



Małgorzata Abassy¹

Women's rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the light of protests 2022: the 'Janus face' of feminism

SUMMARY The aim of the presented analysis is to reflect on the dynamics of the struggle for women's rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). The article consists of three main elements. The first is a factual and ideological analysis of the protests through the prism of statistical data and the content of the song *Woman, life, freedom* (Persian: *zan, zendegi, azadi*). The second element is a discussion of feminism in Iran through the prism of the clash of different value systems, clarified as a result of restrictions after the 1979 revolution. The third element of the analysis is the phenomenon of awakening awareness among activists fighting for women's rights during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005). The analyses will be carried out on the basis of source texts of specific legal acts, statutes of the organization and other cultural texts, such as autobiographies and lyrics of the song *Zan, zendegi, azadi*. The basic research methods are content analysis and hermeneutical text analysis. A review of the literature on the subject and the state of research allowed to identify a research gap, expressed in the question about the values underlying the fight for women's rights within oppressive systems: cultural, identified as patriarchal and political identified with broadly understood Islamic law in the Shiite version. The analysis of the dynamics of the struggle for women's rights will allow us to forecast the further development of events that began with the protests in autumn 2022. The conducted analyses led to the conclusion that the impending revolution has the face of a woman and is aimed at the patriarchal system – an ossified, oppressive system that stifles the individual. It will blow up the political system from within, destroying its structures. However, it will not bring a solution to the problem of the clash of two patterns of ordering social relations expressed in two varieties of feminism in Iran: “classical” and “Islamic”.

KEYWORDS Iran, protests, feminism, Islam, revolution

¹ Małgorzata Abassy DSc, associate professor, Faculty of International and Political Studies, Institute of Russia and Eastern Europe, Jagiellonian University, e-mail: malgorzata.abassy@uj.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-9294-6156.

Introduction

The aim of the presented analysis is to reflect on the dynamics of the struggle for women's rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). The framework of the research period marks on the one hand the beginning of the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, who was the only one in the history of the IRI to open Iran to dialogue with Western civilization and enabled women to return to the public space on a scale not seen since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The end date is the protests that began in September 2022. The research hypothesis of the article is that although the ongoing protests are strongly marked by feminist slogans, in fact they are a manifestation of a wider phenomenon: the struggle for human rights. In this perspective, the patriarchal system has been identified with the oppressive political system. Making woman a symbol and the struggle for women's rights the foundation of these processes carries a potential split between the groups currently opposing the government, because feminism in Iran, seen as a whole, carries an internal contradiction resulting from the adoption of different value systems.

The article consists of three main elements. The first is a factual and ideological analysis of the protests through the prism of statistical data and the content of the song *Woman, life, freedom* (Persian: *zan, zendegi, azadi*). The discussion of feminism in Iran through the prism of the clash of different value systems, clarified as a result of restrictions after the 1979 revolution, is the second element. The phenomenon of raising awareness among activists fighting for women's rights and society during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005) constitutes the third element of this paper.

The bracket that binds the whole article together is the question whether the current protests in Iran, sometimes called a "revolution", can be identified primarily with the struggle for women's rights and, consequently, with feminism. An affirmative response would have important consequences for forecasting the directions of change, their near and far-reaching consequences. If the revolution in Iran were to have a "feminine face", then the change of the political system would be only the initial stage of the transformation of the system. Profound and lasting change would require a transformation of patriarchal cultural patterns.

The analyses will be carried out on the basis of source texts of specific legal acts, statutes of the organization and other cultural texts, such as autobiographies and lyrics of the song *Zan, zendegi, azadi*. Content analysis and hermeneutic text analysis are the basic research methods. Content analysis includes the identification

of key words for the topic and the words accompanying them (relational analysis) in order to reveal semantics in those situations where the content of the word is conditioned by the cultural context (Wierzbicka, 1997, p. 15). Hermeneutic analysis, in turn, will allow us to capture the whole semantics of texts thanks to references to political, social and cultural contexts (Ricoeur, 1989, p. 161).

