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**University of Kurdistan  
Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature  
Department of English Language and Literature**

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English  
Literature

**Title:**  
**Trauma, Translation, and Memory in Yasmin Crowther's *The Saffron Kitchen* and Nahid Rachlin's *Persian Girls***

**By:**  
**Roonak Shakiba**

**Supervisor:**  
**Dr. Cyrus Amiri**

**September 2022**

**In the Name of God**





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The above thesis was evaluated and approved by the following members of the thesis committee with mark  
19.5 and Excellent quality on Oct 20th, 2015.

Position	Title and Name	Signature
1. Supervisor:	Assoc. Prof. Dr. Cyrus Amiri	
2. Advisor:	Prof. -	
3. External Examiner:	Assist. Prof. Vahid Gholami	
4. Internal Examiner:	Assist. Prof. Vali Gholami	

Head of Department:



Faculty Graduate Coordinator:



## **Trauma, Translation, and Memory in Yasmin Crowther's *The Saffron Kitchen* and Nahid Rachlin's *Persian Girls***

### **Abstract**

The aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks led to a dramatic increase in memoir writing in Iranian diasporic literature. In response to the events that followed the attacks, a group of female writers began working on memoir and fiction in an effort to give voice to the voiceless and lay the foundation for the shared global dissemination of untold stories. It was during this time that Yasmin Crowther's *The Saffron Kitchen* and Nahid Rachlin's *Persian Girls* were written. With their main focus on past traumatic events, both narratives emphasize the conflicts women have faced under male-dominated systems and societies in Iran, thereby criticizing such systems and providing accurate life accounts based on their authors' lived experiences. The works in question were examined through the lens of trauma and memory theories in order to determine the functions and significance of the traumas in their narrative. Additionally, Rebecca L. Walkowitz's concept of born translated texts was used to examine the readership and publication processes of Rachlin's memoir and Crowther's novel. To address issues of translation, trauma, and memory, a close textual analysis of the two said works was provided. The research findings showed that Rachlin and Crowther depict traumatic past events in order to reflect serious women's issues in Iran and use storytelling and narrative as a form of therapy while also raising awareness. To this end, they decide that their books should be translated from the inception in order to capture the interest and appeal of a larger international audience.

**Keywords:** *Persian Girls*, *The Saffron Kitchen*, Nahid Rachlin, Yasmin Crowther, Born Translated, Trauma, Memory, Translation, Iranian Diaspora

## Table of Contents

<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1. General Overview .....	1
1.2. Statement of the Problem .....	2
1.3. Theoretical Framework .....	3
1.4. Literature Review .....	4
1.5. Significance of the Study .....	8
1.6. Objectives of the Study .....	9
1.7. Research Questions .....	9
1.8. Methodology .....	10
<b>Chapter Two: Theoretical Background to the Study of Born Translated and Diasporic Texts</b> .....	<b>11</b>
2.1. Walkowitz and Born Translated Novels .....	12
2.2. Iranian Diasporic Novels: Unveiling the Forbidden World ....	13
2.3. Rachlin’s Memoir: Echoes from the Voiceless.....	17
2.4. Reading Iranian Novels in the US: Two Authors in Search of a Reader.....	25
2.5. Cultural and Linguistic Translation in Rachlin’s <i>Persian Girls</i> and Crowther’s <i>The Saffron Kitchen</i> .....	29
<b>Chapter Three: Trauma and Memory in The Saffron Kitchen and Persian Girls</b> .....	<b>36</b>
3.1. Trauma and Memory: Long Day’s Journey into Hostland .....	37
3.2. Trauma: A Driving Force for Diasporic Narratives .....	40
3.3. Silence of the Girls: The Significance of Memory and Memoir in <i>Persian Girls</i> .....	42
3.4. One Flew over the Captive’s Nest: Virginity Test in <i>The Saffron Kitchen</i> .....	46
<b>Chapter Four: Caught between Two Worlds: Double Binds in Diasporic Narratives</b> .....	<b>49</b>
4.1. Double Bind in Diasporic Narratives .....	50
4.2. Who Is Afraid of Furugh Farrukhzad? The Double Bind of Homeland and Hostland .....	51
4.3. How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the US: Double Bind of Familiar/Unfamiliar .....	54
4.4. What Am I Doing in the Middle of the Diaspora? Double Bind of Present and Past .....	57
4.5. Reading Mathew Arnold in Mashhad: Diaspora at Home .....	60

<b>Chapter Five: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>63</b>
5.1. Summary of the Thesis.....	63
5.2. Findings and Implications .....	66
5.3. Suggestions for Further Research .....	67
<b>References.....</b>	<b>70</b>



# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1. General Overview

There has been scores of publications of Iranian diasporic literature recently, especially in light of the events that followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. Iranian and/or Iranian-American female authors have held a preeminent position in this regard, writing from a female perspective, considering women's and gender issues, and making contributions to the literature. Additionally, the popularity of memoir writing has increased over the past ten years, giving women writers in particular a platform to express their opposition to long-standing injustices that have exacerbated their positions due to male-dominated and oppressive systems. Rachlin's *Persian Girls* (2006) and Crowther's *The Saffron Kitchen* (2007) were both written in the said milieu.

