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## Donne, genere e politica in Asia In ricordo di Anna Vanzan

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# Anti-Gender Ideology and the Transnational Diffusion of Authoritarianism: Examining a Common Discursive Space Between Iran and Italy<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article contributes to the debate about authoritarian diffusion by examining the case study of Iranian state propaganda in Italy, with a special attention to anti-feminist and anti-gender ideology initiatives. The article foregrounds historical and contextual factors in the analysis, as well as the development of the relations between Iranian state propagandists and Italian recipients, focusing on far-right and neo-fascist organisations. The article re-assesses the strength and success of Iran's diffusion initiatives, demonstrating that authoritarian states try to create and engage an audience in democratic states even when they have a small chance of influencing the national public debate; and that they do so out of past trajectories and contextual, unstable interests. In conclusion, the article calls for more attention to the context, history and the actors' agency when examining authoritarian diffusion, and emphasises that gender and sexual politics are a fertile ground to analyse the contemporary transformations of political regimes.

**Keywords:** Anti-Feminism, Anti-"Gender Ideology", Authoritarianism, Iran, Italy.

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## Introduction

This article contributes to a growing body of scholarship that conceptualises anti-gender ideology politics as a gravitational pole for the diffusion of authoritarian discourse. Not only authoritarian-minded political forces – which usually are associated to far-right, right-wing populism and the sovranist camp – engage in creating moral panics about trans' rights, abortions, and surrogate pregnancy, but they also utilise gender critical stances to create a common transnational physical and virtual discursive space which allows for the exchange of ideas and political strengthening. This article examines how, through a massive use of digital platforms, such a discursive space is co-created by non-state political actors and organisations between Iran and Italy, with the goal of contributing toward a more comprehensive understanding of how gender politics, non-state actors and discourse are central to the global diffusion of authoritarian politics. This article pays a tribute to the work that Anna Vanzan has done to advance a politics of liberation, when it comes to her research on gender. While often branded as something related to women's rights and women's issues, gender is an analytical framework that allows us to move well-beyond jurisprudential and legalistic arguments in favour of reforming the law to grant more rights to women. While we maintain that women's rights are human rights that should be guaranteed and fought for, we take inspiration from Vanzan's latest works to argue that centering gender in our analysis means destabilising the gender binary and, consequently, a number of gendered institutions and political processes which are constitutive of modernity – from the nation state and national identity, to racial hierarchies, capitalism, social reproduction and the distinction between paid and unpaid sexual work (Biancani 2018; Farris 2017; Fortunati 1995; Guardi and Vanzan 2012; Kumar 2021; Smith 2020). Because of its radicality and this potential for liberation, the struggle against "gender ideology" occupies a central place in the political discourse and practice of authoritarian forces across the world. This article contributes to shed light on the construction of transnational relations between illiberal state and non-state actors in the era of right-wing populism, with the goal of enhancing our understanding of this latter as "an internationally interconnected yet ideo-politically variegated global phenomenon" (Anievas and Saull 2022: 1). By doing so, this study presents four fresh approaches to the analysis of the global diffusion of authoritarianism. First, it foregrounds the role of non-state actors, moving away from more traditional, state-centric approaches. Second, it focuses on the role of political discourses, rather than the military or economic influence that one state may have on another state, in authoritarian diffusion. Third, it underlines the role of digital infrastructures in the creation, expansion and radicalisation of transnational authoritarian and anti-gender ideology narratives (Gounari 2018). Fourth, the case study selected moves away from the usual suspects of authoritarian diffusion that is Russia and China, offering fresh empirics from a less-studied case study. Before discussing the structure of the article, we need to clarify something about the use

of the phrase "gender ideology". As discussed by Garbagnoli (2014), this phrase is being deployed by conservative and far-right political networks to emphasise that gender-based analyses of politics, the economy or history are a matter of ideology, rather than a legitimate approach which deconstructs social norms and historicise power relations. While we are using this phrase in this article to identify a central aspect of far-right ideology, we believe that gender-based analysis is methodologically sound and vital as it unveils unequal and discriminating systems of power, and that more gender-based research, intersecting de-colonial perspectives, is needed and should be mainstreamed in the research carried out across all disciplines.

This article proceeds as follows. First, it contextualises its contribution in broader academic debates on the global diffusion of authoritarian discourses and the fundamental role played by the anti-gender ideology agenda in it. Second, it provides a background to the relations between Iranian and Italian conservative and traditionalist networks. Third, it describes the methodology adopted. Then, the article engages anti-gender ideology discourses through discourse analysis. In the conclusion, the article calls for de-centering the state when it comes to authoritarianism and its global diffusion, to centre non-state actors, discourses and gender politics instead.

## Literature Review

### *Researching the Diffusion of Authoritarian Discourse Beyond the State*

Fears for the assault on liberal democracy and its values have multiplied in the past decades. As the scholarship about democratic backsliding and the crisis of liberal democracy grew in importance (Haggard and Kaufman 2021; Przeworski 2019; Waldner and Lust 2018), a number of scholars have turned to the analysis of authoritarianism with new eyes. They have questioned conventional understandings of authoritarianism as framed and "contained" by the nation state territorially, politically and organizationally (Abaza 2017; Glasius 2018a; 2018b; Glasius, Shalk and De Lange 2020; Lemon and Antonov 2020), prompting reflections on authoritarianism as a travelling politics, whereby state and non-state actors actively produce, exchange, and diffuse authoritarian ideas and practices, from policing and surveillance, to neoliberal authoritarian dispossession and the management of migration and diasporas (Bader 2014; Bader 2015; Berda 2013; 2020; Hyde 2020; Tsourapas 2018; Von Soest 2015). This renewed approach to authoritarianism and how authoritarian politics diffuses internationally calls for shifting the attention from regime structures and structural conditions such as geography and leverage (Levitsky and Way 2006), to the agency of actors and long-term historical contextualization. While the scholarship focusing on structures has rightly pointed out that factors such as the size of a country and its natural resources matter, little attention has been given to the history of the exchanges between authoritarian actors, and the agency of said actors, whether state or non-

state. Following this line of reasoning, this article focuses on "the constellation of actors" involved in authoritarian diffusion (Bank 2017: 1354), their agency (Roberts and Ziemer 2018), as well as the historical relations entertained.

Moving away from a state-centric approach also means to adopt a different perspective than one understanding the global diffusion of authoritarianism as the failure or the success of a state, usually Russia or China, imposing its influence on another state (Ambrosio 2010; Hall and Ambrosio 2017; Koesel and Bunce 2013). In fact, the insistence on measuring the success of authoritarian diffusion has discouraged research looking into the role of actors other than states, that engage in activities other than more-or-less violent coercion. In such practices of co-creation, in fact, there is no straightforward success to be assessed through the pattern of a zero-sum game.

