republic has carried on a coherent cultural discourse aimed at demonizing feminist goals and ideals (Afary 2009). Though, policies towards women did not take root through force alone: trying to repress and take control of their activism, the State simultaneously encouraged the more secluded women to become politically active in support of the Islamic cause. Inviting women to become dynamic citizens in the new order, Khomeini opened up new spaces previously closed to them; in return, he asked hostility to those categories (e.g. leftist and feminist women) that were not aligned (Afary 2009). These efforts resulted in the hardline clergy's initial success to undermine women's protests and the failure of female organizations to safeguard women's rights with the full institutionalization of the Islamic State (Paidar 1999). Until the 1990s and 2000s, indeed, the front of the so-called Islamic and secular feminists has remained divided, if not openly hostile (Paidar 1995; Najmabadi 1998). Under Khatami's administration (1997-2005), alarmed by the unexpected and massive exodus of votes towards the reformist front, conservatives decided to resort again to the women's mobilization reviving the volunteer *Basij*, encouraging women to get involved and pushing traditional parties to activate women for local elections (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010). After Ahmadinejad's appointment in 2005, policies have been aimed to undo the reforms women had succeeded to bring about over two decades, which authorities belittled as 'creeping secularization' and 'Westernization' (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010). Given that feminist ideology was accused of playing a central role in politicizing women against the establishment, the State tried also to integrate those with religious backgrounds into its own cultural institutions, albeit in separated spaces (Saeidi 2011).

Since 2009, the islamization of women's rights and identities has changed partially compared to other periods of the Islamic Republic's history (Saeidi 2011). If until the 1990s the State adopted a rather explicit endeavor including the curtailment of women's public presence and their forced restriction into the private sphere, other tactics have been implemented over time including a process of co-option carried out through multifaced politics (Paidar 1999; Saeidi 2011). In the last decade, the authorities have continued to alternate imprisonment of activists, closure of women's NGOs and of hundreds of print media outlets with more mild tactics like the announcement, in 2017, to replace the arrest of women not respecting the hijab with corrective courses[7]. These strategies, from sticks and carrots to the open resort to violence, are all different forms of

---

[7] Most of the news related to this initiative, however, is limited to the period immediately following the arrest of Movahed, and there no longer seems to be any detailed information on its actual implementation.

patriarchal State control over women employed to weaken their autonomy and involvement (Fazaeli 2017).

The women's movement, on the other hand, has been able to undertake in turn a number of tactics to counterbalance the repression including, as described by Gerami and Lehnerer (2001) and Mahdi (2004) collaboration, negotiation, acquiescence, cooptation and resistance. As a result, their activism has been forced by the contingencies to survive in a constant state of flux (Hoodfar and Sadeghi 2009) and become many-headed and uncoordinated, persuading some authors to claim the absence of a proper women's social movement (Mahdi 2004; Hoodfar and Sadeghi 2009; Bayat 2010). Together with the long-term State's repression, this lack of a homogeneous and coherent organization and ideology can be counted among the reasons why feminism and women's activism today struggle to find a wide recognition within the Iranian society. Sadeghi (2010) pointed out that after 2009, the women's movement, despite tremendous efforts, could not find acceptance as a platform for action by most Iranians, leading women of dissimilar social backgrounds choose to act individually or according to an entirely different political agenda. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, along with class, political orientation and ethnicity, generational differences and a shift in the modes of expression and political activism can be considered explanatory factors.

Moving from these premises, the next section investigates how Tehran's middle-class youths born in the 1990s understand, articulate and put into practice the concept of feminism through the analysis of their own words and narratives.

5. Iranian Millennials' Feminism: New Perspectives, View and Challenges

As for several other social and political issues, feminism is approached with ambivalence[8] by Iranian youths. Within Iranian society, the definition conveyed by feminism depends on the sympathy of the user, and there is even substantial discrepancy in the meaning given to the term, but the most common messages are those of support for equality between men and women's rights and opposition to patriarchy (Tohidi, 2016). Generally speaking, the term continues to have a negative connotation in the public

---

[8] According to Khosrokhavar, one of the major characteristics of contemporary youth culture is the ambivalence towards numerous cultural and social questions, understood not as confusion or contradiction, but coexistence of multiple models, ideals and different but not necessarily contrasting attitudes (Khosrokhavar in Bahramitash and Hooglund 2011, 99).

discourse[9]. While the ruling conservative Islamists deny the existence of such a movement, until recently, both secular and Muslim activists shared a common dismissal of feminism as sign of 'social deviation of Western women' and 'Weststruckness' in the wake of an historical trend that has built West and East, and modernism and feminism, as exclusionary categories[10] (Najmabadi 1998).