The idea of translation becomes more significant when viewed in the context of diaspora. Cultural translation and the idea of born translated texts, as explained by Rebecca L. Walkowitz, are given higher priority when examining diasporic texts than linguistic translation. The idea of translation and how to communicate with readers who speak different languages is a serious issue when considering the global and international readership, so avoiding misunderstanding becomes crucial. According to Walkowitz, novels that are "born translated" are created specifically with the intention of being translated because they are originally written and published with a global audience in mind. They redefine the conventional ideas about authors, readers, and interactions among them. *Persian Girls* and *The Saffron Kitchen* can be examined through the lens of ideas and theories Walkowitz sets forth in her *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (2015).

Concentrating on past experiences, this study investigates the memories of the characters in the selected novels to further analyze their traumas and memories. Nahid Rachlin, an Iranian-American

novelist, and one the authors who has perhaps received the most American publishing, was born in Abadan, Iran. She immigrated to the United States and began her writing career. She published her first novel, *Foreigner*, in 1978, after writing several short stories. Ever since, she has managed to write six novels and short story collections. In 2006, Rachlin published *Persian Girls: A Memoir*. The memoir recounts Nahid's story and how she is detached from her family to be brought up by her childless aunt. She is raised by her aunt Maryam from the time she is an infant, and when she is 9 years old, her father abducts her and takes her back to her biological family, where she forms a close bond with her sister Pari. She grows up in two different environments, and as a result, she experiences different destinies. The memoir also focuses on Pari's life. Pari is forced by her father to marry her wealthy suiter, but Nahid travels to America to further her studies. After learning of Pari's death, which is shrouded in mystery, Nahid returns to Iran to learn the truth about what really happened, what her past was like, and what her future might hold.

Born to an Iranian mother and a British father, Yasmin Crowther grew up in England and studied at Oxford University. Her debut novel, *The Saffron Kitchen*, was released in 2007. The novel is about mothers, daughters, exile, and finding one's roots. The plot revolves around Maryam's life accounts and the tragic life events of her pregnant daughter, Sara. As Saeed, the son of Maryam's late sister, moves in with her and her British husband Edward, she is plagued by memories of the past. Maryam abandons her life in London to return to Mazareh, a remote village in Iran where she grew up and was disowned by her father. Following Sara's miscarriage and Saeed's aborted suicide attempt, Maryam decides to travel to Iran.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

This study aims to explore the memories in Yasmin Crowther's *The Saffron Kitchen* (2007) and Nahid Rachlin's *Persian Girls: A Memoir* (2006) in order to identify the traumas and memories they contain, the roles and functions that these traumas and memories serve, and the significance of translation in the said works. Further analysis of the memories is conducted in order to reveal how the authors employ them to reflect on the characters' traumas, critique critical subjects, and criticize the systems that these traumas are rooted in. Due to their diasporic backgrounds, *Persian Girls* and *The Saffron Kitchen* both contain pivotal elements that are based on memories and traumas. As a

result, this study focuses on memories to clarify how they relate to diasporic novels and what functions traumas and previous experiences have in determining the fates, courses of action, and perceptions of the characters.

This thesis adds to the diasporic literature by taking a stance that sheds light on two important narratives and delves deeply into the cultural issues and injustices that the two aforementioned authors portray. Furthermore, traumatic events leave vivid traces in the memory; as a result, the various theories used in this study can offer a stable framework within which the two novels can be examined, and a small contribution, albeit slight, can be made to the study of the Iranian diaspora. This can advance the study of the Iranian diaspora and provide a stimulating context for the expression of previously unheard authors, stories, and fictions.

### **1.3. Theoretical Framework**

Memory theories propose that meanings inferred from individual sentences in a text or prose are incorporated into a more comprehensive semantic whole. Individuals' prior knowledge and contexts are demonstrated by such meanings. Under such circumstances, people have new experiences with regard to things they have previously learned or remembered. The new information is semantically related to previous experiences. This suggests that individuals' prior knowledge systems about various subjects are integrated with new information, creating an irrevocable synthesis of the two types of knowledge. When individuals try to recall their past knowledge and memories, they make decisions based on the available knowledge, which is supplemented by new information. The following chapters expand on how memories can be used to recall past experiences, reflect on them, and aid in the healing process following trauma.

