

THIS FLAME

**Iranian Revolutionaries in
the United States**



Manijeh Moradian

THIS FLAME WITHIN

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Manijeh Moradian

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*You've got to have this flame within you
that can warm others.*

Jalil Mostashari

Iranian Students Association member,
1963–1968

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ABBREVIATIONS

CISNU	Confederation of Iranian Students (National Union) (<i>Konfederāsiūn-e jahānī-e moḥaṣṣelīn wa dānešjūyān-e īrānī etteḥādīya-ye mellī</i>)
EW	Emancipation of Women (<i>Anjoman-e rahaie zan</i>)
ISA	Iranian Students Association in the United States
NDF	National Democratic Front (<i>Jebḥā-ye demokrātik-e melli</i>)
NF	National Front (<i>Jebḥā-ye mellī-e Īrān</i>)
NUW	National Union of Women (<i>Eteḥād-e mellī-e zanān</i>)
OCU	Organization of Communist Unity (<i>Sāzman-i vah-dat-i kumūnisti</i>)
OIPFG	Organization of Iranian People's Fadā'i Guerrillas (<i>Sāzmān-e čerikhā-ye Fadā'i-e ḵalq-e Īrān/</i>), or <i>Fadaiyan</i>
RO	Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party of Iran (<i>Sāzmān-e enqelāb-e hezb-e tūde-ye Īrān</i>) or <i>Sāzmān-e Enqelābi</i>
SAW	Society for the Awakening of Women (<i>Jam'iat-e bidāri-e zanān</i>)
UIC	Union of Iranian Communists (<i>Eteḥādī-e kommūnisthā</i>)

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This book is for all the children of revolutionaries.

Introduction

Before We Were “Terrorists”

On February 15, 1977, six members of the Iranian Students Association (ISA), along with a small group of Americans from the Revolutionary Student Brigade, chained themselves to the inside of the crown of the Statue of Liberty and unfurled two giant banners (see figure I.1).¹ The larger one read “DOWN WITH THE SHAH.” To the right, a smaller banner demanded “FREE THE 18,” a reference to a group of political prisoners who had just been arrested in Iran. The ISA was a coalition involving several thousand Iranian student-visa holders living in the United States who were determined to end Washington’s political, economic, and military aid to the Shah’s regime. They channeled this determination into a political force through conspicuous acts of protest, such as the occupation of the statue that epitomized America’s democratic promise to the world. By draping an iconic monument to American exceptionalism with a condemnation of a dictatorship that was also a major US ally, these young men and women turned their outrage into a visual spectacle of American hypocrisy. They hoped this spectacle would resonate widely as a call to action.

An accompanying press release issued by Vietnam Veterans Against the War made the expectation of solidarity clear. “The American people,” it stated, “have no interest in dominati[ng] other countries as the American rulers do, [*sic*] instead their very interest is in joining with other people to fight against our own rulers who perpetuate the same misery in this country as well as abroad.”² This sentiment was echoed in an article that appeared shortly afterward in the ISA’s English-language magazine, *Resistance*, explaining that

Resistance

A publication of I. S. A. U. S., Member of Confederation of Iranian Students (National Union)

VOLUME FOUR

FEBRUARY, 1977

SUPPLEMENT TWO

Iranian and American Students Seize Statue of Liberty in Support of 18 Iranian Patriots

The dictatorial regime of the Shah of Iran is finding it more and more difficult to carry out his barbaric repression of Iranian people in the face of mounting international condemnation of his fascist rule. And he is worried. Very worried.

RECENT KILLINGS, ARRESTS GIVE RISE TO FRESH WAVES OF OUTRAGE

Announcements by government-controlled press in Iran disclosed in the last few weeks several new political murders and arrests at the hands of the Shah's secret police.

To begin with, two patriots who had been in prison for an unknown period of time were summarily executed. Mr. M.H. Abrari, and Ms. Z. Gholhaki, whose arrests had never been announced previous to their deaths, and had been kept in an unnamed prison, were the victims. Ms. Gholhaki is the second woman known to be executed on political grounds after the Shah's takeover through the 1953 CIA coup. Many more women, of course, have died in the struggle against the regime both inside and out of prison, though only two have been victims of political executions known to date.

In another announcement by the regime of the Shah it was revealed that Mr. B. Aram, one of the leaders of the revolutionary *Organization of Mojahedeen of the People of Iran* was gunned down along with two other members of the same organization (Mr. M. Shafieha and Mr. H. Bagheri) in a confrontation with Shah's SAVAK and police. Seven others have been arrested in the same incident.

The cold-blooded killings had resulted from what has come to be known as house raids in Iran. An example, typical of these vicious measures,



Figure I.1 *Resistance*, February 1977. ISA file, Social Protest Collection, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

the occupation was intended to “dramatize the hatred and disgust of the Shah and US policies toward Iran felt both by Iranian and American people.”³ The article’s broad and confident assertion that “Iranian and American people” shared viscerally negative reactions—“hatred” and “disgust”—toward their own respective governments, rather than hostile feelings toward one another, reveals the presumption of a shared affective disposition and internationalist

sensibility that would, after the revolution in Iran just two years later, become almost unimaginable.