Our field research and literature review confirm the greater openness and awareness of the Millennial generation towards the whole of ideals and behaviours generally branded as feminism (Debeljak 2013; Kurzman 2008). As their peers worldwide, Iranian youths appear to be:

> "More positive toward the participation of women outside the household. These new generations are also more open to new experiences and are more willing to go beyond traditions. [For them] post-materialist values are the first priority and materialist values second, and the reverse for older generations" (Azadarmaki and Ghaffari 2008, 30).

Overall all Millennials interviewed expressed support for equality between women and men in political, cultural and social domains, even if some of them refused the label of feminism[11] and few showed full familiarity with the history of the movement, as explained by Siamak[12], a man of 25: "I think that almost 90% of those I know agree with equality between men and women… but only few of them know what feminism means and maybe 50% of them practices it in everyday life"[13]. Indeed, the findings indicate a definition gap in identification with feminism that is largely attributable to mainly two beliefs: the belief that feminists are extremists and anti-male; and the belief that feminism is predominantly a Western ideology hardly applicable to the Iranian case, which has its own needs and requirements.

---

[9] Shahidian (1998), Paidar (2001) and Fazaeli (2017) note that in Iran some of the confusion arises from the fact that the term 'feminism' does not have a Farsi equivalent and is widely used as a 'Western import'.

[10] According to Najmabadi (1998), the modernizing policies of the Pahlavi's monarchy and the Shiite clergy constructed each other's' domains of authority and produced Islam and feminism as mutually exclusive, so much so that many continue today to find the category of 'Islamic feminism' difficult to imagine, and a 'feminist Muslim' a paradoxical identity. Some of the Millennials interviewed confirmed this view, expressing their perplexity about the coherence of a Muslim feminist.

[11] Even if it is true that the opinions and behaviours of many of these actors can be considered feminist, they do not call themselves feminists and therefore it would be incorrect to use this expression to define them.

[12] The interviewees' names have been changed to respect their privacy.

[13] All interviews have been translated from Persian into English by Rassa Ghaffari.

The first conviction is the promotion of the superiority of women over men and is due to a biased understanding of the essence of feminism attributable to a lack of proper public debate and organizations in Iran (Shahidian 1994), the longstanding State's negative propaganda and a number of significant socioeconomic changes in the society. The anti-feminist attitudes of the Islamic Republic contribute casting feminists as anti-male fanatics and promoting a variety of negative stereotypes[14]. Furthermore, women's considerable achievements in fields such as education, public visibility and employment appear to constitute a threat to the traditional and hegemonic masculine privileges (Najmabadi 2005a; Khosravi 2017). Several young men affirmed that the increasing influence of Western ideas and models on Iranian women bears controversial effects on society. Ramin, a 29-year-old man, as an instance, criticizes Iranian women because they:

"…Want the same privileges of Western women, like the right to work, along with those of traditional women, like the *mehrieh*[15]. It does not work like this. Women should work and contribute to the domestic life; instead, they stay at home doing nothing".

The decision to ask for the dowry is presented here as a 'traditional' act, in contrast to those of the 'Western women', bearers of rights and responsibilities that are considered 'modern', like working outside home and sharing family expenses. Caught in contradiction between these opposite stimuli, Iranian women would become increasingly demanding and pretentious. This opinion is reaffirmed by Mahdi, another man of 28 who describes himself in favour of full equality between men and women:

"The concept of feminism in Iran still has a negative connotation. I'd rather consider myself an egalitarian. I do not understand why we should call it *feminism* if it is the matter of equality between both genders. But many girls here think it means they have more rights than men because of their sex" (emphasis added).

[14] In an editorial marking the end of its first year of publication, the feminist journal *Zanan* (Women) wrote: "Misogynous thought has so seeped into the soul of our men that they consider women taking up jobs outside the home as rebellion against men and as a sign of lack of commitment to the family" (quoted in Najmabadi 1998, 72)

[15] It is an arbitrary payment, in the form of money or possessions paid by the groom to the bride at the time of marriage. While it is often money, it can also be anything agreed upon by the bride such as jewellery, home goods, furniture, a dwelling or some land. Its amount is typically specified in the marriage contract signed by both partners.