It is impossible to provide a detailed description of the state of research on feminism in Iran, the struggle for women's rights, protests and revolutionary movements. This is an extremely broad topic and very often undertaken. The literature on the subject consists of both scientific studies (Afary, 2009; Alikarami, 2021; Axworthy, 2018; Azari, 1983; Badran, 2009; Chemma, 2023; Cleghorn, 2022; Dezhamkhooy, 2023; Ghoreishi, 2021; Hendelman-Baavur, 2021; Honarbin-Holliday, 2008; Kashani-Sabet, 2011; Kazamzadeh, 2023; Kian, 2023; Kousha, 2002; Moghissi, 1996; Najmabadai, 2005; Noorian, 2023; Osanloo, 2009; Sedghi, 2007; Shaban, 2022; Schulz, 1985; Tabari & Yegandeh, 1982; Ziyachi, 2023) as well as biographical and memoir literature (Esfandiari, 1997; 2009; Ebadi, 2016; Ebadi & Moaveni, 2007; Fathi, 2014; Moallem, 2005; Moaveni, 2010; Nafisi, 2003; Satrapi, 2008). This first corpus of texts allows us to get acquainted in an analytical way with the place of women in the social structure of Iran, the legal situation and the history of resistance to oppression. The memoirs direct researchers towards poorly developed problems that require in-depth analysis, such as the subjective reception of facts, the story of experiences from the perspective of internal processes, in their own words. Women's movements in Iran have two faces: social activism – expressed in the structures and statutes of the organization, and invisible feminism (Badran & Cooke, 1990). The latter refers to deep-rooted and in many cases unconscious cultural mechanisms that enable the oppression of one group against other groups, the political system against the individual, the institutions dominated by men against women. Naming one's own experiences supports the creation of a space of meanings that can become the foundation for a new legal and political system. New not only in structural terms, but above all phenomenological.

A review of the literature on the subject and the state of research allowed us to identify a research gap, expressed in the question about the values underlying the struggle for women's rights within oppressive systems: cultural, identified as patriarchal, and political identified with broadly understood Islamic law in the Shiite version. The analysis of the dynamics of the struggle for women's rights will allow us to forecast the further development of events that began with the protests in autumn 2022.

The protests of 2022: *Zan, zendegi, azadi*

The words: *zan, zendegi, azadi* (woman, life, freedom) have become the slogan of the protests that have been taking place in Iran since September 16, 2022 to the present. The protests erupted after a 22-year-old Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, was beaten to death by Iranian police for improperly wearing a *hijab* (Rahimpour, 2022). Demonstrations against Islamic moral and legal norms swept the entire Islamic Republic of Iran, reaching the highest intensity in the provinces of Sistan-Balochistan and Kurdistan. Iranian journalist Amir-Hadi Anvari cited data that indicate that these two provinces had the most deaths at the height of the authorities' crackdown on demonstrations (Iran International Newsroom, 2023). A detailed report by the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) found that in less than three months since the protests began (82 days to be exact), 481 people have died as a result of violence by the Revolutionary Guardian Corps and auxiliary services. Among the dead were 68 children and teenagers. More than 18.000 have been arrested, although the report's authors point out that the statistics require further verification. (HRANA, 2023). The protests that sparked on 17th September in the day of burial of Mahsa Amini, spread to Iran's all 31 provinces, 160 cities, and 143 major universities. The legal and political system and the actions of the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran have also been the subject of contestation in previous years, but the current protests have unique features, as many observers and analysts point out. First of all, they have the potential to unite all Iranians, regardless of ethnicity, religion, economic status or gender, despite the fact that it was the death of the woman that was the spark that caused the explosion. According to statistics, the population of Iran currently numbers over 89 million people, and the average age is 33 years (Worldometer, 2023). The aspirations and ambitions of this young population collide with an ossified and dangerous political system. What makes the current protests similar to previous ones, such as those of 2009, is the fact that they do not have a clear leadership. This does not mean that there is a lack of specific demands. On the 13th February 2023, twenty independent Iranian trade unions, feminist groups, and student organizations published a 12-point manifesto (*Charter of the Minimum Demands*, 2023). It contains a list of minimum demands: the release of political prisoners combined with the decriminalization of social activism, the guarantee of fundamental freedoms, a moratorium on the death penalty, the recognition of gender equality in every area of life, the guarantee of basic labor rights while prohibiting the employment of minors,

the protection of the environment, the confiscation of the assets of individuals and institutions that have enriched themselves at the expense of society, and the transfer of funds for education and support for the care system health, normalization of international relations. These demands are radical, although the signatories of the *Charter* have described them as “minimal”. They strike at the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a theocratic state: “Religion is a private matter for individuals and must not play a role in the country’s political, economic, social and cultural destinies and laws” (*Charter of the Minimum Demands*, 2023). The documentary is an official expression of what Iranians dream of and what they expressed by singing a song called *Baraye*, written by Shervin Hajipour (2022), in the streets. After the death of Mahsa Amini, a meme appeared on the Internet, under which Iranians wrote the reasons why they were taking part in the protests. Hajipour created a lyrics and pointed to the topics that most disturbed the Iranian youth. The song was first released on 28th September, 2022, on Hajipour’s Instagram account. It was listened to by 48 million of people in less than 48 hours, and then it was removed from the platform by the very Hajipour who had been arrested by the Guardian Revolutionary Corps. The song, especially the phrase “woman, life, freedom,” crowning the list of what Iranians yearn for and oppose, has become the unofficial anthem of the protests. Among the slogans chanted by the protesters are also: “We are all Mahsa, if you fight, we will fight back”, “Death to the Islamic Republic”, “This is not just a protest, it’s the start of a revolution”, “Liberty is our right, Zhina (Mahsa) is our code word” (HRANA, 2023).