By the time of the Statue of Liberty occupation in 1977, Iranian student activists had already spent sixteen years working to convince the Americans around them that they were on the same side in a global contest over the future of humanity. On one side was the US government, its brutal war in Vietnam, its coterie of allied dictatorships across the Third World, and its entrenched racist power structure at home; on the other side were popular liberation movements in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the United States. The ISA invited Americans to add Iran to the map of concern and affiliation that had motivated so many to act against US imperial power in Southeast Asia. If enough Americans expressed outrage at US complicity with the authoritarian regime in Iran, ISA members hoped, Washington might withdraw its support and weaken the Shah to the point that the Iranian people could overthrow him.

Hence the need for dramatic acts of protest that could attract attention to the cause. Chained to the inside of Lady Liberty's crown for over five hours, Iranian students and their American friends waited for a crew of reporters to arrive. Instead, all ferry services to the island were suspended. The Coast Guard went so far as to intercept a private boat full of journalists to prevent them from conducting interviews.⁴ According to *Resistance*, Coast Guard Captain J. L. Fleishell declared a "security zone" around the perimeter, in his words, "because of the presence of known terrorists on Liberty Island."⁵ The unnamed ISA author conveys surprise at this choice of words: "Why would he say that? How did he know? What made these people 'terrorists'?"⁶ As the article points out, the students carried no weapons and made no threats. The article's indignant questions, however justified, transport today's reader to a very different geopolitical era, before the words *Iranian* and *terrorist* had become virtually synonymous in the American media and popular imagination. At the time, Iranians were not generally regarded as threatening or violent. From the mid-1950s until the mid-1970s, Iran was a hopeful site of American largesse toward developing nations, and Iranian students in the US were welcomed as harbingers of Iran's ascent to the rank of a modern, capitalist nation—that is, if they were noticed at all. Scholars and media commentators routinely assume that the term *terrorist* first stuck to Iranians in the US after the taking of American hostages in Iran in late 1979. In fact, it was used against leftist Iranian students in 1977 who expressed public outrage about US complicity with the Shah's dictatorship. This earlier iteration reveals the enduring political motivations behind the selective use

of this term as a slur against individuals and groups who oppose hegemonic state power. Before Iranians in the US were labeled “terrorists” they were revolutionaries.

The ISA’s occupation of the Statue of Liberty raises several questions at the heart of this book. First, how was it that militant anti-imperialist activists emerged from the ranks of privileged foreign students whose *raison d’être* was to assist in the Westernization of Iran? Second, how did these students come to align themselves with a wide range of other liberation movements, and what did this solidarity look like in practice? Third, how did the history of the ISA become marginalized to the point that it is a virtually unknown part of the story of the Third World Left in the US, and how would that story change if the ISA were part of it? Finally, how might the ISA’s legacy become meaningful to the contemporary Iranian diaspora in the US? I address these questions through an investigation of the lived experiences of Iranian student leftists in the United States from the early 1960s through the 1978–79 Iranian revolution. This investigation draws on archives and interviews to write Iranian foreign students into the historiography of Third World internationalism in the US and to gain a deeper understanding of what it meant to organize one’s life around the project of revolution. It also examines the tensions and disappointments of that era, particularly the apparent tendency of anticolonial revolutions to betray the women who fought for them. The ISA thus becomes a case study of the gender and sexual politics of the anti-imperialist Left and reveals a far richer and more complex story than one of simple male domination. This wrangling with the past is also a provocation to rethink contemporary Iranian diasporic subjectivity, feminism, and transnational solidarity. My major contention is that the neglected history of Iranian revolutionaries in the United States can help to reorient diasporic identity away from nationalism, assimilation, and exceptionalism, and toward affiliation with multiple, ongoing freedom struggles—in the US, in Iran, and around the world.

In the pages that follow, not only do the activities of a nearly forgotten movement come into focus, but the affects and emotions that made it possible resurface from the hidden archives of memory and the fading mimeographed pages of activist ephemera. *This Flame Within* invokes both the powerful ferment of an Iranian revolutionary movement that occurred within the borders of the United States *and* the animating, embodied force of affect in forging political subjects and movements. It is the exploration of what I call “revolutionary affects” and how they transform subjectivity that compels this study and imbues it with significance beyond the Iranian

context. If we want to better understand how collectivities form around the goal of social and political revolution, then the registers of affect and emotion carry valuable information. This study of the ISA thus addresses the much larger question of how and under what conditions affective attachments to revolution come to be shared in common, making it possible for people with very different experiences and histories to imagine their struggles and futures as interdependent. Below I describe my research process and the conceptual terminology I assembled in order to make sense of what I found.

Becoming Revolutionaries

Before they were revolutionaries, Iranians in the US were students, including my father, who arrived in Washington, DC, in 1960 to attend Howard University. He participated in ISA meetings, rallies, and marches, as well as actions large and small against anti-Black racism, colonization, and war. It was from him that I first learned about the existence of an Iranian student movement in the United States. My father seemed to embody the spirit of those years of connection across difference, rejecting narrow forms of Persian nationalist identity in favor of the broadest possible identification with all those who suffered because of global capitalist expansion. As a graduate student, I wanted to learn more about the ISA, its role in undermining US support for the Shah, and its role in the post-World War II era of decolonization. Crucially, given the polarizing gender and sexual politics of the Iranian Revolution in which these students participated, I wondered what a study of this movement might have to teach us about the broader tendency of postcolonial states to reconfigure and reinforce, rather than dismantle, patriarchal forms of citizenship. How, I wanted to know, did former ISA members feel about this traumatic history, which drove many of them into permanent exile?

