**Anthropological Reflections on the Globalization of Solidarity: The 2022 Mahsa Amini and 2020 George Floyd Protests**

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This essay explores the ethics of the wide expansion in scale and speed of global solidarity with the 2022 protests in Iran following the murder of Mahsa Amini as well as the 2020 protests in the United States following the murder of George Floyd. We ask whether anthropology, the discipline devoted to understanding and dealing with historical and cultural differences, can provide us with critical purchase on the discourse made when protests go beyond their locality and travel globally. Global solidarity against inequalities and oppressions in any forms are valuable and important. Yet, we contend that those could suffer from a lack of context or irrelevance to the issue at the heart, when they do not take the task of the contextualization their subject of solidarity seriously. Understanding the 2022 Iranian protests, we argue, needs to be rooted in Iranian historical discussions directed against the Iranian’s regime and its brutality. Similarly, understanding the 2020 U.S. protests against the murder of George Floyd requires deeper engagements with a balance of Afrofuturist and Afropessimist scholarship as well as with a discourse about decolonality. Examining these two cases, reveals the possible bungling or misleading activism that can happen when activists assume solidarity that is disconnected from the heart of the issue for which they are protesting or acting against. **‘Woman, Life, Freedom’: Contextualizing the 2022 Protests in Iran**

The 2022 protests within Iran – identified by its central slogan of ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ – began after the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022, who was detained in Iran for wearing an “improper hijab”, and died in police custody. According to Iran Human Rights (IHR), the regime’s response to these protests resulted in the killing of more than 500 people, the injury of several hundred, and the detention of more than 20,000 people.

These protests, however, not only swiftly gripped the nation with reports of internal demonstrations in all of Iran’s major cities and many small towns, but they also spread to the West, where women from London to New York City have lopped off their locks to show solidarity. Undoubtedly, the scale and speed at which these global protests unfolded in the West are impressive. However, the discourse adopted in some of these protests raises some concerns. While participating in some of these protests, we could not help but to notice that there are some differences between these global solidarity demonstrations’ discourses and the Iranian people’s discourse who were protesting simultaneously in Iran.

For example, as part of a global rally for solidarity with Iranian women, at Cambridge University where we both study and live, different student-led and non-students-led protests in solidarity with the Iranian people have been happening at least three times a week. Participating in some of the protests, we noticed one prominent thing, which is the generality and the lack of specificity of the chants with which the demonstrations were calling.

We observed that most of them revolved around “my body is my choice,” a slogan usually used in the context of bodily autonomy and abortion. This slogan is generally used by Western feminists to defend an individual’s right of self-determination over women’s bodies for sexual, marriage, and reproductive choices and rights. In the Cambridge protest we participating in, taking up the mantra “my body is my choice” to show their support and solidarity with the women of Iran was jarring to us. While Iranian women were calling out specific slogans against the regime, slogans that include “Free Iran,” “Woman, Life, Freedom,” “I am Mahsa Amini,” women in the Cambridge were using a more universal language, accompanied by slogans such as “my body is my choice”, and centered on issues such as autonomy, body, and individual choice. Doing so, we argue, these protests turn into a general and universal one, a protest that could have taken place today and any other day, regardless to what is happening in Iran.

We wonder: What are the implications of such a universal discourse? What are the advantages and the drawbacks of such discourses adopted sometimes in global solidarity protests? What might happen when a global solidarity is being indifferent to the historical contextualization and to the particular social and political contexts in which their subject of solidarity is embedded in? Images of solidarity are blessed, but does turning the particular discourse in Iran into a universal one focusing on gender and women in general contributes to the Iranian struggle? Our understanding is that the Iranian gender struggle has different characteristics in Iran compared to the West. Therefore, we argue that creating a fluidity between the two struggles might harm the Iranian struggle, making it irrelevant, by converting it into a universal one.

**The Aftermath of U.S. Protests against the Murder of George Floyd**

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**Anthropological Reflections: Historical Contextualization and Cultural Relativism**

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