The slogan: “woman, life, freedom” requires a broader discussion, because it directly concerns the main research question of this article – about the feminist aspect of the protests. It has its genesis in the Kurdish freedom movement of the late twentieth century. It was popularized by Abdullah Öcalan, who in his writings argued that every change must be based on a deep social transformation, attacking the foundations of the patriarchal system. The essence of his thought is expressed by the sentences: “A country can’t be free unless the women are free”, “To me women’s freedom is more precious than the freedom of the homeland” (Öcalan, 2017, p. 19). Öcalan devoted an entire third chapter, titled *Liberating Life: Woman’s Revolution*, to the role of women in transforming political, economic, social and cultural systems, (pp. 83–122). Taking the ideas expressed by him as a theoretical framework for the analysis of the essence of protests in Iran, we notice that the slogans of Iranian protesters of the current order are aimed at changing the political system in such a way as to make it susceptible to liberalization and democratization. In them, the woman becomes a symbolic starting point for

changes and their goal. However, this does not change the fact that the subject of action is the whole society. Let us refer again to Öcalan's thought:

Liberating life is impossible without a radical woman's revolution that would change man's mentality and life. If we are unable to make peace between man and life and life and woman, happiness is but a vain hope. Gender revolution is not just about woman. It is about the 5,000-year-old civilization of class-based society which has left man worse off than woman. Thus, this gender revolution would simultaneously mean man's liberation (2017, p. 114).

The "Janus face" of feminism in Iran: ideas and structures

The distinction between ideological and structural dimensions is necessary in order to accurately identify the problems faced by activists fighting for women's rights in IRI. Actions aimed at changing the law, liquidating organizations, arresting journalists and activists involved in educating the public are easily recognizable aspects of activities to the detriment of feminist movements. It is more difficult to recognize those actions aimed at depriving feminism of its potential by falsifying the meaning of the word, and consequently – the essence of the phenomenon. Feminism was born in Iran in the 1920's as a response to the challenge of modernization. It includes such phenomena as:

equal access to modern education; improvements in health and hygiene; removal of the veil and other changes in traditional gender roles and household relations; greater employment opportunities for women, specifically in the professional arena; greater participation in different spheres, including women's suffrage and political representation; and changes in marriage and family laws (Afary, 2012).

Iranian women gained access to the public sphere and politics during the reforms of the Pahlavi's era (Afkhami, 1984, p. 333). The scope of the new rights was very large:

These reforms enhanced the rights of women in both the public and private spheres. However, the Shah's state stopped short of depriving religion of its juridical and social functions and legislation remained close to the Islamic model. Divorce by repudiation was abolished and the process of divorce became

a judicial matter. On the other hand, polygamy was not suppressed but was merely subjected to regulation, with the prior consent of the first wife necessary for a man's second marriage; temporary marriage continued to exist; and while women gained the right to divorce and the guardianship of their children after divorce, parental authority continued to belong to the father and the paternal grandfather. Finally, the law of inheritance continued to be based on *shari'a*, according to which women inherit half that of men (Kian-Thiébaud, 2010, p. 6).

The sense of agency awakened at that time and the emphasis on the secularization of the public sphere combined with the marginalization of the influence of the Shiite clergy allowed women to develop tools that gave a real opportunity to shape reality and negate the traditional division of roles along with their scope of rights and duties. As a side note, however, it should be emphasized that the Shah's reforms discriminated against traditionally religious women:

For example, veiled women could not work for the government, which employed the majority of working women. Likewise, in order to benefit from new opportunities, women from traditional backgrounds were obliged to act against, not only their own culture, but that of their family and their social environment as well (Kian-Thiébaud, 2010, p. 5).

Already at that time, a split arose, which in the following decades resulted in the marginalization of one group of feminists. The clash of secularization with religiosity, which in the 1960's and 1970's, as a result of the Shah's policies, favored the former, after the victory of the Islamic Revolution tipped the scales in favor of the latter (Bahar, 1983, p. 172). Paradoxically, the association of feminism with the Pahlavi regime and the decadence of the West resulted in the need to defend the position of women, and thus – to increase awareness. It was also the moment when feminism in both versions: the one promoted by the state and the one developed by supporters of the traditional division of roles, gained another chance to strengthen their position. At that time, there were various currents and organizations that undertook to redefine the essence of feminism in IRI. The most active were the Women's Society of the Islamic Revolution (*Jame'a-ye zanan-e enqelab-e eslami*) and the National Union of Women (*Ettehad-e melli-e zanan*). They reflected the "Janus face" of feminism. The first organization favored the Islamization of women's movements, promoting new models of femininity in the pages of weeklies such as *Rah-e Zeynab* (Azari,