My research led me to ISA archival materials at Stanford University, University of California–Berkeley, and the Library of Congress. Among the many pamphlets, fliers, and periodicals available in Persian and in English, the ISA’s English language journal, *Resistance*, which was published regularly throughout the 1970s, proved invaluable as a record of how the ISA attempted to galvanize the Americans around them. I was also fortunate enough to gain access to the personal collections of several former ISA members, including Younes Parsa Benab, Leyli Shayegan, Nancy Hormachea, and Parviz Shokat. I looked in less obvious places, too, such as the San Francisco State Strike archives and the archives of campus newspapers, and was rewarded for my

efforts. In particular, coverage of the ISA in UC Berkeley's *Daily Californian* and Howard University's *The Hilltop* provided rich material for addressing the impact of ISA activism on American student politics more broadly. In addition to these print sources, I also analyze a short documentary film about the women's uprising in Tehran in March 1979, in which some returning ISA members participated. The original Persian audio is difficult to hear, but reveals affects and experiences marginalized by the French voiceover and English subtitles. My close reading of this film centers the voices of the Iranian women featured in it, voices that have been all but buried by the dominant narratives of victory and defeat that attend the Iranian Revolution.

Above all, as I set out to learn about the ISA, I wanted to hear directly from participants and gather their memories into a new kind of archive. Over the course of several years, I interviewed thirty former ISA members: twenty men and ten women. These interviews were usually conducted in person and lasted an average of three hours, sometimes with additional follow-up sessions. I also interviewed six non-Iranian activists who had worked with the ISA. It quickly became clear that I could interview dozens of Americans who fit this description, as the ISA was fondly remembered by many leftists of that generation, but this would have become a different project. Listening to former ISA members talk about their activist years, I was repeatedly struck by the strength of feeling that lingered decades later. I was interviewing people who had been profoundly affected by growing up under a US-backed dictatorship. Their encounters with state repression and with different traditions and moments of resistance in Iran left them searching for a way to act against injustice. The ISA became the way, a vehicle for transforming students into revolutionaries.⁷ But how did this happen and what did it feel like in practice? And how might those feelings inform present and future diasporic orientations?

In order to address these questions, I read the affects and emotions embedded in the memories of former ISA members, as well as in print and video materials, as an "affective archive." I borrow this concept from queer feminist scholars, in particular Gayatri Gopinath and Ann Cvetkovich. Gopinath understands affect as the force of desire that transgresses the boundaries of nation, race, gender, and sexuality, making legible marginalized histories of the interconnections between different forms of oppression and differently targeted populations.⁸ She locates the formation of marginalized subjectivities in the body's affective capacity to remember that which official histories must forget, and in small, everyday acts that are too often excluded from notions of the political.⁹ I take my understanding of the subversive potential of affect

as a site for reading alternative diasporic histories from her work. Cvetkovich's attention to the "emotional histories that lead people to activism" has also been formative in my approach to charting an affective history of the Iranian student Left in the US.¹⁰ The registers of affect and emotion reveal complex and often contradictory responses to the experience of revolutionary activity—from joy to grief to ambivalence to disbelief—that belie tidy narratives of success or failure. Far from offering a static picture of how things really were, feelings attached to certain memories of collective struggle in the 1960s and 1970s change along with geopolitical conditions and sensibilities, becoming available for new interpretations. An "affective archive" of the ISA can help to make sense of the risks that were taken, the sacrifices that were made, and the feelings that suffuse diasporic political consciousness today.¹¹

This Flame Within reads this archive for what I call "revolutionary affects," those visceral intensities generated by experiences of repression and resistance that remain latent within the body. For former ISA members, revolutionary affects are the embodied remains of the intertwined experiences of imperialism, dictatorship, and diaspora. Revolutionary affects form the basis of the transnational theory of revolutionary subjectivity offered in this book. Before I elaborate, I must first explain what I mean by *affect*, a term rarely used outside specialized scholarly circles. Affect refers to the way the body, which includes the "mind" or brain, registers the impact of coming into contact with people, places, objects, and ideas. Affects are outward and relational, rather than internal or fixed, and they are manifest physically—as a sensation (or lack thereof), a gesture, a facial expression, a stance, an orientation in space. They are always present; indeed, as Jonathan Flatley points out, we are always in an affective state (or mood) of some sort, although we may not know exactly how we got there.¹² The sociologist Deborah Gould explains that an affective state is "often experienced, as Raymond Williams wrote, 'at the very edge of semantic availability,' felt as 'an unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency.'" ¹³ I would add to this list affective states experienced as pressure, excitement, anger, fear, and melancholia, by which I mean an unwillingness to let go of someone or something that is lost, like a loved one, a sense of belonging, or a moment of freedom. Rather than understand "negative" affects and feelings—such as anger and melancholia—as counterproductive or unhealthy, I draw on cultural studies scholarship that explores the subversive knowledge, subjectivities, and collectives that can emerge from an open and ongoing engagement with loss.¹⁴ Our affective states, what Williams famously called "structures of feeling," can register the "tension between dominant accounts of what is and what might be, on

the one hand, and lived experience that contradicts those accounts.”¹⁵ They may be the first sign that all is not well, that something needs to change.