Declaring he prefers to define himself an egalitarian rather than a feminist, this man is actually endorsing the negative label of the term despite his support for the whole concept. In his view, besides, feminism's claims of equality are often exploited by Iranian women to obtain privileges and impose themselves upon their partners or peers, a belief shared by a large number of interviewees. Another example of the defensive attitude many men seem to assume towards feminists was given by a 29-year-old man who, after being introduced to one of the authors, commented sarcastically: "Oh, you are a feminist? Please don't start to judge". Continuing the conversation, he criticized feminist women for "having too many expectations and judging everything".

In contrast, Paria, a 28-year-old self-declared feminist expresses her frustration as a woman in having to face a widespread mansplaining about what to be a feminist means and entails: "It happened to me at a party, I argued with a boy because he stated that feminism means the dominance of women over men. It is wrong. It means complete equality".

Golnar, another woman of 29, affirmed her complete observance of the whole concept of feminism explaining in the meantime that she has been warned against declaring herself a feminist because "it is not fashionable, not really interesting". Apparently, even for those who embraces feminism, many felt that the label has become so stigmatized that it is difficult to interest their peers in joining a movement and ideology that rally around 'women's issues'. Most interviewees reported that feminism is unpopular among their friends, who turn away from self-identifying as such for fear of being excluded, judged or mocked (Maurer 2016), but also because they do not see the need to join a movement to express their beliefs.

Millennials are extensively considered the engine of a profound change taking place in the society which presents its own contradictions and takes different forms for men and women (Shaditalab 2005; Azadarmaki and Ghaffari 2008; Kurzman 2008). Yet, they cannot be considered free from oxymorons and paradoxes. Some fundamental rights, such as education, work and divorce, are generally recognized and accepted; there are more and more positive examples such as the growing awareness among boys on the discrimination suffered by women, but double standards regarding women's sexuality and behaviours persist, along with the internalization of some gender stereotypes (Rafatjah 2012). The following lines convey the feelings of Siavash, a 27-year-old young man who claims to support the feminism movement:

"There are women who use their bodies to be looked at and gain attention and they say no, we do it because we are feminists... well, you live with men in the

same city, so if you behave sexily, you are objectifying yourself and you are not a feminist".

This comment testifies the difficulty in understanding the plurality of meanings and shades the concept of feminism assumes and reveals a certain degree of inflexibility towards women's behaviours. This feeling is stated by Malika, a 28-year-old woman:

"In Iran, feminist men are considered as gays. Another thing: for many people I know, a feminist is a bald, fat woman who does not wash herself, who dresses in a masculine way. But it is not so: a woman can be sexy and be a feminist at the same time. Feminism means you can decide upon your body".

What Malika expresses is the difficulty, reiterated by other female interviewees, to make their opinions and thoughts understood by men. Most importantly, she emphasizes the increasing weight of sexuality and bodily autonomy as fundamental dimensions of feminism and the need to unchain women's corporeality from dominant patriarchal view and from a stereotyped representation of feminism. As Morgana (2018a) claims, in fact, the individual and collective resistance of Iranian women has moved over time – and especially from the 1990s – against the depoliticization of women's struggles for their own bodies and sexuality that lies on the conceptualization of a division between the 'public' domain of politic and the State and the 'private' sphere of the home (Mac-Cormack and Strathern 1980; Kandiyoti 1991; Norton et al. 1997).

As said, another belief made upon feminism is not to have a real understanding of the women's situation in Iran or to be inadequate to address women's problems in the country. Such judgement can be linked to the long-lasting diatribe between Western and local feminism (Tohidi 2002; Kian-Thiébaut 2012; Mouri and Batmanghelichi 2013) and is best exemplified by this man of 29:

"Our society still has a lot of work to do. We cannot change everything so suddenly. A new culture should be built first. If we want to import this wave of feminism without changing women's law, well, this would create problems".

Another participant, Reza, a man of 27, highlighted the gap between the articulation of feminism in Western societies and the situation of Iranian women:

"I think feminism until the second wave was legitimate, it dealt with women's rights in the family and in society. But the third wave, in which for example women do not shave their armpits, is a bit too much for me, it is extremism. And it harms

the movement. Women who are feminist should fight only for their rights within the family and in society and not for their personal, small issues".