1983, pp. 210–217). The latter was left-wing, emerging in March 1979 in protest at Ayatollah Khomeini's declaration to mandate the Islamic dress code for women working in the government offices, and the statement that the declaration on 26 February that the 1967 Family Protection Law (which had curtailed men's access to divorce and polygamy) was non-Islamic (Mir-Hosseini, 1999, p. 499). The scale of the protests was so large that the government had to withdraw from the planned actions. Nevertheless, the Iran-Iraq war has directed public attention to the country's defense issues, thus enabling a distraction from domestic politics. The following years were used for far-reaching modification of legal codes, especially in the area of women's rights, and for combating organizations promoting the image of femininity divergent from the Islamic model. The legal system has become the most effective tool for removing women from the public space and limiting their roles to the traditional ones: wife and mother.

The discussion on the model of femininity, the relationship between a woman and a man in family and social life, the interpretation of religious texts took place in the pages of the most progressive monthly *Zanan* at that time. The arguments were presented from the position of women, which met with strong opposition from fundamentalists: "At the center of *Zanan's* revisionist approach is a radical decentering of the clergy from the domain of interpretation, and the placing of woman as interpreter and her needs as ground for interpretation" (Najmabadi, 1998, p. 72). The newspaper openly identified with Western models of feminism, which on the one hand made it an effective platform of resistance to the Islamic model of femininity, and on the other – exposed it to attacks. The cultural response to the "Western" feminism was the "Islamic" feminism. The notion was coined in early post-revolutionary years and it "derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence" (Badran, 2009, p. 76). In fact, in the a theocratic state, Islamic feminism can be both an attempt to gain agency within existing values and norms, as well as a hidden form of dependence on the political and legal structures. Its liberal dimension is reflected in the demand for gender equality and reform of institutions. The Islamic feminists challenge power relations in public sphere but without profound changes of their religious foundations:

Islamic feminism attempts to carry out a synthesis between cultural tradition (including the importance of the role of a woman within the family), modern values (including the active participation of women in social, political, economic and cultural life) and gender equality (Kian-Thiébaud, 2010, p. 9).

Their aim is not to abolish patriarchy, but to gain a position within its structures (Kandiyoti, 1988). Thus, Islamic feminism differs fundamentally from classical, Western feminism. Lazreg emphasizes that the perception of women in Islam prevents them from gaining agency and shaping their own history:

The overall effect of this paradigm is to deprive Muslim women of self-presence, of being. Because women are subsumed under religion defined in fundamental terms, they are inevitably seen as evolving in nonhistorical time. They have virtually no history. Any analysis of change is therefore foreclosed (Lazreg, 1988, p. 86).

Many Iranian activists, however, disagree with the claim that Islam is the main reason for their dependence on the male perception of gender roles: "It is not Islam but the interpretation of its precepts by the clergy that hinders women's access to public office" (Kian-Thiébaud, 2010, p. 13). Two elements are intertwined and to some extent make it difficult to understand the dynamics of change and its potential scope: the religious model of woman and femininity, and the burden of legal regulations. Allowing women into parliament, judicial functions or administrative positions does not automatically mean that they are given a position equal to that of men. Social activism, regardless of whether it refers to the Western model of feminism or to the Islamic one, is the first stage of the transformation of the political and legal system. In this area, feminists agree, regardless of ideological affiliation. As long as the IRI exists, it is necessary to negotiate the scope of influence within the existing structures. However, if the current protests turn into a revolution that leads to the overthrow of the current order, it will be necessary to negotiate the meanings hidden in the "Janus face" of feminism in Iran. Realizing that the Islamic model of family and society is in fact a patriarchal model, promoting a strict division of gender roles will allow us to see that despite the change of structures, the content remains the same. Ebadi stressed that in IRI one cannot talk about human rights based on the Declaration of Human Rights, because the space of meaning is created by Islam (Ebadi & Moaveni, 2007, p. 66). The same conclusion is valid in relation to the discussion of woman and her freedom. The slogan of the protests: *zan, zendegi, azadi* adopted by the protesters is semantically unclear. The Iranians declare their desire to shape their own reality, without Western interference. In the informal anthem of the protests, *Baraye*, they expressed the longing for the right to happiness by eliminating these obstacles, which are symbolized by the *hijab*. Nevertheless, the interpretation

of the *hijab* symbol is largely intuitive and limited to the sphere of legal obligations and prohibitions. It does not reach the sources of the creation of meanings, which is Islam, understood not only as a religion, but also as one of the pillars of the culture of traditional environments.