Addressing the limitations of the scholarship, this article looks at non-state liminal actors between Iran and Italy co-creating a common discursive, anti-gender ideology field. In fact, this article takes seriously narratives and discourses as a site for interrogating authoritarian diffusion beyond usual measurements of success or failure, which traditionally are associated to the subversion of the *status quo*, *coups d'état*, or forms of economic and political exploitation. In her work, Gurol (2023) examined how the diffusion of Chinese narratives of success in managing the COVID-19 pandemic has had an effect in the Gulf, strengthening the idea that there is a global hegemon to look up to for governance models other than the United States – a form of influence that might bear fruits in the long term. Examining al-Sisi regime's positive response to Chinese propaganda, Rasheed (2022: 69) theorises the concept of authoritarian reinforcement, which is defined as "a discursive legitimization of authoritarian practices under the pretext of maintaining political order, preserving sovereignty, achieving progress, decoloniality and fairness in the international system". In this case, Rasheed explains that the Egyptian state utilises Chinese state propaganda to reinforce the legitimacy of its own actions and ideas, something that does not translate into an immediate benefit for Beijing. Stepping away from the idea that authoritarian diffusion is a one-way process and a zero-sum game, this article looks at how authoritarian discourses circulate between networks close to the Iranian state and the Italian far right, and how they co-create a common discursive field utilised by both sides to enrich and strengthen their argumentations.

### *Anti-Feminism and Anti-"Gender Ideology" as Global Authoritarian Discourses*

While anti-feminist positions have always been present in both the far-right and the Iranian state propaganda, they have acquired global salience because of the attention that reproductive rights, LGBTQIA+ visibility and gender ideology have recently been receiving from conservative political forces (Bellè, Peroni and Rapetti 2018; Gago 2020; Garbagnoli and Prearo 2018; Norocel and Giorgi 2022). This section elaborates on why gender has become such a controversial term in recent years, and how it has become

an instrument to channel and diffuse authoritarian ideas transnationally.

Anti-feminism and anti-gender ideology are crucial elements in the contemporary rise of the global far right. Several scholars have highlighted the intimate connection between patriarchy, the formation of the nation state, the maintenance of a gender-binary social order, and the survival of the current capitalist economic system (Duggan 1994; Federici 2020; Hartman 2019; Mezzadri, Newman and Stevano 2021; Mikdashi 2022; Smith 2020; Yuval-Davis 1997). Traditionalist and sovranist forces are particularly concerned with same-sex marriage, reproductive rights, and the multiplication of diversity-sensitive policies and legislation, which they see as a threat to the traditional *status quo* built on patriarchal cis-heteronormativity. According to their views, the claim that gender is a social construct rather than a natural fact endangers the dominant social order, because it unhinges the correlation between sex and expected social behaviour, gendered roles and norms. To counter this danger, far-right and traditionalist forces work to present gender roles as a "natural fact", according to which women are naturally caring and inclined to perform reproductive labour, while men are naturally decisive and inclined toward productive work.

Anti-gender ideology politics emerged as a context-dependent iteration of longer-standing anti-feminist and gender-critical positions,<sup>1</sup> providing relevant talking points to conservative and traditionalist forces (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). To understand the emergence of anti-gender ideology discourse and policies, it is important to identify the larger framework in which gender ideology has come under attack, and the political opportunities structure for the internationalisation of the opposition to it. As Graff and Korolczuk (2022) explain, anti-gender ideology is rooted in the Vatican's opposition to gender equality policies promoted after the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women. At the time, a loose-knit cooperation of multi-denominational organisations and groups coalesced around traditional family values,<sup>2</sup> evolving into what Bob (2012) called the "Baptist-burqa" network. In the last decade, these struggles have grown more complex, in reaction to challenges such as migration and recurrent capitalist economic crises, and far-right organisations have become more active and visible in anti-gender ideology coalitions. While the opposition to the Istanbul Convention to eliminate all forms of violence against women has renewed efforts at creating transnational alliances, the growth of racism and islamophobia post-9/11 and after the 2015 "refugee crisis" has prompted a transformation in the alliances at the transnational level. Fundamentalist Muslim and Islamist groups have largely been marginalised, although some collaborations between far-right and Islamist forces have survived thanks to the long history of exchanges which they have had, including those considered in this study.

Anti-gender mobilisations have taken different forms, depending on the context. In France, for example, they have focused on opposition to assisted reproduction. In Italy, Poland and Russia, anti-gender campaigns have demonised non-heteronormative



sexualities and families, as well as reproductive rights such as abortion and emergency contraception, while in Spain, they have targeted the legislation against violence on women, reframing it as an attack on the traditional family and values. Since 2022, the Italian government led by Giorgia Meloni has been particularly active in transforming anti-gender ideology discourse into actual policies, exposing LGBTQIA+ individuals and families, and people with a womb, to growing state and social violence. In all cases, the defence of traditional kinship and hierarchies of power is at the centre of anti-gender campaigns. Building on this observation, Sauer, Dietze and Roth (2020) theorise that such campaigns aim at protecting heterosexual, white cis-masculinity and its privileges, revealing extreme anxiety about the possible loss of authority to the benefit of historically other-ed segments of the population, that is women, people expressing non-conforming gender identities, racialised people and migrants. Therefore, the conflict is not merely over men's prerogatives, but it is over who gets to be seen and included in democracy, who is entitled with rights and liberated from oppressive hierarchies of power. The close association between anti-gender ideology campaigns and right-wing populism reveals how gender as an analytical tool utilised to deconstruct oppressive hierarchies, is at the heart of this political alliance. It follows that analysing anti-gender ideology discourse is necessary to understand both transnational authoritarianism and the crisis of democracy.

## The Iranian-Italian Connection

### *The Italian Far Right's Interest in Iran*

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, non-Western religions and Islamic mysticism (Sufism and *irfan*, Shi'a mysticism or gnosis) have been a pole of attraction for traditionalist, far-right and fascist ideologues, because they were seen as uncorrupted by Western modernity (Sedgwick 2019). Such a cultural interest also had a geopolitical aspect, as exemplified by the work of the Italian fascist thinker Julius Evola (1898-1974) and the Italian journal *Geopolitica* (established in 1939) whose ambition was to establish the foundation of a fascist foreign policy (Savino 2015: 99). According to them, the fascist state was in direct competition with other European colonial powers, Great Britain *in primis*. Italy had to maintain a "good neighbor" policy towards, and cultural relations with, Russia and the Muslim world, its natural allies in the fight against British imperialism and soul-less industrial modernity.