These last comments highlight the ambivalence that comes with the idea of feminism among these actors and specifically among young men. As Moghadam (1993), Paidar (2001) and Haeiri (2009) argue, the growing discrimination introduced by the Islamic Republic has paradoxically led to an increase of awareness and activism for women' rights among many Iranians despite the great hostility expressed by the conservative majority and the official discourse. Nevertheless, for many youths, Iran does not seem ready yet for the complete acceptance of feminism that still represents a foreign concept and needs further adaptation to be implemented in society. Given that the women's movement in Iran has, over time, remained predominantly rights oriented and targeted the legal system (Tohidi 2016; Sadeghi 2019), most respondents put emphasis on the need to reform the jurisprudence; while Malika's quote stresses the importance of body management and autonomy, Reza and Siavash's ones marginalize other, more subtle forms of discrimination towards women, for example in the sexual sphere[16].

As these quotes show, the struggle over 'local' and 'global' feminism and Iranian women's 'true' priorities is indeed an evergreen matter of debate both within and outside the academia. The followings are two cases raised from the interviews that best exemplify the diverse attitudes towards Iranian women's needs and urgencies and the most suitable strategies to achieve them.

The Me Too campaign, a movement against sexual harassment and assault spread mainly in the United States since 2017, has entered the public debate also in Iran, provoking conflicting standpoints. During a meeting in Tehran with some Millennial men and women – organized by one of the authors of this paper – two diametrically opposite reactions emerged. On the one hand, some individuals declared themselves in favor of the movement, arguing that it could have beneficial effects on Iranian society, where there is a pervasive ostracism on the issue. On the other hand, other Millennials expressed skepticism about the campaign, judging it a 'Western product' hard to implement in the Iranian context, where women face different problems and need different solutions. Along with the Me Too movement, the football match that took place on October 10, 2019 in Tehran between Iran and Cambodia represents another significant battleground on the diverse opinions youths hold about women's challenges and their

---

[16] Similarly, Afary (2009) affirms the existence of a persistent attitude among intellectual men, who have often opposed limitations of women's rights in field such as education, employment and citizenship, while refusing to address male sexual prerogatives. The field research confirms this behaviour among the young men interviewed too, in accordance with Sadeghi and Moruzzi (2006) and Sadeghi (2008).

relevance. On this occasion, the ban on Iranian women entering stadiums and watching football matches was temporarily lifted following years of activism and international pressure. Here too, the opinions collected were divided between those who positively welcomed the event as a step forward for women's emancipation, and those who underlined its utter uselessness. Interviewed about the initiative, Samaneh, a 30-year-old woman argued that:

> "Actually, this kind of topics sound bigger and more important in the West, because they want to emphasize that women here have nothing, no rights... but the truth is that being allowed to watch this match is not that important in our lives... even if I were free to do it, I don't think I would ever go to the stadium... out of Iran, everyone tries to highlight that Iranian women are miserable, that their conditions are horrible, that they're victims of patriarchy... while it is no longer so, really, at least in our social class... As an Iranian woman, there is nothing that I have not done; indeed, I have also done things that men have never done. I don't want to praise the Islamic Republic, the veil is a very important issue, yes, but I do the same things that men do."

This remark on the misrepresentation of Iranian women in the West is in line with a successive comment in which Samaneh criticized the MeToo movement as a form of 'white Western' feminism valid mainly in the European and American context as it focuses on a topic she considers secondary for herself and Iranian women. To the 'first world problems' of Hollywood celebrities, she counterposed issues such as unemployment, political repression and the struggle to make ends meet in the middle of an economic crisis. Stressing her ability to do "the same things that men do", moreover, she affirmed the pragmatic and concrete nature of her daily life's priorities as an Iranian woman, which seem to go well beyond the compulsory veil or the stadium ban.

As these last examples show, the dilemma of the true urgencies for Iranian feminists and the women's movement – that is, whether to remain faithful to issues that primarily affect women's daily lives, such as the family law, or to adopt a broader intersectional approach that takes into account additional, multiple forms of discrimination – remains open and problematic.