Woman as a citizen: the effects of “awakened consciousness”

In the first three parliaments in IRI (1980, 1984, 1988) women deputies took 1.5% of the seats. Such a low level of representation did not give women the opportunity to have a real impact on the shape of generated laws. Their voice was barely heard in an environment that gave privileges to men and promoted a conservative point of view on gender roles. Despite the fact that some male parliamentarians were ready to support such women's demands as respect for the right to *ijtihad* (*interpretation, explanation*) in the courts – especially on the issue of divorce and custody of children, raising the minimum age for marriage, abolishing the penalty of stoning, recognizing the equal value of the life of a woman and a man in the payment of compensation for murder – with the passage of time the gap between reformers and conservatives deepened. An example is the religious ruling, the so-called *fatwa*, issued in December 2002 by Ayatollah Youssef Sane'i, in which the clergyman stated that the value of the life of a woman and a man is the same, and that there are no obstacles for women to hold high positions in the judiciary or state administration. The Council of Guardians (the body consisted of six clergymen and six jurists whose task is to supervise the compatibility of the legislations with Islam) blocked the regulation stating that it was incompatible with Islam. Such cases indicated that although formally women had rights, they were actually blocked and there was an impassable line to women's advancement and influence. The highest positions, and consequently the greatest opportunities for action, were reserved for men. Jamileh Kadivar, a representative of Tehran in the Sixth Parliament, pointed out: “We know that the presence of one or two women in the government is not going to resolve women's problems but we believed that the appointment of women as ministers would have positive consequences for society and culture” (Kian-Thiébaud, 2010, p. 15). The lack of a transparent policy towards women made it difficult for them to plan their actions or set an achievable goal. As Zahra Shoja'i noted,

More than two decades after the Revolution, we still do not know the views of the Islamic Republic in relation to women. Should the proportion of economically

active women increase or not? There is no overall program as regards women. Neither the four principles of the Constitution nor the sermons of Ayatollah Khomeini nor the history of women in the early days of Islam can lead us towards the idea of a comprehensive plan! (Kian-Thiébaud, 2010, p. 16).

Allowing women to speak, founding organizations and expressing opinions became the first step towards changing the state of affairs. Nevertheless, in retrospect, it can be seen that society overestimated the Khatami's capabilities. The new president faced the constraints imposed by the IRI's political and legal system. In addition, most of the challenges were long-term – they could be initiated during one or two presidency terms but the results required patience. Being able to modify the legal system, Khatami was not able to change in a fundamental way the ideological foundation and various value system underlying the perception of gender roles. The doctrinal duality of IRI politics clashed with Western and Islamic models of femininity. A thorough analysis of the dynamics of women's activists' activities in the period 1979–2023 allows us to conclude that the struggle for the shape of a political system friendly to women and their ambitions took place between supporters of feminism on the Western model and proponents of Islamic feminism. To put it simply, it took place between an individualistic vision of the individual in society, without distinction of sex or gender roles, and a patriarchal vision, promoting a rigid assignment of qualities, space of action, rights and duties to one of the two sexes. When the supporters of one vision withdrew or were marginalized, their place in the struggle for women's rights in IRI was taken by supporters of the other vision. When educated women from the upper social strata became disillusioned with the meager effects of the Khatami reforms and withdrew from the public space, their place was taken by supporters of the traditional order. In the Seventh Parliament (2004–2008), so at the end of the second term of Khatami:

The slowness of reform during Khatami's presidency disappointed the educated and modern women who had played such a prominent role in his election. It contributed to their disenchantment with politics and their radicalization. The lack of mobilization among this group of women favored the rise of the conservative or even ultra-conservative women who were elected [...]. As soon as they were elected, two of them – the most anti-feminist – lent their support to polygamy, argued for the adoption of repressive measures against women deemed insufficiently veiled and expressed their opposition to the adoption of the CEDAW

(the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women – M.A.) (Kian-Thiébaud, 2010, p. 16).

A detailed analysis of the postulates regarding changes in the law and their consequences goes beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize the dynamics of change and the main actors of the processes taking place. On the one hand, it is the IRI as a political and legal system maintained by a group in power and decisively retained this power. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the heir to Khomeini's ideas, and his attitude towards women, domestic politics and the West is clearly visible in the official public speeches (Khamenei.ir, 2023). The politicians gathered around it present different factions, but their foundation is the same – it is Islam. The second element are groups promoting Islamic feminism, i.e. a patriarchal vision of interpersonal relations. Finally, the third group, identified in this article as Western or classical feminism, takes the position of recognizing the individual as the starting point and goal of all actions undertaken. It is a vision that draws its models, of course in a modified form, still from the European Enlightenment. It is inevitably connected with liberalism and democracy as they have been shaped in Western political and legal systems. It is depreciated by conservative groups through terms such as “legacy of western colonialism”, “lack of respect by Iranian women for the Islamic veil” (Kian-Thiébaud, 2010, p. 17).

