

**SPEAKER 1:** I take with me a great sense of family. The family is so important in that part of the world. There are large families. Extended families are often together. There's a sense of everyone participating in raising the children.

There's a great sense of art that is very appreciated there. Their poets are very appreciated, their artists, mosaic, tile makers, anything that is remotely related to art. And I take that with me and I know that that's been a very strong influence on my writing.

There's also a wonderful sense of music and very lively. For instance, when we have a party, everybody dance till 4:00 in the morning. And everyone's very merry and the food is exquisite. There's feasts at these parties. And Iranians in general, seem to me, very passionate people, very feeling and deeply moved people.

**SPEAKER 2:** You also write, though, about the persecution that many women face. Why are so many women mistreated?

**SPEAKER:** I think in Iran, it's less than in many countries. And I think that things have gotten better. There was a very painful time in our history when just after the revolution in the late '70s, times were very difficult. There was a lot of identity searching on the parts of those in charge of the country.

For the most part, from what I've seen, there are still many venues for women. There are women doctors, women lawyers, women judges. However, these incidents still occur and it depends on the time. And the history sometimes have been worse, sometimes have been better. So I'm hoping that things are better.

And I think it's an issue of power, as it always is, even in our own country when we see women persecuted, which we do. Domestic violence, and rapes and other various crimes that we have here, it is an issue of power.

**SPEAKER 2:** Will you read your poem to the house?

**SPEAKER 1:** Sure. "I should have emptied my colander of rice into their smiling eyes. Rice so fresh that salt water steamed and dripped on my sandaled toes. Pasdars' eyes lingered on little girls when they passed, pretending not to watch from shadows. A screech and halt and they dragged, shrouded women under by the necks of their scarves, stuffed in a pasdar's car and branded whores because of one button missing on a coat, shoved under the roof like cargo one by one, some struggling, some passive, all hauled to the station to stand before a judge who decided the proper exchange of coins for whippings.

My mother unknotted her scarf, pulled the burning cigarette from her smoking lips and pressed my fingers around the cracked lipstick marks of its moist tan rim, whispering, you want to try it, try it."

**SPEAKER 2:** What is a pasdar?

**SPEAKER 1:** Pasdar is a revolutionary guard. They were installed just after the revolution to keep order. And they were told to keep an eye that laws were followed, the new laws. One of the new laws was that all women must be covered in the traditional Islamic dress.

So a big change I noticed as a child was on the street where my grandparents lived, where we often stayed, there were now pasdars lining the streets. And my aunt lived next door and so I'd often be running back and forth between the two houses. And they would be there.

**SPEAKER 2:** And the punishment was really that severe if you had a button missing or anything like that?

**SPEAKER 1:** It depended on who you ran into. It's just like anywhere else. Some people would turn a blind eye and some would not.

I know that for my age at that time, I didn't need to wear anything. I was under the age of nine. But for instance, my mother would be required to wear something if she were running back and forth between the houses.

**SPEAKER 2:** In your writing, though, you're outraged about the way women are treated.

**SPEAKER 1:** Yes.

**SPEAKER 2:** What do you think can be done about it?

**SPEAKER 1:** I know that many women do try. There are groups of women who are dedicated to educating the public about incidents against women. I know that-- in fact, I wrote a poem about one particular demonstration where women, they all collected, and went into the town square and just took off their chadors and their hijabs, which is the scarf. And of course, they were rounded up, and taken away and silenced, but they do get attention.

I believe it was after that particular demonstration that they were permitted to wear colored scarves. So change happens, but very slowly. And I would say that that's the best way the change can happen is slowly.

If anyone is forced to do anything too quickly that they're not accustomed to, there is always going to be a backlash. And my guess is that things will change and they will change slowly. And eventually, my hope is that Iran will be a comfortable place to live for everyone.

**SPEAKER 2:** How do you think that your poems will be received?

**SPEAKER 1:** I think they'll be received well. I've had some very good experiences. The last few places that I've read, many people have been very compassionate. Of course, they're pained about our own country and as am I.

However, I've really noticed a lot of interest and openness into hearing, yes, we are all people. We should focus on what we have in common. We should try to understand each other and not erase the difference.

I think that's a big mistake is when you start saying, well, everybody is the same. And that's not at all what I'm saying and I don't think anyone should think that. I think it's at the point when we understand that we're all different from each other and that that's fine.

And then we can start building bridges and start saying, OK, you're different from me. What are you like? Let me understand you. And then we can really communicate.

**SPEAKER 2:** Do you feel American at this point or do you feel multinational?

**SPEAKER 1:** It's a good question. I've never felt more American in my life than after the attacks. And I don't know why that is. I think there was a wave of feeling very united here and in sharing each other's grief and pain.

I've always, most of my life, felt multinational, international because I've really spent an equal amount of time in the US and in the other countries I'm from. And I speak three languages and I'm really divided right through. But at this point, I feel mostly American. And I think it's because I feel this connection to the people that I haven't felt before. And I think that's why I also feel this connection to my Middle Eastern family and friends.

And my desire-- I hate to see myself ripped in half. And I know there are others like me, many others. And my desire is to try to sew that back together and tell all Americans that we're all Americans, even if we're from various parts of the world. And we all are.