Evola's work became popular in the 1970s and 1980s. During those years, an interest in and admiration for khomeinism as a force against modernity strengthened the far right's interest in Shi'a mysticism, esotericism and political traditionalism – and in Evola's work too. Those who gathered around radical right-wing magazines such as *Orion*, *Avanguardia*, *Aurora* and *Dissenso* considered Islam as an ally in the fight against liberal globalisation and its brand of modernity. Many converted to Shia Islam,

too. Examples include Dagoberto Hussein Bellucci, collaborator of *Avanguardia* and *Eurasia*, a journal founded in 2004; Pietro Benvenuto, a former member of the fascist organisation Ordine Nuovo and active in Morabitun – The World Movement of Western Muslims; and Luigi Ammar De Martino (d. 2019), another former Ordine Nuovo member. De Martino established the magazine *Il Puro Islam* and the association Ahl al-Bait in Naples, which has close relations with the Tehran-based mother organisation under the control of Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei (Mirshahvalad 2020; Ra'ees and Kamal 2017). From the Naples-based Ahl al-Bait split the religious Imam al-Mahdi cultural centre, with branches and associated organisations in Rome and Milan. The Imam al-Mahdi cultural centre is headed by converts Shaykh Abbas di Palma and Marco Hussein Morelli, a collaborator of the neo-fascist magazine *Fuoco* and close to Casa Pound Italia.<sup>3</sup>

Central to these networks, both in the past and today, are Claudio Mutti (b. 1946) and Carlo Terracciano (1948–2005). Mutti, who has been involved in far-right cultural initiatives since the 1970s, converted to Islam in the 1980s and established the Italian section of the organisation Morabitun. Terracciano was editor of *Orion* and *Avanguardia*.<sup>4</sup> Since the 1990s, both have supported the need to overcome the right versus left political divide to embrace common anti-imperialist and anti-liberal positions. Mutti and Terracciano also played an important role in popularising Aleksandr Dugin's Eurasian geopolitical vision in Italy. Dugin combined mysticism and aryanism with geopolitics to theorise the alliance of Slavic and Muslim civilisations to oppose Western liberal imperialism and globalisation, an idea that the Italian far right was already familiar with through Evola's work. In 1993, Mutti and Terracciano attended the First World Congress of the Peoples Oppressed by the New World Order in Moscow, where delegations from several countries, including Iran, met to consolidate alliances and a common anti-liberal and sovereignty-centred political discourse (Savino 2015). With the mainstreaming of Dugin's theories since the 2000s in Italy (Piraino 2023), the geopolitical aspect of the far right's interest in Iran became prevalent, although interests in Islam and mysticism never disappeared. As Mutti put it during an interview, his generation's early interest in Iran and Islam was motivated by "the search [...] the want for spiritual fulfilment and an alternative to Western existential materialism".<sup>5</sup> However, he continued, this spiritual approach has to be overcome in favour of a more militant one to initiate a common international struggle against global liberalism and the "New World Order" (NWO). In this context, the insistence on shared values aims to counter the Islamophobic sentiment prevalent today within the far right,<sup>6</sup> emphasising that the struggle is against three common oppressors, that is capitalist globalisation, the liberal forces attacking sovereignty, and gender ideology.

### *The Iranian State's Soft Power and Non-State Actors Mediating It*

In this section, the actions and characteristics of the networks that diffuse the



discourse of the Iranian state are discussed in order to appreciate their agency in co-creating a discursive field together with the Italian far right. The Iranian state diffuses authoritarian discourses in Italy through its official cultural and media platforms. However, such official state voices may not necessarily be efficient in targeting the Italian audience, or specific Italian audiences. Non-state liminal actors between Iran and Italy, whom I call the *mediators*, play a fundamental role in mediating the Iranian state's discourse, translating and contextualising it for far-right audiences.

But first, this section examines the transnational efforts of the Iranian state when it comes to diffusing its political discourse. Content-wise, it is similar to that of the two more powerful countries of Russia and China, with the promotion of sovereignty, non-interference, and highlighting the hypocrisy of what is called "the West",<sup>7</sup> especially when it comes to its double standards in respecting human rights. However, Iran also emphasises its own cultural specificity which sets it apart from Russia and China, by referring to its past as a unique Muslim and Persian empire,<sup>8</sup> and by foregrounding today's role of religion in the public sphere and the higher moral status of its domestic and foreign politics given that both derive from Islam, so the Iranian state argues. Scholars have often portrayed Iran as an "ideological state" unable of rational choices and policies, hence its muscular approach to international and regional politics, which often involves a military presence. Therefore, with few exceptions (Holliday 2016; Von Maltzahn 2013; Warnaar 2013; Wastnidge 2015), scholars have comparatively dedicated little attention to the ideas and discourses that come from the Iranian state, especially when their reach goes beyond the geographical and cultural boundaries of Muslim-majority countries. This article ventures outside of such limits.

When it comes to promoting and diffusing its own discourse, the Iranian state does not act uniformly. In fact, the institutions and the actors involved in such efforts are different and might have different agendas. In particular, two offices are involved in the field of public diplomacy, the Supreme Leader's Office and the Presidency of the Republic. Wastnidge (2015) elaborates on the impact of this dual system on how the soft power of the Iranian state is projected and managed abroad. He explains that the "President performs one role in terms of representing Iran on the world stage, while the Supreme Leader maintains control over some important soft power tools, such as [...] international media operations and cultural attaches and related cultural outreach centres" (Wastnidge 2015: 366). It follows that when the President and the Supreme Leader have different ideas about what image Iran should present abroad, a conflict of narratives might become evident. However, while governments and presidents are elected and change regularly, the Supreme Leader remains in office for life. It follows that the political discourse of state and non-state actors associated to the Supreme Leader's office does not change and is traditionally more conservative.<sup>9</sup> In terms of the infrastructures that enable the diffusion of state discourse, social media play a fundamental role. The Iranian state, and the many institutions and entities associated

with it, in fact, are active on several digital platforms, from traditional social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, to TV and streaming platforms such as YouTube and satellite TV channels. Digital platforms are enablers of authoritarian diffusion and amplify the work and the message of concrete infrastructures such as Iran's International State Broadcast IRIB,<sup>10</sup> the Iranian Embassy in Italy and the Consulate in Milan.<sup>11</sup>

This study pays attention to a set of actors that are connected to the Supreme Leader and that present an anti-Western and illiberal political discourse. Such actors can be defined as political and cultural entrepreneurs who mediate and popularise the Iranian state's authoritarian discourse within specific networks in Italy, and who inhabit a liminal space between Iran and the political conservative networks of Italy. Such *mediators* are Italy-based Iranian individuals and Italian-Iranian individuals or organisations (such as research centres, religious associations, publishers) who are loyal to the Iranian Supreme Leader or have a more-or-less direct connection with his office; and who entertain contacts with Italian far-right organisations. The next section discusses data collection and analysis to examine the co-construction of authoritarian discourse and narratives.

### Data Collection and Analysis

This article builds on the analysis of several Iranian and Italian social media accounts in Persian and Italian across different platforms (YouTube, Twitter/X, Facebook, Instagram and Telegram) to examine how anti-gender ideology constitutes a common discourse between the Iranian state, the *mediators* and Italian far-right organisations. Hundreds of posts/tweets and several recorded conferences have been examined between 2020 and 2023.<sup>12</sup> For the Iranian state, the following institutional accounts have been considered: the Supreme Leader<sup>13</sup> and the Italian chapters of the Iranian al-Mustafa International University,<sup>14</sup> which organise seminars and educational activities for Italian audiences; co-organise conferences with far-right and "Eurasiatist"<sup>15</sup> organisations; and provides speakers for media and public events.