A review of the profiles of female ministers appointed by successive presidents and female parliamentarians shows that it is not gender *per se* but values that play a major role in the postulates (Hanna, 2021). The achievement of activists and women's organizations from the Kahatami era was to awaken public awareness of women's rights, also from the perspective of sexual abuse. Between 1997 and 2005, more than 600 NGOs were established to support and promote women's rights, directing the greatest efforts to change the legal system. Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Shirin Ebadi (2003) – lawyer, founder of the Defenders of Human Rights Center (2001), author of books on women's lives in IRI, made Iranian women's problems visible in the international arena and they themselves felt morally supported. Awakening awareness, both feminists and gender one, was the most important final outcome of that period. Maintaining this achievement became one of the most important goals in later years, when the conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–2013) became the leader of the IRI. Peaceful assemblies were then outlawed and violations of the ban were severely punished. The Human Rights Watch report (2007) noted: “In March police and plainclothes

agents charged a peaceful assembly of women's rights activists in Tehran and beat hundreds of women and men who had gathered to commemorate International Women's Day". This event highlighted the change in the political climate: from friendly to diverse forms of women's activity to hostile to feminist activism inspired by the non-Islamic model. Ahmadinejad's rise as president coincided with the re-activation of Islamic feminism. In parliament, women demanded equal access to the executive, aptly perceiving Islamic principles as a pretext to maintain male domination: "To say that the presence of women in Parliament's executive bodies is not compatible with the modesty of Muslim women is only a pretext. The truth is that these male deputies believe themselves superior to women" (Behrouzi, 2008). They used the rivalry between Ahmadinejad and Ali Larijani, the Speaker, to reject the law on the taxation of widowed property and the right for a man to have all his property in the case of polygamous marriages.

In August 2006, the activists launched *The One Million Signatures Campaign*. Its assumptions, course, participants, target groups and results have been characterized in detail by Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani (2010). It is important that the project was prepared in such a way as to rely solely on indigenous resources, and the proposed reforms were within the framework of Islamic law. As mentioned above, it was a tool to maintain awareness of the situation of women in IRI and to promote knowledge in the widest possible social circles. The hope that Khatami gave Iranians has survived the terms of successive conservative presidents and erupted as a sequence of protests in the fall of 2022.

Conclusions

A woman as a symbol is not an unambiguous ideological identification of the ongoing protests. The struggle for women's rights is essentially a struggle against the patriarchal system, which in IRI took the form of a theocratic state system. The dynamics of feminist movements in Iran allow us to trace the interdependence of the classical, Western and the Islamic feminism. First, they contradict the cultural model of woman and femininity, her role in the family and society. Secondly, within the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran they are activated alternately, and their activity depends on the political climate: at the time of thaw, the model of classical feminism becomes more active whereas at the moment of radicalization, the Islamic model comes to the fore. The oppressiveness of the political system and the law sanctioning gender inequality is unquestionable. Nevertheless, this is not the only factor in the outbreak of protests. The IRI's political system is also

economically inefficient, as a result of inept international policies resulting in sanctions, internal corruption and the COVID-19 pandemic. The death of Mahsa Amini became the spark that caused an outbreak of social discontent.

Iran in the modern era experienced two great revolutions: constitutional (1905–1911) and Islamic (1979). Both were preceded by great social crises. The first had the face of intellectuals struggling for influence with the Shiite clergy, the second had the face of a people rebelling against the oppression of the Shah and the western supremacy, and it was led by the Shiite clergy. The third impending revolution has the face of a woman and is aimed at the patriarchal system – an ossified, oppressive system that stifles the individual. It will blow up the political system from within by destroying its structures. Nevertheless, it will not bring a solution to the problem of the clash of two patterns of ordering social relations expressed in two varieties of feminism in Iran: “classical” and “Islamic”.

Additional information

The publication was funded under the program *Excellence Initiative – Research University* at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow.

References

- Afary, J. (2009). *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Afary, J. (2012). Feminists Movements in Iran. I. Introduction. II. In the Late Qajar Period. In: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, IX/5, 489–491. Retrieved from: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/feminist-movements-i-ii> [accessed: 16.09.2023].
- Afkhami, A. (1984). A Future in the Past: the Pre-Revolutionary Women's Movement in Iran. In: R. Morgan (ed.), *Sisterhood is Global: An International Women's Movement Anthology* (pp. 330–338). New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York.
- Alikarami, L. (2021). *Women and Equality in Iran: Law, Society and Activism*. Bloomsbury: 3Pl.
- Axworthy, M. (2018). *Revolutionary Iran. A History of the Islamic Republic*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Azari, F. (ed.) (1983). *Women of Iran: The Conflict with Fundamentalist Islam*. London: Ithaca Press.
- Badran, M. & Cooke, M. (1990). *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Badran, M. (2009). *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. Oxford: One-world Publications.
- Bahar, S. (1983). A Historical Background to the Women's Movement in Iran. In: F. Azari (ed.), *Women of Iran: The Conflict with Fundamentalism* (pp. 170–189). London: Ithaca Press.