The term "diaspora" refers to the movement of people away from their homeland. With regard to literature, it refers to works written by authors who live outside their home countries. Furthermore, exile and diaspora literature should be distinguished. Exile is a term used to describe forced migration and the subsequent desire of the exiled to return to their place of origin or homeland. Diaspora, on the other hand, connotes a more neutral or even optimistic outlook. The novels selected for this research represent the Iranian diaspora in this regard. They were written by the Iranians living far away from their homeland, haunted by the memories of Iran.

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## چکیده

ادبیات منتشر شده توسط ایرانیان مقیم خارج شاهد خلق حجم گسترده‌ای از آثار داستانی بخصوص شرح حال بوده است. این روند گسترش در سایه عواقب حملات تروریستی یازده سپتامبر به وجود آمد که به دنبال آن زنان نویسنده ایرانی مجال برای بروز و ظهور خود و روایت داستان‌های درد و رنج تحمیل شده به جامعه زنان ایرانی در عرصه جهانی و با در نظر گرفتن مخاطب بین‌المللی یافتند. *رمان مطبخ زعفرانی* (۲۰۰۷) یاسمین کروتر و شرح حال *دختران ایرانی* (۲۰۰۶) اثر ناهید راچلین ثمره این دوره تاریخی تاثیرگذار هستند. با تمرکز بر حوادث تروماتیک گذشته، هر دو اثر در پی نشان دادن مشکلات زنان ایرانی هستند که در ادوار مختلف تاریخی توسط جامعه مردسالار بر آنان تحمیل گشته است. از این رهیافت، هدف راچلین و کروتر آگاهی‌رسانی در خصوص چنین رنج‌هایی و در نتیجه ارائه تصویری واقع‌بینانه‌تر از جامعه ایرانی به دور از غرض‌ورزی‌ها و تبلیغات جانبدارانه رسانه‌های غربی می‌باشد. آثار ذکر شده از دریچه نظریات مختلف حافظه و همچنین تروما بررسی شدند تا نقش و کارکرد آنها در روایت‌های کروتر و راچلین مشخص گردد. همچنین با هدف بررسی روابط روایت‌پردازی، نشر و خوانندگان بین‌المللی، از نظریات ربکا والکوویتز در خصوص آثار «زاییده ترجمه» استفاده شد. جهت بررسی تروما، ترجمه و حافظه در *مطبخ زعفرانی* و *دختران ایرانی* از روش ژرف‌خوانی بهره گرفته شد تا مثال‌های عینی پیش روی خوانندگان قرار گیرد. نتایج حاکی از این بود که با به‌کارگیری حافظه، کروتر و راچلین روایت‌گر داستان‌های رنج و غم زنان ایرانی هستند که از طریق حوادث تروماتیک گذشته نشان داده شده‌اند، و در این راستا از روایت به عنوان مرهمی برای تروما استفاده می‌کنند. از این منظر، هر دو نویسنده آثار خود را زاییده ترجمه قلمداد می‌کنند تا از این طریق خوانندگان بین‌المللی بیشتری را با خود همراه کنند و روایت معتبرتری از ایران و زنان ایرانی ارائه دهند.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** *دختران ایرانی*، *مطبخ زعفرانی*، ناهید راچلین، یاسمین کروتر، زاییده ترجمه،

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پایان نامه‌ی ارائه شده به عنوان بخشی از فعالیت‌های تحصیلی لازم جهت اخذ درجه‌ی کارشناسی ارشد (MA) در رشته‌ی زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی

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در تاریخ ۱۴۰۱/۶/۲۸ توسط کمیته‌ی تخصصی و هیئت داوران زیر مورد بررسی قرار گرفت و با نمره ۱۹.۵ و درجه‌ی عالی به تصویب رسید.

امضاء	مرتبۀ علمی	نام و نام خانوادگی	هیئت داوران
C. Amiri	دانشیار	دکتر سیروس امیری	۱. استاد راهنما
	استادیار	دکتر وحید غلامی	۲. استاد مشاور
	استادیار	دکتر ولی غلامی	۳. استاد داور خارجی
			۴. استاد داور داخلی

مهر و امضاء معاون آموزشی و تحصیلات تکمیلی دانشکده

مهر و امضاء مدیر گروه



Jalil Fathi





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گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی

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ناهید راجلین

پژوهشگر:

روناک شکیبا

استاد راهنما:

دکتر سیروس امیری

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ناهید راجلین

پژوهشگر:

روناک شکیبا

استاد راهنما:

دکتر سیروس امیری

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