Remapping Diasporic Imaginaries: The ‘Green’ Uprising and Iranian American Transnational Solidarity

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Although Iran is often excluded from discussions about the wave of democratic aspirations sweeping the region—or deployed as an example of the theocratic road the Arab revolts should avoid—anti-regime sentiment and struggle has not only become endemic to Iranian society but has radiated beyond Iran’s borders and reconfigured diasporic activism as well. Calls for freedom and democracy by the “green” movement in Iran enabled Iranians in the West to visibly affirm their support for the Iranian people while simultaneously asserting belonging in the societies in which they lived. This paper considers the “green” uprising through a diasporic lens in order to investigate the transnational implications of national mass movements and map circuits of affect and affiliation as they travel between differently configured sites of political power. In particular, I examine how the outpouring of “green” solidarity in the U.S. challenges and reinforces the target-status of Iran in mainstream American discourse, offering a critical look at new forms of Iranian American activism. This paper also uncovers alternative strategies that resonate against the work of Iranian leftists at U.S. universities in the 1960s and 70s, who connected their struggle against the U.S.-backed Shah with the movement for black liberation and other exilic decolonization campaigns. In conversation with this history, I look at a series of joint actions by two New York City-based organizations: Where Is My Vote-NY (WIMV-NY), a diasporic wing of the “green” movement, and Raha, an Iranian radical feminist collective that incorporated a critique of U.S. empire into support for the Iranian uprising. Many WIMV-NY and Raha members were previously active in Palestine solidarity, immigrant rights, labor rights and queer/women of color organizing. I consider the ways in which they embody a subjectivity that cannot be inscribed within U.S. or Iranian nationalism and enact solidarity that contests liberal universalism.