6. Conclusions

The main goal of this paper was to provide evidence that, far from being a monolithic category devoid of political and civic engagement or firm on radical and dichotomous positions (Westernized and progressive *versus* traditional and Islamic), Iranian Millennials present a plurality of beliefs and stands about gender and feminism, not without contradictions. If the supposed lack of interest in feminism and political activism among Millennials is a subject of continual debate within the international literature (Williams and Wittig 1997; Myaskovsky and Wittig 1997; Liss, O'Connor, Morosky and Crawford 2001; McCabe 2005; Crossley 2017), in Iran this debate presents its own specificities due to the particular social and political history of the country. In a generally heteronormative and repressive context, most Iranians are not exposed to the intricacies of gender and feminism debate or given the opportunity to explore and discuss these issues (Rahbari 2019). The recent protests against the mandatory veil, moreover, have awakened an ever-dulled anxiety on the part of Western commentators to identify new feminist icons. However, caution should be exercised in hastily affixing labels without considering the complex dynamics of the Iranian society and its transformations.

The paper aimed at highlighting the ambivalences and contradiction inherent in the representations and narratives of Iranian youths regarding controversial and complex issues such as gender roles and power dynamics. Young Iranians born in the 1990s have often been accused of lack of interest in social and political issues, laziness, idleness and passivity. Raised in the so-called Reconstruction Era, they have not experienced major upheavals like the 1999 and 2009 riots and their understanding of activism has assumed shapes and meanings different from the previous generations (Morgana 2018b; Risman 2018). Partially rejecting these pessimistic interpretations, the field research showed the more tolerant and open attitude of these youths towards gender issues and women's rights and their innovative role within the new frame of political participation. Such lively gender debates and confrontation did not exist in the early years of the Islamic Republic, nor during the previous regime (Tohidi 2002). In their struggles for women's rights, Millennials have developed new, inedited strategies that include increasingly new technological and communication tools: more educated and techno-savvy than the previous generations, today's middle-class Millennials have ideals and behaviours that are significantly dissimilar from other Iranians (Kurzman 2008). If these strategies and approaches are different from the traditional ones, they are not necessarily less effective (Sadeghi 2010; Bayat 2017).

Compared to older generations and their peers from different social classes and rural contexts, middle-class Millennials of Tehran enjoy several economic and social privileges, like the generally higher level of education and exposure to global models and influences. Nevertheless, their accounts disclose numerous ambivalences that mirror

the complex and multifaceted relation with the West and the power dynamics within Iranian society. The negative stereotypes associated with feminism as a result of the government backlash are alive and well today and help to clarify why youths are often cautious of the feminist label, even when they espouse egalitarian values. In accordance with international literature, the number of youths who openly share opinions about feminism or declare him/herself a feminist is certainly on the rise, but the tag is still viewed with a certain suspicion due to a combination of different factors such as the lack of a proper public debate and a conceptual clarity within the society, the fragmented nature of the women's movement, the persistence of stereotyped gender representations and roles and youths' new approach to politics and activism. More and more youths are becoming gender-conscious; at the same time, they are trying to de-couple their identity from collective labels and affiliations to individual definitions based on their own preferences and attitudes (Mahdi 2004; Morgana 2018b).

The empirical findings also indicate that a gender gap persists relative to identification with feminism, as the harshest criticisms are those from men (Kurzman 2008; Maurer 2016). While all interviewees declared themselves in favor of gender equality, this statement remains ambiguous and vague as the in-depth analysis of their words revealed double standards of judgment, the existence of many misunderstandings ("feminism means the dominance of women over men") and a certain resistance to net changes in gender relations and roles ("women who do not shave their armpits, is too much for me").

It seems that while feminism as a set of abstract values and dispositions is generally acknowledged and accepted, feminism as a social identity and movement is still subject of unsolved misinterpretations and critics, similarly to what a number of scholars (Renzetti 1987; Griffin 1989; Kamen 1991; Cowan, Mestlin and Masek 1992; Henderson-King and Stewart 1994; Buschman and Lenart 1996) have shown for other, Western contexts too.

References

Adelkhah, F. (1998), *Being modern in Iran*, London: C.Hurst&Co.

Afary, J. (1996), "Steering between Scylla and Charybdis: Shifting Gender Roles in Twentieth Century Iran", *NWSA Journal*, 8(1): 28–49.

Afary, J. (2009), *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Afary, J. (2012), "On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran", *Journal of Women's History*, 1(2): 65–87.