As for the *mediators*, whose role is fundamental in identifying a common discursive space between Italy and Iran, the following have been selected: the Research Centre Le Dimore della Sapienza<sup>16</sup> and the publisher Irfan Edizioni.<sup>17</sup> Le Dimore della Sapienza is active in organising events with far-right networks and Iranian institutions, such as the Embassy-affiliated Iranian Cultural Institute in Rome, on the topics of Islam and Iranian history and politics. At such events, representatives of the Iranian state and Italian far-right individuals sympathetic to the Islamic Republic often feature as speakers.<sup>18</sup> It is directed by Giuseppe Aiello, the founder of Irfan Edizioni, who also converted to Islam. The publishing house Irfan Edizioni devotes particular attention to Iranian and Shi'a mysticism as well as to conservative and traditionalist thinkers. It has published work by Dugin, Khamenei and in honour of Mutti. Aiello<sup>19</sup> self-defines

as a defender of tradition and traditionalist views, is an estimator of Dugin and Putin, and a contributor to the neo-fascist magazine *Fuoco*.<sup>20</sup> Along with these organisations, some individuals play an important role as *mediators*. For this study, the social media profiles of the following individuals have been identified as relevant: Hanieh Tarkian,<sup>21</sup> a lecturer at the al-Mustafa International University and a frequent commentator for far-right platforms; Mostafa Milani Amin,<sup>22</sup> an Iranian-Italian cleric and collaborator of Al-Mustafa University; Shaykh Abbas Di Palma<sup>23</sup> and the cleric Abolfazl Emami,<sup>24</sup> both religious leaders of the Imam al-Mahdi Cultural Centre. On public speaking occasions, *mediators* identify areas of shared political interest, showing the far right how the authoritarian narratives and discourse coming from Tehran overlap and reinforce common anti-liberal and anti-gender ideology analyses. While anti-gender ideology positions are crucial, it is important to highlight that the *mediators* also share broader political and ideological persuasions with the far right, for example the hostility toward the celebrations of the Italian liberation from Nazi-fascism on 25 April. An example of this is an interview to Milani Amin, originally published in the rightist newspaper *Il Giornale* and re-published in the far-right newspaper *Il Primato Nazionale*, which eloquently titles *An Assad-less Syria would end up like Italy after 25 April: In the hands of the terrorists*,<sup>25</sup> where "terrorists" refers to post-1943 partisan armed formations that captured Mussolini and liberated Italy from Nazifascism. It follows that the *mediators* ideologically overlap with, and contribute to the development of the far right's discourse, albeit from their own perspective and often by introducing pro-Iran topics and tropes, or by proposing Iran's viewpoint on Middle East politics. An example of this is the event titled *Foibe and Palestine: Two distant yet similar tragedies*, organised by the Dimore della Sapienza, which established a common anti-liberal interpretation, tainted with anti-semitic tones, of the anti-fascist reaction against the presence of Italians in the colonised territory of Croatia (which neo-fascists call "Fiume e Dalmazia") and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.<sup>26</sup> These events and the *mediators'* discourse also reveal another implication of their work: through their translation and mediation, the *mediators* often do not simply report the Iranian state's discourse, but they actively transform it into a set of more radical contents and discourses to be offered to the Italian audience. Examples of this discrepancy are the *mediators'* positive reference to Italian fascism, and their virulent transphobic and anti-abortion discourse, which are both absent in the discourse of the Iranian officials; and the *mediators'* merciless condemnation of the "Woman Life Freedom" female protesters as enemies past redemption, which does not correspond to the much more forgiving attitude of Khamenei, who adopts an understanding approach, probably with the goal of coopting them.<sup>27</sup>

As for the far right, the following organisations and platforms have been identified as relevant: *Il Primato Nazionale*,<sup>28</sup> *Idee&Azione*,<sup>29</sup> *Fuoco*.<sup>30</sup> *Il Primato Nazionale* is the flag-publication of one of the most important far-right and militant organisations of Italy,

Casa Pound. It often hosts interventions by the *mediators* on topics such as the fight against liberalism and the "New World Order"; and has dedicated great attention to the killing of IRCG Gen. Soleimani in 2020 and its geopolitical implications. Idee&Azione defines itself as "the voice for the Organic Communities of Destiny",<sup>31</sup> a group of twelve far-right and Eurasiatist organisations among which are Le Dimore della Sapienza and Terra dei Padri. On Telegram, Idee&Azione self-describes as "the official voice of the International Eurasiatist Movement in Italy". *Fuoco* is comparatively less known but has been active in offering platforms and space to the cultural and political *mediators* identified above.

The cultural and political *mediators* have been identified during the coding process of the authoritarian discourse diffused by Iranian institutional accounts through retweets and shares. To identify the responsive far-right networks and the relevant players in Italy, the *mediators'* accounts and their participation in events have been used as proxies. It is important to emphasise that neither the *mediators* nor the receiving far-right organisations are structured in a defined, uniform group. This article does not argue that Italy's far right is a monolith sympathetic to Iran, and there is a selection bias when it comes to the identification of the relevant actors for this study. However, the size of the material collected and examined suggests that the findings are representative of a large network, which expands but maintains a high degree of ideological and relational cohesiveness internally. In fact, the network considered includes a host of alliances and collaborations between several organisations which are of interest to an audience of far-right sympathisers, who are interested in interpretations of world politics which are alternative to the official ones. The *mediators* are captivating of such an audience thanks to a rich linguistic and discursive register, which is informal and includes sarcasm, and thanks to the radical contents they circulate, including slanders and defamation against migrants, feminists, leftists and liberals, and LGBTQIA+ individuals. In Meloni's Italy, it is arguable that the audience sympathetic to such discourses is emboldened by the protection guaranteed by the government and has likely increased in numbers. An anti-gender ideology discursive space has been identified and coded thanks to the analysis of Iran's authoritarian discourses, in both Persian and Italian, and the overlaps between it and the material collected in Italian. Three anti-gender ideology discourses were identified as common, although the boundaries between them are porous: the defence of gender complementarity; feminism as a top-down project dangerous to women; gender ideology as a cover-up for the consolidation of the NWO. During the coding process, differences have been noted, too. For instance, while transphobic ideas are central to the *mediators'* and the Italian far right's discursive patterns, they are almost absent in the discourse of the Iranian state's representatives. The Iranian state in fact upholds sex reassignment as a way to protect the gender binary and as a "cure" for same-sex desire (Vanzan 2015). While Iranian authorities insist on the gender binary and present it as natural, there is no attack on trans' rights *per se* or references

to typical culture wars issues such as trans women's access to gendered bathrooms or trans sport athletes. As mentioned, the *mediators* radicalise the Iranian state's defence of gender complementarity, articulating an attack on trans' right to self-determination as part of their interactions with Italian far-right audiences.<sup>32</sup>

