



Exiled Memories: Stories of Iranian Diaspora

Zohreh Sullivan

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"I feel I am the wandering Jew who has no place to which she belongs. I thought I could settle down, but can't imagine staying. Whenever I bought a bar of soap and two came in the package, I thought there would be no need to buy a package of two because I would never last through the second. Why? Because I knew I was returning to Iran - tomorrow. So too, I would buy the smallest size toothpastes and jars of oil. Putting down roots here is an impossibility." These are the words of one Iranian emigre, driven from Tehran by the revolution of 1979. They are echoed time and again in this powerful portrayal of loss and survival. Impelled by these words and her own concerns about nationality and identity, Zohreh Sullivan has gathered together here the voices of sixty exiles and emigres. They come from various ethnic and religious backgrounds and range in age from thirteen to eighty-eight. Although most are from the middle class, they work in a variety of occupations in the United States. But whatever their differences, here they are all engaged in remembering the past, producing a discourse about their lives, and negotiating the troubled transitions from one culture to another.

Unlike many other Iranian oral history projects, "Exiled Memories" looks at the reconstruction of memory and identity through diasporic narratives, through a focus on the Americas rather than on Iran. The narratives included here reveal the complex ways in which events and places transform identities, how overnight radicals become conservatives, friends become enemies, the strong become weak. Indeed, the narratives themselves serve this function - serving to transfer or transform power and establish credibility. They reveal a diverse group of people in the process of knitting the story of themselves with the story of the collective after it has been torn apart. Author note: Zohreh T. Sullivan is Professor of English at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She is the author of "Narratives of Empire: The Fictions of Rudyard Kipling" and editor of the Norton edition of "Kipling's Kim".

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