Affect and *emotion* are not identical terms. Some scholars draw a sharp distinction between the two, arguing that affect is inchoate and loaded with potential, whereas emotion represents the cohering of affect into a definite form of expression.¹⁶ Affect may be open-ended, but it is, nonetheless, always social. As Gould writes, “affect is a body’s processing of social conditions.”¹⁷ Sara Ahmed has illustrated how this processing provides the raw material for political emotions: we might experience something that puts us in an affective state of unease—an incident of harassment, for example—but only realize later, when we come to recognize the experience as part of a system of discrimination, that we are angry about what happened.¹⁸ We also might want to better understand how that system works in order to make sense of how we have been affected. Coming into contact with others who share our affective state can channel our affects in particular directions, toward particular political ideologies and organizations. Social movements, Gould argues, provide an “emotional pedagogy . . . a guide for what and how to feel and what to do in light of those feelings,” and can, moreover, “authorize selected feelings and actions while downplaying and even invalidating others.”¹⁹ This is the case no matter where a social movement falls on the political spectrum. Seen in this way, the ISA became compelling because it offered an explanation for the affective states of Iranian students who had trouble accepting a US worldview that hinged on support for dictatorship and because it provided a plan for action. Affect thus became a conduit toward new political horizons, new ideas about what kinds of feelings and actions were permissible and desirable.²⁰ In the chapters that follow, I have sometimes found it necessary to draw a distinction between *affect* and *emotion*—for example, when discussing childhood memories of ISA members or changing feelings ascribed to the same memory. At other times I use the two terms together because they are both equally relevant to my analysis of revolutionary subjectivity.

The concept of revolutionary affects refers to the sensorial material out of which a revolutionary consciousness can later be fashioned *and* to those affects that attach to and fuel the project of making a revolution. Michael Hardt argues that affects “illuminate . . . both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, and the relationship between these two powers.”²¹ The term *revolutionary affects* describes precisely this relationship, encompassing the power of being impacted by the world such that one is out of sync with the dominant order *and* the power to sustain

revolutionary activity designed to change that same order. The revolutionary affects of former ISA members provide an archive of the United States' disavowed empire in the Middle East and the efforts by a group of foreign students to bring that empire down.

Revolutionary affects describe a theory of revolutionary subjectivity that is not predictive but rather historical and analytical. Affective potency lingers and can animate the body later on in ways that are impossible to foresee.²² In the absence of revolutionary ideas and organization, revolutionary affects flow elsewhere or dissipate. In other words, revolutionary affects do not cause a person to adopt a revolutionary ideology or join a revolutionary organization; and yet it may be impossible to fully understand why certain ideologies and organizations become compelling enough to reorient the lives of thousands of people at the same time without paying attention to the affects they mobilize and circulate.²³ After all, not everyone who reads Marx becomes a Marxist. Or as Flatley points out, "insights about one's political oppression are unlikely to motivate resistance unless they can be made interesting and affectively rewarding."²⁴ Just as socialist and communist ideas offered Iranian students a method of "reading" their formative memories and the affects that remained, the concept of revolutionary affects offers an approach to reading history, a method of interpreting the data I accumulated through in-depth interviews with former ISA members and through archival research. By telling their stories, and opening themselves up to the affects and feelings that attend them, ISA veterans produced, in the words of Cvetkovich, "political history as affective history, a history that captures activism's felt and even traumatic dimensions."²⁵ These are the dimensions that do not appear in conventional histories of modern Iran or of US-Iran relations, but that left each of these young people longing for justice. Here I give just a few examples.

Sitting quietly in a room in Tehran, a ten-year-old Jewish girl named Jaleh Behrooz tried to make sense of why her brother, an artist, had been tortured by SAVAK (Sāzemān-e Ettelā'āt va Amniyat-e Keshvar), the US-trained secret police force. As she worked this horror over in her mind, she sat next to a different brother who was translating *The Diary of Anne Frank* into Persian. She read each page as he handed it to her. It is this moment that Jaleh recalls when she talks about how she lost her faith in God and became interested in the idea of self-emancipation. The atrocities of the European Holocaust, the violence of dictatorship, her brother's body in pain—these experiences affected her in ways she hardly understood at the time. Years later in diaspora, the affects and emotions that remained would fuel her

decision to commit her life to a revolutionary movement that promised to put an end, once and for all, to regimes that torture.²⁶