Ahmadi Khorasani, N. (2018), *Dokhtaran khiaban Enghelab va zuhire nasl-e jadid konshgeran ejtemai*, Revised March 8, 2020, Retrieved March 11, 2019 (https://noushinahmadi.wordpress.com/2018/03/06/-نسل-ظهور-و-انقلاب-خیابان-دختران/ جدید-کن.)

Azadarmaki, T. (2010), *Jameshenasi Iran: jameshenasi monasebat beyne nasl,* Tehran: Nashre Elmi.

Azadarmaki, T. and G. Ghaffari (2008), *Jameshenasi-ye nasl dar Iran,* Tehran: Tehran University.

Bagheri, G. (2018), *Millenial Iran: Political Disenchantment, Post-Network Society and Commodity Culture,* PhD thesis, University of Texas at Austin.

Bahramitash, R. and E. Hooglund (Eds.) (2011), *Gender in Contemporary Iran. Pushing the Boundaries,* Abingdon: Routledge.

Bayat, A. (2010), *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, Amsterdam: ISIM.

Bayat, A. (2017), "Anti-Thesis. Is There A Youth Politics?", *Middle East-Topics & Arguments*, 9: 16–24.

Buschman, J.K. and S. Lenart (1996), "'I am not a feminist, but…': College women, feminism, and negative experiences", *Political Psychology*, 17: 59-75.

Camozzi, I., D. Cherubini, C. Leccardi and P. Rivetti (2015), "Youth Cultures: Values, Representation and Social Conditions", *SAHWA Background Paper BP03*, Barcelona: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB).

Crossley A.D. (2017), *Finding Feminism. Millennial Activists and the Unfinished Gender Revolution*, New York: NYU Press.

Dabashi, H. (2000), "The End of Islamic Ideology", *Social Research*, 67(2): 475–503.

Danesh, T. and R. Kashefi (Eds.) (2012), Iran Human Rights Review: Youth, *Foreign Policy Centre,* Revised March 6, 2020, Retrieved June 15, 2018 (https://fpc.org.uk/publications/ihrryouth/).

Debeljak, K. (2013), *Youth in Iran : A Story Half Told*. V*alues, Priorities and Perspectives of Iranian Youth*, Young Public Research Paper Series, 1, London: Intermedia and Small Media.

Eskamani, A.V. (2011), *Iranian Feminism. A Comparative Evaluation of its Impact and Future*, PhD thesis, University of Central Florida.

Farthing, R. (2010), "The Politics of Youthful Antipolitics: Representing the 'Issue' of Youth Participation in Politics", *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13(2): 181–195.

Fazaeli, R. (2017), *Islamic Feminisms. Rights and interpretations across generations in Iran*, Oxon: Routledge.

Furstenberg, F. (2017), "The Use and Abuse of Millennials as an Analytic Category,

Council on Contemporary Families", The University of Texas at Austin, Revised March 6, 2020, Retrieved April 20, 2018 (https://contemporaryfamilies.org/8-furstenberg-millennials-analytic-category/).

Gilleard, C. (2004), "Cohorts and Generations in the Study of Social Change", *Social Theory & Health*, 2: 106–119.

Harris, K. (2012), "The Brokered Exuberance of the Middle Class: An Ethnographic Analysis of Iran's 2009 Green Movement", *Mobilization: An International Journal*, 17(4): 435–455.

Hoodfar, H. and F. Sadeghi (2009), "Against all Odds: The Women's Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran", *Development*, 52(2): 215–223.

Hoodfar, H. and S. Sadr (2010), "Islamic Politics and Women's Quest for Gender Equality in Iran Islamic Politics and Women's Quest for Gender Equality in Iran", *Third World Quarterly*, 31(6): 885–903.

Kandiyoti, D. (1991) "Women, Islam and the State", *Middle East Report*, 173: 9–14.

Khosravi, S. (2017), *Precarious Lives: Waiting and Hope in Iran*, Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.

Kian-Thiébaut, A. (2012), "Islamic Feminism in Iran: A New Form of Subjugation or the Emergence of Agency?", *Critique internationale*, 46: 45–66.

Kurzman, C. (2008), "A Feminist Generation in Iran?", *Iranian Studies*, 41(3): 297–321.

Le Renard, A. (2014), *A Society of Young Women. Opportunities of Place, Power and Reform in Saudi Arabia*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Leccardi, C. (2000), L'intervista narrativa (F. Schütze). *Methods Conference*, 1. Arcavacata di Rende.