### Three Discourses

#### *The Defense of Gender Complementarity*

Gender complementary is the belief that men and women have fixed gendered social roles and identities which are different and complementary. The belief in gender complementarity rests on a number of assumptions, such as that heterosexuality and binary gender identities are natural "facts"; and it has a number of consequences, such as the idea that women have a natural inclination toward motherhood and care. This translates into a demonisation of same-sex desire, reproductive rights, children-free and non-traditional families. Iranian state officials uphold gender complementary, although it is not incompatible with women's education and employment,<sup>33</sup> albeit within the boundaries set by gendered roles that is, for women, being a mother and a wife.<sup>34</sup> This is well-explained by one of Khamenei's posts, which reads that "[a]ccording to Islam, a woman's natural role is being a housewife, but this does not mean that a woman should stay at home [...] she should not stay at home and do nothing, she has duties, such as [...] be involved in the social and political life [...] and govern a house. A woman can work outside the house with enthusiasm and passion, but this comes after her primary duty of running a house and a family."<sup>35</sup>

*Mediators* translate such positions for Italian audiences, at times proposing them with little modifications, at times changing them to create a cultural connection. For example, in many of her public speaking appearances, Tarkian has argued that a woman's true battle is to understand and embrace her peculiarities as a woman compared to a man and use them to realise her objectives as a woman. Hinting on to motherhood and marriage – but not exclusively, as professional satisfaction and participation in social and political affairs are important, although not sufficient – Tarkian argues that a woman's path to realisation should be supported by institutions and should be free from the dominant liberal thought, which conveys anti-family messages. In other interventions, Tarkian has utilised cultural references familiar to an Italian audience to emphasise the commonalities with her positions as an Iranian-Italian and Muslim woman. In her book, *Studio comparativo sulla figura di Maria. La madre di Gesù nella tradizione cristiana e islamica* (A Comparative Study of Mary. Jesus' Mother in Christian and Islamic Traditions, published by Irfan Edizioni, 2013), she argues that abortion is intimately connected to the loss of centrality of the traditional family in the contemporary society, something that Khamenei has often repeated and that is a classical trope in the far-right's discourse too.<sup>36</sup> Tarkian's position utilises

Christian references to foreground the overlaps with Islam, countering Islamophobia and reinforcing the connection with the Italian allies. Her article *Usano la Vergine per sponsorizzare l'aborto* (*Virgin Mary Being Misused to Advertise Abortion*), hosted by the far-right Catholic organisation Azione Tradizionale,<sup>37</sup> is another example of this. The article criticises one morning-after pill advertisement. The advertisement shows the archangel Gabriel who, instead of announcing Mary her pregnancy, hands her a box of the contraceptive telling her "[t]ake it, it's miraculous!". After taking issue with the "blasphemy" of the advertisement, Tarkian celebrates the "never-ending submission" of Mary, recalling that "when God revealed his will to Mary, she accepted it" and this changed her life and the course of history. Tarkian writes that, in spite of the efforts by the liberal media to change feminine caring and submissive nature, women maintain "a stronger inclination toward submission [...] when we submit to God, we become stronger and not weaker (because) God is the only source of power". Tarkian also pushes back against the belief that Catholic values are the only ones that are mis-represented or ridiculed, and that Muslims too feel offended by such an advertisement. Reminding that Islam is often ridiculed and that Mary the Virgin is a holy figure in Islam, Tarkian concludes that "[t]he truth is that we, the followers for Tradition, are victims of mockery and slander",<sup>38</sup> establishing a common ideological ground.

While the battle against abortion has long been high on the agenda of the traditionalist forces in Italy, a more recent one is against surrogate pregnancy. This topic is nearly absent in the Iranian state's political discourse but it is central to far-right and Catholic anti-gender ideology propaganda in Italy and other European countries. Presented as a non-mainstream event, "inspired by 'alternative thought'", the online celebration of the 8 March 2021 organised by the Dimore della Sapienza Research Centre, featured Giorgia Brambilla, an Italian academic, and Hanieh Tarkian.<sup>39</sup> Brambilla presented surrogacy as the apex of the denaturalisation of a woman's innate instinct, motherhood, as well as the major obstacle to the fulfilment of a woman's natural mission, which is to be a mother and a wife. Blaming gender ideology and its eugenicist views, Brambilla argues that abortion and surrogacy do not only invisibilize "the person who is in the womb and always has a right to life" but also women. On her end, Tarkian has used this opportunity to highlight the common hostility of Islam and Catholicism towards birth control and their common "support for life, which translates into support for women", thus strategically utilising a public speaking occasion to create a common discursive space based on the defence of gender complementarity and the primacy of women's reproductive role.

### *Feminism as a Top-Down, Anti-Women Project*

While neither Khamenei nor the accounts representative of the Iranian state take issue with feminism as such, thus recognising it as a legitimate system of thought and analysis, it is stigmatised indirectly. *Mediators* and far-right discourse name and



demonise it directly. Feminism is said to be responsible for a number of issues, which have partially been addressed above. This section looks at shared interpretations of feminism as a top-down project against women's interests, a belief which lies at the intersection of the Iranian state's discourse, the *mediators'* and the Italian far right's. Sharing common views, Hanieh Tarkian and Catholic writer Costanza Miriano have become friends. Miriano is the author of well-known books *Sposati e sii sottomessa. Pratica estrema per donne senza paura* (*Marry Him and Be Submissive. Extreme practice for fearless women*, 2013) and *Obbedire è meglio. Le regole della compagnia dell'agnello* (*It Is Better to Obey. The rules of the company of the lamb*, 2014). She is close to fundamentalist Catholic far-right networks, such as the anti-abortion organisation Pro-Vita e Famiglia and Azione Tradizionale. On her blog, Miriano writes about her encounter with Tarkian, who she recognised "as a sister [...] in our common escatological struggle for the eternal salvation of humans - a struggle which is foremost for the salvation of humanity".<sup>40</sup> Both Miriano and Tarkian (along with representatives of Pro-Vita e Famiglia) contributed to the second issue of the neo-fascist magazine *Fuoco*, titled *Hanno ucciso l'uomo maschio* (*They Killed the Masculine Man*, 2019), which refers to the threat of feminist culture and politics. During the launch of the issue,<sup>41</sup> Miriano talked about the "lies of feminism"<sup>42</sup>, which has convinced women to renounce their natural role as mothers, and that they "have to become like men" to feel satisfied and fulfilled. "Feminism screwed us up", she continues, and talks about the difficulty to reconcile a professional career with motherhood. "The labor market does not consider us as mothers", she adds, concluding that "we are not discriminated against as women; we are discriminated against as mothers". It follows that it is not important to "help mothers to work, but to help workers to be mothers" and that feminism is a politics with no resonance in the real life of women. "We know that feminism is a top-down project, an artificial political project imposed from above and funded by networks of powerful people operating in finance, interested in convincing women that [...] it is better to obey your employer than a loving husband".<sup>43</sup>

This resonates with Khamenei's words. In a Telegram post<sup>44</sup> - a platform he extensively uses to provide advice and disseminate his thinking on a wide variety of topics - he wrote that "[w]estern capitalism is sexist [...] men have a priority over women because they have more economic power [...] in the West, women's freedom has been made into an artificial political issue to push women into the labour market (the factories) to have cheaper labour force". During the launch of *Fuoco*, Tarkian followed up some of the points that Miriano made, emphasising that powerful liberal media elites flex their power to deny "evident truths, such as that a child needs a mother and a father and that there is a natural correspondence between the biological sex and being a woman or a man",<sup>45</sup> serving in this way the interests of powerful financial liberal elites and working to the detriment of women's and children's welfare.