Among the thirty former ISA members interviewed for this book, many could still describe specific encounters with state repression in Iran in the aftermath of the 1953 CIA-backed coup, events that occurred many years before they came to study in the US. They recounted memories of martial law and the sting of tear gas, of relatives disappeared, of friends, teachers, and neighbors imprisoned and tortured. Farid, a former ISA member now based in New York City, recalled a recurring scene from his childhood in Tehran: “We would see the tanks, we would see the soldiers in the streets. These were all in front of my eyes, and then the question, why are they doing that? Why are they there?” These formative experiences, and the troubling questions they raised affected how individuals reacted when they came across subversive ideas, texts, and organizations—whether in Iran or in diaspora. The recollections of some former ISA members evoked even earlier moments of Iranian opposition to autocracy, charting a subterranean leftist genealogy that reaches back through generations of repression and resistance. During the first half of the twentieth century, Iran was a nexus point for the transnational circulation of radical ideologies and movements, including the formation of Asia’s first communist party among Iranian migrant workers in the oil fields of Baku in 1920. Both the persistence of visceral memories of state violence *and* affective attachments to earlier moments in the modern Iranian freedom struggle illustrate how the making of revolutionary subjects unfolds over time through a complex entanglement of the intimate, the historical, and the geopolitical.

The desire for national liberation among Iranian students challenged the hierarchies of class, as thousands of middle- and upper-class Iranian students in the US became concerned with the liberation of the vast majority of poor Iranians back home. Members of the ISA were affectively attached to a broad yet powerful notion of “the Iranian people,” which included those left out of the version of progress the US and the Shah were promoting. These attachments to the impoverished and exploited masses proved far more compelling than Western degrees or the promise of individual career advancement. As I discuss in chapter 5, this class rebellion included a rejection of bourgeois forms of femininity associated with a Westernizing dictatorship and made possible new gender roles for women within the student movement. Revolutionary affects, including the desire for equality and belonging in an alienating and unjust world, facilitated the transformation of thousands of Iranian students into revolutionaries.

Affects of Solidarity

In the course of my research, I found that former ISA members had not only engaged in actions geared toward overthrowing the Shah, but also participated in a wide range of other movements. This is how Jalil Mostashari, a former ISA member at Michigan State in the mid-1960s, described his activities: “The Black struggle was a part of the total international struggle for me. It was not only them. Sometimes the UAW [United Auto Workers] needed people on their picket line in Detroit. When Arab students had an action, we would participate in it. When we had an action, they would participate in it. Eritreans would come with us. Afghan students would come with us. Some people from Bengal—they were leftists—they would come with us.”²⁷

When I asked him what motivated this level of commitment to so many different causes, he looked me in the eyes, held my gaze, and spoke with the gravity of someone expressing a sacred truth: “If you want people to sympathize with you, you have to sympathize with them at the time of their need. You cannot just say things; you’ve got to believe it, really, in your heart. You have to have this flame within you that can warm others. You cannot say it with your tongue; it doesn’t move anybody.” This book takes its title from Jalil’s words and from the description of the relationship between affective energy and political action embedded within it. To “believe” something “really, in your heart” describes an affective state that blurs the mind/body divide structuring Western enlightenment notions of subjectivity. To have “this flame within” is to embody a politics of solidarity as animating energy that burns, warms, and moves people toward others with whom they sense something shared.

I developed the concept “affects of solidarity” to describe embodied attachments to the liberation of others. Affects of solidarity are generated when revolutionary affects, or desires for revolution, circulate and converge across different populations and movements. It is important here to distinguish between affects of solidarity and emotions like pity or guilt that might accompany altruism or charity. Solidarity enables people who do not occupy the same position in a global or national hierarchy of power to imagine themselves as sharing something in common—a common enemy perhaps, or a common stance against injustice, or a common vision of the future. David Featherstone defines solidarity “as a relation forged through political struggle which seeks to challenge forms of oppression.”²⁸ Solidarity, he explains, is transformative and relational, proceeding across the uneven terrain of race, gender, nation, and empire, bringing new political possibilities

into being.²⁹ Solidarity does not automatically eradicate or transcend those divisions and can sometimes reproduce them, but it can also reroute our affiliations and attachments away from dominant hierarchies and toward new forms of connection.

By paying attention to affects of solidarity we can better understand how the power of solidarity “from below” emerges. If affect refers to our ability to be affected or changed by the world, and also our ability to effect change, then the question becomes: how and under what conditions is affect mobilized toward acts of solidarity? There may be a material basis for different groups of people coming to identify with one another and act collectively, such as a common interest in fighting a company that pollutes the environment and busts unions (for example, the “Teamsters and Turtles” coalition of union members and environmentalists that opposed NAFTA). But this kind of coincidence of immediate, material interests is not always present or necessary for solidarity to occur. There was no immediate, material interest at stake when Iranian students marched with their American counterparts against the US war in Vietnam as they were not in danger of being drafted. I argue that the affective states mobilized and generated through acts of solidarity have the power to redefine the very notion of “interests,” to change how we perceive our needs, desires, and commonalities. Affects of solidarity encompass a range of sensations and orientations toward the Other that are compelling precisely because they facilitate a new feeling of mutuality, connection, and collective power. This is how affective attachments to the well-being of others become rewarding and transformative, even among people who may previously have understood themselves to hold disparate or conflicting concerns.