Liss, M., C. O'Connor, E. Morosky and M. Crawford (2001), "What Makes a Feminist? Predictors and Correlates of Feminist Social Identity in College Women", *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 25(2): 124-133.

Magaraggia, S. (2015), *Essere giovani e diventare genitori. Esperienze a confronto,* Roma: Carocci Editore.

Mahdi, A.A. (2004), "The Iranian Women's Movement: A Century Long Struggle", *The Muslim World*, 94: 427–448.

Mannheim, K. (1928), "The Sociological Problem of Generations", in P. Kecskemeti (Ed.), *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge: Collected Works*, pp. 276–322.

Maurer, E. (2016), *Where Have All The Feminists Gone? A Mixed Methods Study of College Students' Attitudes Toward Gender Equality,* PhD thesis*,* City University of New York, Revised January 15, 2020, Retrieved September 10, 2019 (https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etdshttps://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds /1591).

McCabe, J. (2005), "What's in a Label? The Relationship Between Feminist Self-Identification and 'Feminist' Attitudes Among U.S. Women and Men", *Gender and Society*, 19(4): 480–505.

MacCormack, C. and M. Strathern (1980), *Nature, culture and gender*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McElrone, S.M. (2005), "Nineteenth-Century Qajar Women in the Public Sphere: An Alternative Historical and Historiographical Reading of the Roots of Iranian Women's Activism", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 25(1): 297–317.

Milkman, R. (2017), "A New Political Generation: Millennials and the Post-2008 Wave of Protest", *American Sociological Review*, 82(1): 1–31.

Moallem, M. (2005), *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Moallem, M. (2011), "Passing, Politics and Religion", *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, Issue 9.3, The Barnard Center for Research on Women, Revised March 1, 2020, Retrieved May 4, 2019 (http://sfonline.barnard.edu/religion/moallem_01.html).

Morgana, S. (2018a), "La battaglia aperta delle Iraniane. Un percorso storico-critico e di letture sulla dibattuta questione del velo", *Il Manifesto*, April 7: 10.

Morgana, S. (2018b), "La generazione '90 che può cambiare l'Iran", *EastWest*, March 29, Revised March 7, 2020, Retrieved September 1, 2019 (https://eastwest.eu/store/it/opinioni/iran-oggi-domani-economia/iran-giovani-proteste-cambiamento).

Mottahedeh, N. (2019), *Whisper Tapes. Kate Millet in Iran*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Mouri, L. and K.S. Batmanghelichi (2016), "Can the Secular Iranian Women's Activist Speak ?: Caught between Political Power and the Islamic Feminist"*,* in G. Ozyegin (Ed.), *Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures,* New York: Routledge, pp. 347-370.

Myaskovsky L. and M. Wittig (1997), "Predictors of Feminist Social Identity Among College Women", *Sex Roles*, 37: 861–882.

Naghibi, N. (2006), "Bad feminist or Bad-Hejabi?", *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 1(4): 555–571.

Najmabadi, A. (1998), "Feminism in an Islamic Republic: Years of Hardship, Years of Growth", in Y. Yazbeck Haddad and J. Esposito (Eds.), *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 59–84.

Najmabadi, A. (2005a), "Mapping Transformations of Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Modern Iran", *The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, 49(2): 54–77.

Najmabadi, A. (2005b), *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards*, Berkeley:

University of California Press.

Norton, A.R., D.E.M. Singerman, L. Taraki, B. Cheriet and S. Carapico (1997), "Gender, Politics and the State: What Do Middle Eastern Women Want?", *Middle East Policy*, V(3): 155–189.

Olszewska, Z. (2013), "Classy Kids and Down-at-Heel Intellectuals: Status Aspiration and Blind Spots in the Contemporary Ethnography of Iran", *Iranian Studies*, 46(6): 841–862.

Paidar, P. (1995), *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Paidar, P. (2001), *Gender of Democracy The Encounter between Feminism and Reformism in Contemporary Iran*, Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

Pilcher, J. (2016), "Mannheim's Sociology of Generations: An Undervalued Legacy", *The British Journal of Sociology,* 45(3): 481–495.

Rafatjah, M. (2012), "Changing Gender Stereotypes", *State of the Future*, 1(1): 55–68.

Rahbari, L. (2019), "Duffs and Puffs: Queer Fashion in Iranian Cyberspace", *Middle East Critique*: 1–18.