In his media activities, Italian-Iranian cleric Mustafa Milani Amin also centres feminism

as an anti-women *ideology*. Milani Amin argues that it has forced women to become "emancipated", imposing un-natural roles on them. Those who would like to opt for more traditional roles are stigmatised.<sup>46</sup> It follows that, according to Milani Amin, feminism is responsible for the current population crisis in Italy: it has convinced women "to entertain themselves (*trastullarsi*) with dogs, cats and mobile phones"<sup>47</sup> while the society risks "extinction".<sup>48</sup> This line of reasoning and discourse overlaps with Khamenei's message on the decrease of birth-rates in Iran. In a post titled "Tomorrow is late", accompanied by the hashtags #ToHaveKids, #PopulationCrisis and #PopulationReductionCrisis, he presents the ageing of the population as a urgent problem, which is connected to a loss of centrality of maternity as a woman's highest ambition.<sup>49</sup> The attention that, on far-right platforms, this issue attracts is also prominent, and it often is discussed along with the *mediators*, as evidenced by the example reported above. There are, however, differences. The most prominent is the reference by the far right to the so-called "theory of the great replacement", or "the Kalergi Plan", which is less prominent in the discourse of *mediators* (although it is not absent)<sup>50</sup> and in the discourse of the Iranian state officials.

#### *Gender Ideology and the Consolidation of a New World Order*

Discursively, the far right in Italy presents gender as a gateway for more liberalism and neoliberalism. Examples are provided by far right ideologue Diego Fusaro, who argues that gender ideology is a threat that comes from the globalist elites, who want to establish the NWO by uniformising the world population into an identity-less and docile mass of consumers.<sup>51</sup> In his words,<sup>52</sup> "The New World Order doesn't tolerate the survival of the nation state and the family, of national languages and culture, collective identities, such as class or 'the people'. In conformity with the One Ideology of Libertarian Liberalism, the NWO [...] reduces men to stateless, English-speaking consumers with no root, who are passive, neutral and agency-less. [...] [t]he liberal and libertine financial elites have not only declared a war against the traditional bourgeois morality, but against the whole Western civilization and its ancient identity because this is resistant against the precarious sexual identity [...] the NWO wants to impose". Khamenei and official representatives of the Iranian state have traditionally focused on the defence of gender complementarity, rather than gender ideology and the NWO. However, they have long framed the connection between liberal hegemony and the attack on traditional gender roles as an attempt by "the West" at imposing its imperialist interests. For example, Khamenei wrote that Western media have taken an interest in forced *hejab* and women's rights in Iran as an excuse to weaken the Islamic Republic. "The core of Western civilization is the separation between religion and politics [...] The Islamic Republic hit the West exactly where it hurts, because it refused to follow the model"; this is the reason that prompts "the West", Khamenei continues, to attack Iranian women, the Islamic *hejab* and the Islamic Republic.<sup>53</sup> Another important

discursive trope is the strength of Iranian women. "The Iranian woman" is "honourable and full of talents because she gave the bloodiest blow to the West".<sup>54</sup> In fact, while the Western media portray her as weak, submissive and oppressed – a trope that the *mediators* often utilise to unveil the Islamophobia of the media systems in Western countries<sup>55</sup> – she is strong and high-achieving. More recently, the Woman Life Freedom uprising of 2022–3 has revived this discourse, with accusations against "the West" of instrumentalising and mystifying the death of a young woman (Mahsa Jina Amini) to target the whole Islamic Republic and its political standings.<sup>56</sup>

The discourse of the Iranian state and the Italian far right are similar yet not identical, and the intervention of *mediators* is central to identify a common ground to build on, when it comes to the rejection of gender ideology to counter liberal hegemony. Religious and national identity, in particular, are centred as necessary to counter liberalism. In the words of the Shaykh Abbas di Palma, "Islam is a living religion [...] and therefore, there are forces trying to eliminate it. There are forces [...] trying to create a universal and homogeneous world order. They operate where God is absent, and where religion is nothing more than a phenomenon relegated in the past, with no relevance to the present".<sup>57</sup>

Another example are Giuseppe Aiello's (2022) remarks during the launch of his book *La Repubblica Islamica dell'Iran alla luce della Tradizione. Un'ideale d'azione in vista della restaurazione finale* (*The IRI from the Point of View of Tradition: Countering the Final Restoration*, which refers to the hegemony of liberalism), co-organised by the Dimore della Sapienza and the neo-fascist Milan-based bookstore Libreria Cinabro.<sup>58</sup> Building on work by René Guénon, Evola and Khomeini, Aiello argues that the very existence of the Islamic Republic is the "eschatological example" of an action in defence of traditional identities, highlighting the commonalities between far-right and neo-fascist thinking, and Shi'a Islamic one, in a pro-Islamic Republic framework, playing a fundamental role in identifying a common discursive space utilised to increase the resonance between authoritarian ideas and their circulation.

## Conclusion

Moving away from an understanding of authoritarian diffusion as a zero-sum game, this article suggests that paying attention to the co-creation and the circulation of ideas and political discourses shed significant light on how far-right ideologies travel transnationally and, while doing so, how they take different forms depending on the context. In particular, it helps understand what are the material and immaterial structures that enable such diffusion, such as historical connections and exchange, the existence of audiences familiar with authoritarian ideas, if not enthusiastic, about them; and the fundamental role played by individuals and organisations translating authoritarian discourses and ideas for local audiences. However, the focus on sexuality and gender reveals much more, as it allows to link authoritarian diffusion to broader

questions about the nation state and the current crisis of democracy. Furthermore, while the literature has abundantly explored the importance of social networks as tools of resistance to authoritarianism, the paper resonates with more recent work (Jones 2022) emphasising the role of platforms such as Telegram, Instagram, and Twitter as infrastructures through which authoritarian and anti-gender ideology discourses are translated, conveyed, and disseminated.

In conclusion, the article opens a reflection about the nature and the forms of authoritarianism. Decentering the nation state and the traditional differentiation between authoritarian and democratic countries, this article calls for an understanding of authoritarianism as a set of practices, ideas and discourses – rather than structures, states and governments – that work to hinder human liberation from multiple oppressions, generated through gendered, racial, or classist hierarchies and their intersection.