The element of mobility that characterizes affect is perhaps most crucial to my formulation. Affects of solidarity accumulate and circulate, building in intensity and picking up new meanings as they move. Affects of solidarity draw people together from widely differing contexts and facilitate joint political action across the boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, language, and nationality. They describe the affective state or mood that made Third World internationalism possible. Iranian student activists in the US were deeply affected by the conditions they encountered in diaspora, by the rebellions underway on and off college campuses. Depending on where they landed, ISA members had the opportunity to participate in mass movements against racism and war. Their activities constitute a missing piece of Afro-Asian studies historiography, bringing West Asian solidarity with African American and African liberation into focus. Like their American

activist peers, Iranian students were influenced and inspired by the proliferation of Third World anticolonial movements and searched among them for models to adapt and follow. In turn, ISA members contributed to the shared feelings of militancy and solidarity among a larger leftist milieu by exposing the hidden brutalities of the alliance between the US and the Shah, and, along with Arab and Arab American students, by placing West Asia and North Africa on the map of activist affiliation and concern. In this way, they deepened and expanded an internationalist political culture that thrived by making connections between domestic and imperial forms of subjugation and by linking vastly different sites of resistance. These connections were sometimes material—as when the Shah was funneling weapons to suppress anticolonial struggles in Southern Africa—and always affective.

Among the most active Iranian students, Third World Marxism became the primary interpretive lens for their experiences in Iran and in the US. Even though the ISA was imagined as a coalition representing the interests of all Iranian foreign students, by the late 1960s many leading ISA activists were also affiliated with a handful of underground leftist parties. These parties followed various interpretations of Marxism-Leninism and Maoism. Some supported guerilla struggle while others looked to rural peasant movements or to the urban working class as the agent of change. By 1975, the competing influences of these parties, and disagreements among them, would cause the ISA to split. Despite this fragmentation, the Iranian anti-Shah student opposition would continue to grow and to deepen its connections with other revolutionary movements.³⁰ The fact that the ISA came to be dominated by Third World Marxism created a shared ideological framework with the rest of the US Third World Left, facilitating what Cynthia Young has called the “multiple translations and substitutions” necessary to “close the gaps between First and Third World subjects.”³¹ My argument is that analogies between the conditions faced by inhabitants of racialized urban space in the US and those of the colonial countryside, between Black and Brown Americans and the peasantries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, were lived and felt as affects of solidarity, and that this force allowed disparities and inconsistencies to recede in the construction of a deeply rewarding revolutionary imaginary.

However, even as affects of solidarity crossed national, racial, and other sites of difference, they did not necessarily transcend them. In the 1960s and 1970s, affects of solidarity did not attach equally to all liberation movements. Notably, feminist and gay liberation movements were not common areas of affiliation and solidarity for the Third World Marxist Left, including

for the ISA. Rather than idealizing solidarity, this study explores these gaps and contradictions in order to better understand how affects of solidarity attach to some struggles and not others. I thus contribute to queer and feminist interventions into Afro-Asian studies by exploring how affective dissonance within movements became a launching point for challenges to hetero-patriarchal ideas and forms of organizing.³²

Crucially, as my research shows, affects of solidarity do not necessarily stem from the same experiences of oppression; Iranian foreign students like Jalil were not targeted by racism the way that African Americans were, for example, and yet they could still identify with and support “the Black struggle.” That “flame within” could emanate from vastly different encounters with injustice and still attract people to the same meetings and demonstrations. When it came to the divisions between men and women, however, solidarity was often conditional upon adherence to masculinist definitions of proper revolutionary activity. These were the conditions that gave rise to Third World and women-of-color feminism.³³ Below I apply my affective theory of revolutionary subjectivity to analyze the structures of feeling that facilitated, and impinged upon, solidarity between women and men in the ISA.

Affect, Gender, and Feminist Critique

The terms of belonging for women and men in the ISA reflected a set of feelings about the particular relationship between class, gender, and sexuality produced in the context of Western intervention in Iran. Class, gender, and sexuality, while not the only markers of difference among ISA members, emerged in my research as the most persistent challenges to building a united movement. New forms of revolutionary subjectivity both transgressed and reinforced the boundaries of traditional gender roles and class divisions. In the 1960s, as the first generation of Iranian feminist scholars of modern Iran have shown, the Shah co-opted the discourse, and even some of the demands, of Iranian feminists and imposed a top-down agenda that rested on thoroughly gendered notions of modernization.³⁴ The link between femininity and modernization crystalized in the figure of the Westernized bourgeois woman, adorned with a miniskirt and makeup. For opposition movements, religious and secular, this figure fused femininity, upper-class status, and imperial intervention into the quintessential symbol of the corruption and degradation of Iranian society under the Shah.³⁵ Anti-Shah forces from across the political spectrum railed against this figure and offered ways for

women to regain their self-respect via adherence to particular revolutionary ideologies and gendered forms of participation in revolutionary activity. For the Marxist Left, women could never really be free until the larger socioeconomic system was transformed. Yet, within Marxist organizations, as Iranian feminist scholars have discussed, women's experiences were highly contradictory. On the one hand, becoming part of a clandestine movement for human liberation was exciting and empowering, especially when compared with life as a bourgeois housewife valued only for her sex appeal and reproductive capacity.³⁶ On the other hand, the Left remained male-dominated in leadership and outlook, invested in a hierarchical approach to liberation that subordinated the "woman question" to the anti-imperialist struggle.³⁷