- Behrouzi, M. (2008, February 19). *Zanan bayad dar charkhe tasmimgiri sherkat konand* [Women should take part in the proces of decision making]. Retrieved from: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,3137038,00.html> [accessed: 16.09.2023].
- Charter of the Minimum Demands of Iran's Independent Trade Unions and Civic Organizations. (2023, February 16). *Campaign to Free Political Prisoners in Iran*. Retrieved from: <https://cfppi.org/2023/02/16/charter-of-the-minimum-demands-of-irans-independent-trade-unions-and-civic-organisations/> [accessed: 16.09.2023].
- Chemma, I. (ed.) (2023). *The Other #MeToos*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cleghorn, E. (2022). *Unwell Women: A Journey Through Medicine and Myth in a Man-Made World*. London: Orion Publishing Group.
- Dezhamkhooy, M. (2023). *Women and the Politics of Resistance in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*. Germany: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ebadi, S. (2016). *Until We Are Free: My Fight for Human Rights in Iran*. London: Random House.
- Ebadi, S. & Moaveni, A. (2007). *Iran Awakening: One Woman's Journey to Reclaim her Life and Country*. New York: Random House.
- Esfandiari, H. (1997). *Reconstructed Lives: Women and Iran's Islamic Revolution*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Esfandiari, H. (2009). *My Prison, My Home: One Woman's Story of Captivity in Iran*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Fathi, N. (2014). *The Lonely War: One Woman's Account of the Struggle for Modern Iran*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ghoreishi, S. (2021). *Women's Activism in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Political Alliance and the Formation of Deliberative Civil Society*. London – New York: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.
- Hajipour, S. (2022). *Baraye*. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0th9_v-BbUI [accessed: 16.09.2023].
- Hanna, A. (2021, March 8). Profiles of Women Politicians, Activists. *The Iran Primer*. Retrieved from: <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2020/dec/03/part-ii-profiles-women%E2%80%99s-movement> [accessed: 16.09.2023].
- Hendelman-Baavur, N. (2021). *Creating the Modern Iranian Woman. Popular Culture between Two Revolutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Honarbin-Holliday, M. (2008). *Becoming Visible in Iran: Women in Contemporary Iranian Society*. London – New York: Tauris Academic Studies.
- Human Rights Activists New Agency (HRANA) (2023). *A Comprehensive Report of 82 Days of Nationwide Protests in Iran: Totaling 486 Pages, Reports, Statistics, Videos, Analysis and Sources*. Retrieved from: <https://www.en-hrana.org/a-comprehensive-report-of-the-first-82-days-of-nationwide-protests-in-iran/> [accessed: 16.09.2023].
- Human Rights Watch (2007). *Iran. Events of 2006*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2007/country-chapters-7> [accessed: 16.09.2023].
- Iran International Newsroom (2023, January 24). New Data Suggest More People Died In Iran During Protests. *Iran International*. Retrieved from: <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202301240166> [accessed: 16.09.2023].
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with Patriarchy. *Gender and Society*, 2(3), 274–290.
- Kashani-Sabet, F. (2011). *Conceiving citizens: women and the politics of motherhood in Iran*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Kazemzadeh, M. (2023). *Mass Protests in Iran: From Resistance to Overthrow*. Germany: De Gruyter.
- Khamenei.ir (2023, September 11). *Exposing US's crisis-making mission: Targeting Iran by aggravating ethnic & religious differences, & using the issue of women*. Retrieved from: <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/10070/Exposing-US-s-crisis-making-mission-Targeting-Iran-by-aggravating> [accessed: 16.09.2023].
- Khorasani, N.A. (2010). *Iranian Women's One Million Signatures: Campaign for Equality. The Inside Story*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Kian-Thiébaud, A. (2010). Le féminisme islamique en Iran : nouvelle forme d'assujettissement ou émergence de sujets agissants? *Critique internationale*, 46, 45–66. DOI: 10.3917/cii.046.0045.
- Kian, T. (2023, September 12). *The Women's Movement in Iran One Year after the Death of Mahsa Amini*. Retrieved from: <https://publicseminar.org/2023/09/after-amini-iran-womens-movement/> [accessed: 18.09.2023].
- Kousha, M. (2002). *Voices from Iran: The Changing Lives of Iranian Women*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Lazreg, M. (1988). Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria. *Feminist Studies*, 14(1), 81–107. DOI: 10.2307/3178000.
- Mir-Hosseini, Z. (1999). Feminist Movements in the Islamic Republic of Iran (pp. 498–503). In: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, IX/5. Retrieved from: www.iranicaonline.org/articles/feminist-movements-iv [accessed: 16.09.2023].
- Moallem, M. (2005). *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*. California, L.A.: University of California Press.
- Moaveni, A. (2010). *Honeymoon in Tehran: Two Years of Love and Danger in Iran*. New York, Manhattan: Random House Publishing Group.
- Moghissi, H. (1996). *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nafisi, A. (2003). *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*. New York: Random House.
- Najmabadi, A. (1998). Feminism in an Islamic republic: Years of hardship, years of growth (pp. 59–85). In: Y. Haddad & J. Esposito (eds.), *Islam, Gender and Sociopolitical Change: Case Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Najmabadi, A. (2005). *Women with mustaches and men without beards gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Noorian, Z. (2023). *Parvin Etesami in the Literary and Religious Context of Twentieth-Century Iran: A Female Poet's Challenge to Patriarchy*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Öcalan, A. (2017). *The Political Thought of Abdullah Öcalan: Kurdistan, Woman's Revolution and Democratic Confederalism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Osanloo, N. (2009). *The Politics of Women's Rights in Iran*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Rahimpour, R. (2022, September 16). Fury in Iran as young woman dies following morality police arrest. *BBC NEWS*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-62930425> [accessed: 16.09.2023].
- Ricoeur, P. (1989). *Język, tekst, interpretacja*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Satrapi, M. (2008). *Persepolis I & II: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return*. London: Random House.