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## Notes:

1 - For the sake of space, we are not able to elaborate here on gender-critical feminism, which "ostensibly takes issue with the feminist theoretical notion that sex and gender are social and cultural inventions and, crucially, with the attendant trans political vision for a world where a multitude of lives beyond the gender binary are both imaginable and rendered materially possible" (Bassi and LaFleur 2022: 311; see also Eugenia Zuroski, *Walking Away from Oxford University Press*, 4 May 2023, [https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/1YKtcU7glSiQ045Z0cdJfWH4K2ekufPxo7zyivbq1AqU/mobilebasic?urp=gmail\\_link](https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/1YKtcU7glSiQ045Z0cdJfWH4K2ekufPxo7zyivbq1AqU/mobilebasic?urp=gmail_link) (last accessed on 14 September 2023). In recent years, gender critical feminists have established alliances with far-right and fundamentalist religious forces in the name of countering gender ideology.

2 - We will use "traditional values" or "traditional family" in the paper, but it should be pointed out that there is nothing traditional about what is represented as the "traditional family" by conservative forces, for the "traditional family" is an invention of modernity. See Smith (2020).

3 - See <https://leggifuoco.it/redazione/> (last accessed on 5 October 2023) and the book launch event organised at Avamposto29, linked to Casa Pound, in which both Morelli and di Palma participated <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cq3DQvMteZA/> (last accessed on 5 October 2023). See also the interview to Morelli, *Ecco perché noi italiani ci convertiamo all'Islam*, "La Repubblica," 4 January 2011, [https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/01/04/news/ecco\\_perch\\_noi\\_italiani\\_ci\\_convertiamo\\_all\\_islam-10850443/](https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/01/04/news/ecco_perch_noi_italiani_ci_convertiamo_all_islam-10850443/) (last accessed on 5 October 2023).

4 - Terracciano's contributions to *Orion* have been collected in the 2020 volume *Pensiero armato. Gli scritti di Carlo Terracciano in «Orion»*, published by the neo-fascist publisher AGA.

5 - See "Islam ed Europa. Intervista a Claudio Mutti", *Iqna*, 7 April 2017, <https://iqna.ir/it/news/3481528/islam-ed-europa-intervista-a-claudio-mutti> (last accessed on 20 September 2023).

6 - The far right is not a homogenous group of parties, movements, organisations. In this study, Casa Pound and other similar networks have been found to be more relevant and set on pro-Iran positions.

7 - The "West" is discussed as an abstract political and cultural unity, usually indicating the geographies of Europe and North America.

8 - There is a growing scholarship that interrogates Iranian nationalism and Iranian-Persian identity. See Kia (2020) and Rivetti (2023) for historical analyses of the transnational origin of Persian identity, mostly originated in the Indian subcontinent, and for a deconstruction of it.

9 - This contrasts with the fact that, within society, gender roles, behaviours, femininity and masculinity are transforming rapidly. See Ghaffari and Ruspini (2023).

10 - @RadiolItaliaIRIB (Twitter/X), <https://parstoday.ir/it> (last accessed on 20 September 2023).

11 - @Iraninitaly @IraninMilan (Twitter/X).

12 - Only a fraction of them has been reported here, according to their relevance. The 2020-23 temporal arch provides rich empirical material considering the density of the events that have characterised it, from IRCG Gen. Soleimani's death, to COVID-19 pandemic and the Woman Life Freedom uprising.

13 - @it\_Khamenei (Twitter/X), t.me/Khamenei\_it (Telegram).

14 - <https://www.facebook.com/istitutoalmustafa>, <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069437915281> (last accessed on 5 October 2023).

15 - In Italian, "Eurasiatista". This adjective is used to identify a group of political and cultural organisations that are contiguous to more established far-right organisations and endorse Dugin's Eurasia ideas and related theories. For a review of their work and ideas, see the YouTube channel of the organisation *Terra dei padri* (The Fathers' Land, @laterradeipadri8745), which co-organised the first "Rassegna dell'editoria eurasiatista" or the Eurasiatist Book Fair, in April 2023 in Modena.

16 - t.me/dimoredellasapienza/9 (Telegram), @centrostudiinternazionale2246 (YouTube).

17 - Facebook account "Irfan Edizioni," linked to Giuseppe Aiello's account; @irfanedizioni\_italy (Instagram).

18 - See for example the conferences "Imam Khomeini, tra spiritualità e politica rivoluzionaria" (Imam Khomeini, Between Spirituality and Revolutionary Politics), 4 June 2016, <https://www.irancultura.it/imam-khomeini-tra-spiritualita-e-politica-rivoluzionaria/> (last accessed on 20 September 2023); "La sacra difesa dell'Iran contro Saddam. Il concetto tradizionale di Pace" (The Holy Defence Against Saddam.

The Traditional Notion of Peace), <https://www.irancultura.it/la-sacra-difesa-delliran-contro-saddam/> (last accessed on 21 September 2023); and the cycle of seminars about the role of religious minorities in supporting the Islamic revolution, 13 February 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/CSIDimoredellaSapienza/videos/455472745587374>.

19 - Facebook account "GiuseppeAiello(Irfan Edizioni)."

20 - <https://leggifuoco.it/redazione/> (last accessed on 21 September 2023).

21 - @Hanieh.Tarkian2 (Facebook, Instagram).

22 - T.me/Mostafa\_Milani\_Amin (Telegram), see also <https://mostafamilani.ir/biografia> (last accessed on 21 September 2023).

23 - Facebook account "ShaykhAbbasDiPalma," examined between 2014 and 2016.

24 - For a profile, see Oppedisano A., *L'Iran si prepara ad Al-Quds: la giornata "contro Israele" istituita da Khomeini nel 1979*, "Il Primato Nazionale," 30 June 2019, <https://www.ilprimatonazionale.it/esteri/siria-senza-assad-mano-terroristi-litalia-25-aprile-63144/> (last accessed on 21 September 2023).

25 - Della Guglia A., *Siria senza Assad? In mano a terroristi, come l'Italia dopo il 25 aprile*, "Il Primato Nazionale," 26 April 2017, <https://www.ilprimatonazionale.it/esteri/siria-senza-assad-mano-terroristi-litalia-25-aprile-63144/> (last accessed on 21 September 2023).

26 - See [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC\\_tto\\_cuEZ3ekw8XY4pFh5g](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_tto_cuEZ3ekw8XY4pFh5g) (last accessed on 21 September 2023).

27 - Khamenei Telegram, 13 January 2023 (Italian). Khamenei argues that loosely veiled women are "our daughters anyway" and it is a mistake to consider them anti-revolutionary and anti-religious. Instead, they should be helped to find their way back into the community.

28 - @ilprimato (Twitter/X) and website [www.ilprimatonazionale.it](http://www.ilprimatonazionale.it) (last accessed on 21 September 2023).

29 - @Idee&Azione.it (Facebook), t.me/ideeazione (Telegram), @ideeazione5559 (YouTube).

30 - @Leggifuoco.it (Facebook).

31 - See the event broadcast on Facebook marking one year since the establishment of the "great Italian network of associations, communities, cultural initiatives and organisations and, above all, hearts beating for a brand new world" (as reads the event's blurb): <https://www.facebook.com/Comunitagiovanile/videos/1256277028189074> (last accessed on 5 October 2023).