Hostile feelings toward the Westernized femininity promoted under the Shah's reign traveled with Iranian students to the US and fueled attachments to anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist ideals. Adherence to these ideals was also the manner in which mostly upper-class student activists tried to show that they had truly sided with the "toiling masses"—a population, the ISA routinely pointed out, which included millions of women. These women performed backbreaking labor in fields and dusty workshops and did not wear miniskirts or makeup. The exploited masses of women thus served as a noble foil to the "West-toxified" woman complicit with the Shah's regime. Feelings about class and gender were inextricably linked to feelings about the intertwining of imperialism and dictatorship, and were embedded within the revolutionary affects mobilized by the ISA in diaspora. Class and gender differences within the organization were mediated through affective attachments to new forms of revolutionary subjectivity, which were supposed to make those differences less visible and, therefore, less threatening to the unity of the movement. Through an ideology of "gender sameness," men and women repeated the notion that they were "the same," meaning already equal. Their "sameness" was supposedly achieved by mutual dedication to and participation in the cause, and through a tacit, if routinely broken, agreement that "serious" revolutionaries had no time or interest in the distractions of sexual desire and intimacy. Yet in practice, the ideology of gender sameness manifested as what Parvin Paidar has called "masculinization": for the good of the revolution, women would cut their hair short and wear clothing that hid the shape of their bodies.³⁸ At no point were men supposed to change the way they looked or acted to become more like women. Many women felt uncomfortable about such double standards, including those surrounding the sexual practices of men versus women, but willingly participated anyway. My research illuminates the affective investments women had in these

gendered forms of revolutionary subject-making, which were not unique to the Iranian context.

Memories of gender sameness, masculinization, and efforts to side with the oppressed classes are loaded with contradictory sensations, affective dissonances that index deeply gendered states of being. Affects, to borrow Flatley's words, "come into being only *through* categories of class and gender" because these social formations "are woven into our emotional lives in the most fundamental way."³⁹ We must speak, then, of the intersectional character of revolutionary affects— affective experiences of state repression and resistance in Iran—which reside in bodies continuously impacted by patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, and class divisions.⁴⁰ While the men and women I interviewed recalled the joy that came from feeling part of a revolutionary family, estrangement, surprise, dismay, and regret toward the past often emerged as well, and sometimes in the course of a single memory. These "negative" feelings are certainly products of hindsight, inextricable from the events and experiences of the past forty years, and yet these feelings also reference affective states of ambivalence, tension, and discomfort that existed at the time. Sometimes these feelings drove efforts toward institutional and cultural change within the ISA and the Iranian Left. More frequently, they remained in an inchoate and unnamed affective register until conditions changed and they became available as sources of feminist critique and mobilization. As I argue in chapter 6, this is what happened in Tehran in March 1979, when a revolutionary women's uprising seemed to appear out of nowhere, catching all established parties off guard.

Given the demonization of Iranian society and culture as particularly oppressive to women, and the weaponization of this discourse by Western imperial countries, I have found it necessary and productive to adopt a relational approach that makes visible similarities between the gender and sexual politics of the Iranian internationalist Left and other diasporic and anticolonial revolutionary movements. In the United States, Iranian students were active alongside many non-Iranian movements that were also grappling with gender, sexual, and class divisions within their ranks. Iranian leftists were far from alone in reproducing existing hierarchies, demanding gendered forms of sacrifice in the name of unity and gendered forms of unity in the face of state repression. For the Third Worldist Left of the 1960s and 1970s, revolutionary affects attached to ideas, leaders, and organizations that represented the most compelling responses to oppressive conditions at the time. Across all racial, ethnic, and national groups, those responses were often bound up with the oppressions they sought to overcome, even as they offered animating

visions of another possible world. Placing the gender and sexual politics of the ISA within this broader context undermines the reductionist, ahistorical blaming of Muslim culture as the source of gender and sexual oppression in Iran and on the Iranian Left. My research shows that the revolutionary affects of avowedly secular ISA members were embedded within social formations (gender, sexuality, and class) that were reconfigured at the intersection of imperialism, dictatorship, and diaspora. My argument is that this analysis of the relationship between affect and political processes must impact how we study the Iranian diaspora before and after 1979.

An Intersectional Approach to Iranian Diaspora Studies

The changing dynamics of US imperialism and dictatorship in Iran have been, since the US replaced Britain as the dominant imperial power in the middle of the twentieth century, the driving force behind the migration of Iranians abroad—whether as foreign students or as exiles, immigrants, and asylees—and the central problematic around which Iranian diasporic identity, culture, and politics have been organized in the US. Imperialism and dictatorship both stand in the way of freedom and justice for ordinary Iranian people, who might yet wish for a future that is neither a US neo-colony nor an Islamic republic. This is true whether US empire and dictatorship are in alignment, as they generally were during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, which is the focus of the current study, or whether these power structures are locked in a bitter and highly unequal conflict, as are the US and Iran today.