Rivetti, P. (2020), *Political Partecipation in Iran from Khatami to the Green Movement*. London: Middle East Today.

Sadeghi, F. (2008), "Negotiating with Modernity: Young Women and Sexuality in Iran", C*omparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 28(2): 250–259.

Sadeghi, F. (2010), "Bypassing Islamism and Feminism: Women's Resistance and Rebellion in Post-revolutionary Iran", *Revue Des Mondes Musulmans et de La Mediterranee*, 8(2): 209–228.

Sadeghi, F., and C. Moruzzi (2006), "Out of the Frying Pan, into the Fire: Young Iranian Women Today", *Middle East Report*, 241: 22-28.

Saeidi, S. (2011), "Iran 's Hezbollah and Citizenship Politics: The Surprises of Religious Legislation in a Hybrid Regime", in N. Butenschøn and R. Meijer (Eds.), *The Middle East in Transition: The Centrality of Citizenship,* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 223-248.

Saghafi, M. (1994), "Daneshjyu, Dowlat va Enqelab", *Goftogu*, 4: 89-110.

Sarraf, A.R.A., M. Abzari, A.N Isfahani and S. Fathi (2017), "Generational Differences in Job Engagement: A Case Study of an Industrial Organization in Iran", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 49(3): 1-27.

Schütze, F. (1983), "Biographieforschung und narratives Interview", *Neue Praxis*, 13(3): 283–293.

Schütze, F. (1984), "Kognitive Figuren des autobiographischen Stegreiferzählens", in M.

Kohli and G. Robert (Eds.), *Biographie und Soziale Wirklichkeit: neue Beiträge und Forschungsperspektiven,* Stuttgart: Metzler, pp. 78–117.

Shaditalab, J. (2005), "Iranian Women: Rising Expectations", *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 14(1): 35–55.

Shahidian, H. (1994), "The Iranian Left and the 'Woman Question' in the Revolution of 1978-78", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 26: 223–247.

Siamdoust, N. (2016), "The Re-Emergence and Evolution of Pop Music in the IRI: From Heavenly to Earthly Love", in M. Monshipouri (Ed.), *Inside the Islamic Republic: Social Change in Post-Khomeinist Iran*, London: Hurst, pp. 221-241.

Sohrab Zadeh, M. (2009), "Moghaise zehni nasli va beyne nasli dar naslhaye daneshgahi pas az enghelab islami", *Faslname Tahghighat Farhangi*, 2(8): 263–294.

Sreberny-Mohammadi, A. and Massoumeh, T. (Eds.) (2013), *Cultural Revolution in Iran. Contemporary Popular Culture in the Islamic Republic,* London: I.B. Tauris.

Strauss, W., and N. Howe (1991), *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*. Fort Mill: Quill.

Tohidi, N. (2002), "The Global-Local Intersection of Feminism in Muslim Societies: The Cases of Iran and Azerbaijan", *An International Quarterly*, 69(3): 851–887.

Tohidi, N. (2016), "Women's Rights and Feminist Movements in Iran", SUR-*International Journal on Human Rights,* 13(24): 75-89.

Williams R., M.A. Wittig (1997), "'I'm Not a Feminist, But …': Factors Contributing to the Discrepancy Between Pro-Feminist Orientation and Feminist Social Identity," *Sex Roles*, 37: 885–904.

Winch A. (2017), "Does Feminism Have a Generation Gap?", *Angelaki*, 22(1): 207–221.

Worldometer (2020a), *Iran Population*, Retrieved March 5, 2020 (https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/iran-population/).

Worldometer (2020b), *Iran Demographics*, Retrieved March 5, 2020 (https://www.worldometers.info/demographics/iran-demographics/#urb).

Wyn, J., and D. Woodman (2006), "Generation , Youth and Social Change in Australia", *Journal of Youth Studies*, 9(5): 37–41.

AUTHORS' INFORMATION:

Rassa Ghaffari is a PhD candidate in Applied Sociology and Methodology of Social Research at the University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy. Her research investigates the

transformations of gender roles and representations in the Islamic Republic of Iran, with a focus on the post-revolutionary generations.

Elisabetta Ruspini is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy. She is the Director of "ABCD-Centro Interdipartimentale per gli Studi diGenere/ABCD-Interdepartmental Center for Gender Studies", University of Milano-Bicocca, and the Co-Coordinator of ESA Research Network 33 'Women's and GenderStudies'.