32 - See, for example, Tarkian's Facebook posts on 28 March 2023; 26 March 2023; 8 April 2023.

33 - Khamenei Instagram, 22 May 2023; 3 February 2021; 12 July 2021; 12 December 2021; 22 January 2022 (in Persian).

34 - Khamenei Instagram, 13 January 2023; 12 June 2021 (in Persian); Telegram, 4 January 2023; 8 January 2023 (in Persian).

35 - Khamenei Instagram, 5 January 2023 (in Persian). See also his Instagram post on 22 January 2022 (in Persian): "[t]he mother is the family's core. Western propaganda machine, and some of our own media, minimise, hide, ignore this reality. Housewives (even those who have no employment) take on the most important job of all. Their work should be valued and honored [...] as women's most important duty."

36 - Khamenei Telegram, 24 January 2023 (in Persian).

37 - Hanieh Tarkian, *Usano la Vergine per sponsorizzare l'aborto*, "Azione Tradizionale," 27 June 2019, <https://www.azionetradizionale.com/2019/06/27/usano-la-vergine-per-sponsorizzare-laborto/> (last accessed on 21 September 2023).

38 - *Ibid.*

39 - "La vera battaglia della donna. La Donna come non l'avete mai sentita raccontare [A Woman's True Battle. The Woman As She Has Never Been Talked About]," 8 March 2021, Facebook, <https://ms-my.facebook.com/CSIDimoredellaSapienza/videos/la-vera-battaglia-della-donna/266446278329065/> (last accessed on 10 October 2023).

40 - Miriano Costanza, *Libertà è sottomettersi all'infinito (Freedom Is Never-Ending Submission)*, 15 March 2016, <https://costanzamiriano.com/2016/03/15/liberta-e-sottomettersi-allinfinito/> (last accessed on 21 September 2023).

41 - "Più ardente che mai! Presentazione del numero due di *Fuoco*" (On Fire! Launch of Issue no. 2), 19 July 2021, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/leggifuoco.it/videos/187097913386732/> (last accessed on 10 October 2023). *Fuoco* translates as "fire" in English.

- 42 - Unless otherwise stated, the translations are by the authors of the current paper.
- 43 - See the launch of issue no. 2 of *Fuoco*, available at [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch\\_permalink&v=187097913386732](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=187097913386732)
- 44 - Khamenei Telegram, 4 January 2023 (in Persian).
- 45 - "Più ardente che mai! Presentazione del numero due di *Fuoco*" (On Fire! Launch of Issue no. 2), 19 July 2021, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/leggifuoco.it/videos/187097913386732/> (last accessed on 10 October 2023).
- 46 - Milani Amin Telegram, 30 March 2023.
- 47 - Milani Amin Telegram, 27 June 2022.
- 48 - In another post, Milani Amin argues that, however, those who legalise same-sex unions while outlawing polygamy, merit "extinction" (Milani Amin Telegram, 21 May 2022). See also Tarkian Facebook, 26 March 2023.
- 49 - See, for instance, Khamenei's post on Telegram on 23 January 2023. See also Khamenei Telegram, 3 July 2022; 18 May 2022; 22 July 2020 (in Persian).
- 50 - See for instance, the podcast *Zambracca*, realised by Valerio Savioli e Gianluca Kamal (who are close to Casa Pound, the organisations Domus Europa/identità europea and the publisher Passaggio al bosco) featuring Tarkian (<https://www.spreaker.com/user/16307401/ep-1-guerra-alla-fede-hanieh-tarkian>, last accessed on 21 September 2023); Gabriel Rizza, *Globalismo e terrorismo opprimono i popoli. Intervista ad Hanieh Tarkian*, "La Critica. Navigare verso la libertà," 2019, <https://www.lacritica.org/globalismo-e-terrorismo-opprimono-i-popoli-intervista-ad-hanieh-tarkian/> (last accessed on 21 September 2023); also Tarkian, "My speech in Piazza Sempione, in Rome, defending Christian values from the globalists, as Soleimani and his soldiers did in Syria and Iraq against the terrorists, who are the globalists' allies", YouTube, 21 March 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUkFryvRhvY> (last accessed on 21 September 2023). It is worth noticing that Tarkian was belittled and referred to as "the girl from the Shi'a community" by the Italian male speaker who introduced her. Then, the floor was not yield to her, as another Italian man took the floor and offered praising words for Soleimani and chanted "Viva Hezbollah". See also Tarkian Facebook, 28 March 2023.
- 51 - Diego Fusaro, *Ideologia gender e capitalismo*, "Scenari", 7 November 2014, <https://www.mimesis-scenari.it/2014/11/07/ideologia-gender-e-capitalismo/> (last accessed on 21 September 2023), and see his many contributions on the topic published in *Il Primato Nazionale*, for example: <https://www.ilprimatonazionale.it/primo-piano/bibbiano-prove-tecniche-gender-capitalismo-125591/>, <https://www.ilprimatonazionale.it/primo-piano/godimento-neolibertino-e-gender-il-nuovo-ordine-erotico-turboglobalista-93207/> (last accessed on 21 September 2023), among his many other contributions about gender and "turbo-capitalism."
- 52 - Diego Fusaro, *Bimbi costretti a scrivere lettere d'amore gay. Benvenuti nel gender-totalitarismo*, "Il Primato Nazionale", 11 October 2018, <https://www.ilprimatonazionale.it/approfondimenti/bimbi-costretti-a-scrivere-lettere-damore-gay-benvenuti-nel-gender-totalitarismo-94483/> (last accessed on 21 September 2023).
- 53 - Khamenei Telegram, 27 July 2022 (in Persian).
- 54 - See, for example, Khamenei Telegram 27 July 2022; 28 July 2022; 31 August 2022; 10 October 2022; 1 November 2022; 2 January 2023 (in Persian).
- 55 - Tarkian often brags about her achievements as a highly educated Muslim woman, accompanying them with assertions such as "I promise I will start tomorrow to be the oppressed Muslim woman you want me to be" (Tarkian Facebook, 26 May 2023, 17 May 2023, for example).
- 56 - See for instance Khamenei Telegram 9 December 2022 (in Persian). See also note 27 for more on this.
- 57 - *Islam sciita, Sheikh di Palma: la società occidentale vive una profonda crisi spirituale*, "Pars Today", 11 May 2022, <https://agenziaStampaItalia.it/speciali-asi/speciale/60992-l-imam-sciita-di-palma-la-societa-occidentale-vive-una-profonda-crisi-spirituale-l-islam-puo-coltmare-questo-vuoto> (last accessed 14 October 2023).
- 58 - Event reported by the neo-fascist group Raido: *La Repubblica Islamica dell'Iran. Un ideale d'azione in vista della Restaurazione finale. Presentazione del libro presso la Libreria Cinabro*, Comunità Militante Raido. Tradizione Formazione Rivoluzione, 11 June 2022, <https://www.raido.it/politico/la-repubblica-islamica-delliran-un-ideale-dazione-in-vista-della-restaurazione-finale-11-06-22/> (last accessed 10 October 2023).

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