With so much emphasis generally, and understandably, placed on the rupture of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, many of the continuities between the pre- and postrevolutionary periods have been overlooked in ways that may distort our understanding of diasporic consciousness and political possibility. *This Flame Within* offers an approach that views major geopolitical shifts in US-Iran relations not so much as a before and after, but as different iterations of a crisis brought on by the incompatibility between “US interests” and popular democracy. I understand “US interests” as the mandate to intervene militarily, economically, and/or politically anywhere in the world to maintain the profitability and competitive edge of US capitalism and to suppress any entity considered threatening or even slightly unfavorable to this agenda. It is this agenda that has been so sympathetic to dictatorships around the world, including that of Mohammad Reza Shah, who was empowered to crush all opposition. And it is in this context that anticolonial opposition forces come

to treat internal dissent as a vulnerability, as a weakness to be stamped out in the face of the continuous threat of state repression and foreign domination. Whether US interests were in alignment with the goals of the Iranian state or not, it was the interactions between state repression and imperial aggression that created the conditions for Iranian migration to the United States from the 1950s through to our current moment.

This integrated and dynamic way of framing a longer historical arc of displacement builds on over three decades of scholarship constituting the still-emerging interdisciplinary field of Iranian diaspora studies. In their introduction to a special journal issue on the topic, Babak Elahi and Persis M. Karim traced the shift from the use of terms like *exile*, *refugee*, and *immigrant* to the term *diaspora* within literary and sociological scholarship on Iranian populations abroad. They argue that the use of diaspora allows for investigations of Iranian experiences outside Iran that are organized not only in relation to Iran, but also in “mutually transformative” relationship to various host countries *and* to communities of Iranians within them.⁴¹ Elahi and Karim carve out space for the study of the Iranian diaspora not primarily as a subset of Iranian studies, but as a field that “situates Iran and Iranian culture in the continuum of more global diasporic consciousness.”⁴² My emphasis on an intersectional approach to Iranian diaspora studies is a provocation to develop this nascent field further precisely by engaging analyses drawn from the global context of multiple diasporic experiences.⁴³ These include systemic critiques of capitalism, empire, racial formation, and the politics of gender and sexuality produced by scholars of Black and Third World feminisms, Asian American studies, Arab American studies, and queer-of-color diasporic critique. One of the most important insights I draw from these bodies of work is the need to expose and resist the hierarchical binary between West and East that creates conditions in which the diasporic racialized subject must either assimilate to the higher civilizational order or be rendered abject/threatening. To reject this logic in relation to the Iranian diaspora means to tackle directly the geopolitical polarization between the US and Iran that exerts massive pressure on our diasporic culture, politics, and subjectivity.

An intersectional approach to the Iranian diaspora would reject the notion, so common among the generation of Iranians who came to the US in the immediate aftermath of the 1979 revolution, that Iran has been “lost” to a uniquely oppressive Islamist state and that the US constitutes its polar opposite—a space of exceptional freedom.⁴⁴ Aside from the obvious Orientalism inscribed in this view, it removes the Islamic Republic from the

political battles which brought it into being and also exempts it from the larger context of postcolonial dictatorships across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.⁴⁵ The corresponding construction of the US as “free” disregards the structural brutality of settler colonialism, white supremacy, poverty, mass incarceration, and the rampant gender and sexual violence embedded in every sector of US society. Furthermore, this dominant “polar opposites” paradigm cannot account for the complicated role of US empire in the rise of undemocratic postcolonial governments, whether formed with US support or in reaction to US imperial power.

At the same time, an intersectional Iranian diaspora studies framework departs from a still potent strain of anti-imperialism, which insists the job of Iranians in the US is only to denounce US aggression and not to discuss the domestic repression that shapes Iranian society. This position makes transnational solidarity with Iranians living in Iran impossible, for it refuses to respond to popular opposition to and alienation from the Iranian government and offers no support to grassroots activists persecuted for contesting policies that are anathema to even the most broadly defined progressive agenda.⁴⁶ Furthermore, it aligns the Left in the US with the Iranian government, conceding the political terrain of concern for repression in Iran either to liberal human rights advocates—who often take for granted the benevolence of US influence abroad—or to pro-war media outlets and politicians.⁴⁷ The leftist diasporic mandate to only criticize “our own government,” meaning the US government, is driven by the legitimate fear that saying anything negative about Iranian society can and will be used as a justification for sanctions, war, and US-sponsored “regime change.”

This amounts to a transnational version of an argument that has long circulated among oppressed and targeted groups: that we must not air our “dirty laundry” in front of those who would seize on any excuse to do us harm. Women-of-color feminists have had to engage with this argument as a condition of possibility for their very existence.⁴⁸ From the 1977 statement of the Combahee River Collective, to anthologies like *This Bridge Called My Back* and *Colonize This!*, to the work of Arab and Arab American feminists like Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Naber, women-of-color feminists in the US have responded to the “dirty laundry” debate by arguing that our movements against racism, economic exploitation, and imperialism will become stronger and more effective if we also oppose gender and sexual oppression.⁴⁹ Even more than this, women-of-color and Third World feminists have demonstrated that racism, capitalism, and empire mobilize and depend on particular constructions of gender and sexual difference in order