- Sedghi, H. (2007). *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling and Reveiling*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Shaban, S. (2022). *Iranian Feminism and Transnational Ethics in Media Discourse*. Pennsylvania: Lexington Books.
- Schulz, A. (1985). Women and Revolution in Iran. Edited by Guity Nashat. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983. 301 pp. *Iranian Studies*, 18(1), 105–108. DOI: 10.1080/00210868508701650.
- Tabari, A. & Yeganeh, N. (eds.) (1982). *In the Shadow of Islam: The Women's Movement in Iran*. London: Zed Books.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1997). *Understanding Cultures Through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese*. New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Worldometer (2023, September 16). *Iran Population*. Retrieved from: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/iran-population/> [accessed: 16.09.2023].
- Ziyachi, M. (2023). *Iranian Motherhood: A Cognitive Approach*. London: Routledge.

Prawa kobiet w Islamskiej Republice Iranu w świetle protestów 2022: „janusowe oblicze” feminizmu

STRESZCZENIE Celem przedstawionych analiz jest namysł nad dynamiką walki o prawa kobiet w Islamskiej Republice Iranu (IRI). Artykuł składa się z trzech głównych elementów. Pierwszy to faktograficzna i ideowa analiza protestów przez pryzmat danych statystycznych oraz treści piosenki *Kobieta, życie, wolność* (pers. *zan, zendegi, azadi*). Drugi element to omówienie feminizmu w Iranie przez pryzmat zderzenia odmiennych systemów wartości, wyklarowanych wskutek restrykcji po rewolucji 1979. Trzeci element analizy stanowi zjawisko rozbudzenia świadomości wśród aktywistów walczących o prawa kobiet za czasów prezydentury Mohamma-da Chatamiego (1997–2005). Analizy zostaną przeprowadzone w oparciu o teksty źródłowe konkretnych aktów prawnych, statutów organizacji i innych tekstów kultury, jak autobiografie i tekst piosenki *Zan, zendegi, azadi*. Podstawowe metody badawcze to analiza treści oraz hermeneutyczna analiza tekstu. Przegląd literatury przedmiotu i stanu badań pozwolił wyłonić lukę badawczą, wyrażoną w pytaniu o wartości stojące u podstaw walki o prawa kobiet w ramach opresyjnych systemów: kulturowego, identyfikowanego jako patriarchalny oraz politycznego utożsamionego z szeroko rozumianym prawem islamskim w wersji szyickiej. Analiza dynamiki walki o prawa kobiet pozwoli prognozować dalszy rozwój wydarzeń, które rozpoczęły się od protestów jesienią 2022 r. Przeprowadzone analizy doprowadziły do wniosku, że nadciągająca rewolucja ma twarz kobiety i jest wymierzona w ustrój patriarchalny – skostniały, opresyjny system tłamszący jednostkę. Rozsadzi od wewnątrz system polityczny poprzez zniszczenie jego struktur. Nie przyniesie jednak rozwiązania problemu zderzenia dwóch wzorców porządkowania relacji społecznych wyrażonych w dwóch odmianach feminizmu w Iranie: „klasycznej” oraz „islamskiej”.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Iran, protesty, feminizm, Islam, rewolucja

Date of submission of the article: 18.09.2023; date of acceptance of the article: 3.11.2023.