

# Funny in farsi immigration



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America has often been called “ The Land of the Free”, where opportunities are like the bounteous fish caught at sea; the catch may be large or small, may come sooner or later. Just as the Gold Rush prompted for many miners to come about, the promising opportunities have prompted for immigrants to pour into in America. Although this chance for a new beginning has vastly beckoned immigrants, there are sacrifices immigrants must make along with newfound chances. Succumbing to social alienation is one of the sacrifices that immigrants must make.

In the memoir, *Funny in Farsi*, by Firoozeh Dumas, and the studies of Djuro J. Vrga on *Differential Associational Involvement of Successive Ethnic Immigrations: An Indicator of Ethno-Religious Factionalism and Alienation of Immigrants*, the depths of social alienation and its influence on immigrants are reviewed. Dumas’ memoir describes the experience of an Iranian growing up in America, whilst Vrga’s study is applied to different sociocultural aspects of life immigrants may encounter.

Cultural differences in morality, ethics, values and political standings all play an substantial role when discussing social alienation. However, more often than so, the Americans are the social alienators while the immigrants are the socially alienated. Though Americans were once so to speak—immigrants, as if Americans are rotten crops from the harvests of heritage, immigrants are the freshly picked fruits of culture and tradition, and a batch of flawless tomatoes obviously stand out amongst the rundown veggies.

Firoozeh Dumas highlights the awkward feelings entailed with social alienation as a theme throughout the memoir. Dumas recalls on several

occasions how uneasy and disturbing it is to be singled out, “ I cringed. Mrs. Sandberg, using a combination of hand gestures, started pointing to the map and saying, “ Iran? Iran? Iran? ” Clearly, Mrs. Sandberg had planned on incorporating us into the day’s lesson. I only wished she had told us that earlier so we could have stayed home. ” (Dumas 6).

Merely because it was a tad unusual to have an Iranian family join the community, Dumas’ teacher decided it would be perfectly normal to use people of a unique heritage for the lesson as though they were show-and-tell puppets when they are after all, people. Daily ‘ encounters’ with other Americans through Dumas’ experiences depict how the lack of geographic knowledge has further contributed to alienation and its bond with immigrants, “ Inevitably, people would ask us where we were from, but our answer didn’t really matter. One mention of our homeland and people would get that uncomfortable smile on their face that says, “ How nice.

Where the heck is that? ” (Dumas 37). Despite the seemingly minor extent of social alienation found in Dumas’ more humorous examples, the isolation of cultures does occasionally meet with a rather unreasonable but inevitable high tide. As the Iranian Revolution took place, the media fed its always starving Americans with the news that Iranians had violently taken a group of Americans hostage, “ For some reason, many Americans began to think that all Iranians, despite outward appearances to the contrary, could at any given moment get angry and take prisoners. (Dumas 39. )

This kind of media induced prejudice created an unsafe social environment for Iranians, ultimately forcing them to lie about their ethnicities, “ My mother

solved the problem by claiming to be from Russia or "Torekey." (Dumas 39. Other than lying about one's ethnicity, finding and keeping a job was nearly impossible during these sorts of times, " Even worse, with the turmoil in Iran, the value of my father's pension dropped to the point of worthlessness. At fifty-eight, my father found himself unemployed and with no prospects.

Nobody wanted to hire an Iranian. "(Dumas 117. ) Coinciding with the urgency of unemployment due to societal prejudices, Djuro J. Vrga's views on the matter are quite blunt, " An immigrant must make two kinds of adjustments: (1) to his own ethnic group, and (2) to the larger ociety. " (Vrga 239. ) Without restriction to the Iranian Revolution, Dumas' experience and Vrga's analogy reveal a now unearthed concept that social alienation is composed of both a minority and a versing majority.

All throughout her life, Firoozeh Dumas was forced to contend to a traditional upbringing contrary to the contemporary surroundings she lived in. These two opposing factors were the necessary ingredients creating the recipe for social alienation, whereas if Dumas were not Iranian and born purely American there would be a missing ingredient. Even in marital matters, Dumas faced the same kind of discouraging social issues, " Francois and I had agreed that we would be married both in the Catholic Church and in a traditional Persian ceremony.

The tough part was finding a Catholic priest who would be willing to officiate at a mixed marriage. " (Dumas 145-146. ) The interracial circumstances binding the wedding like a serpent does its prey, Firoozeh Dumas consistently meets with American shortcomings. In 1977, Washington, D. C. ,

Iranians were invited to welcome the Shah, or Iranian leader, who was scheduled to meet Jimmy Carter, a newly elected president. Unfortunately, anti-Shah demonstrators interfered with the event, " The demonstrators had crossed the road.

They were stampeding toward us waving sticks with nails driven into them. People were screaming and running. Instead of Iranian flags, the lawn was covered with bloody and injured Iranians. My parents and I ran and ran and ran. " (Dumas 113. ) The segregation of Iranians uprooted into a violent and gruesome scene, agreeable with Djuro J. Vrga's perspective on such issues, " The ethnic group is a social system through which its members satisfy many of their social needs and express frustration resulting from unsatisfied expectations and aspirations in the larger society. (Vrga 239. )

The larger society in Dumas' case was composed of the anti-Shah demonstrators, whom successfully destroyed a political event with their distaste for Iranians. Regardless of the many stages social alienation has set, it appears that time has an influential hand when it comes to deciding whether the stage will be a dandy garden, or a gloomy swamp. Funny in Farsi is a memoir that not only shows how growing up an immigrant can be, but how it affects one's social standings in society.

Djuro J. Vrga's Differential Associational Involvement of Successive Ethnic Immigrations: An Indicator of Ethno-Religious Factionalism and Alienation of Immigrants serves only further in accentuating the conditional aspects an immigrant must face. Though social alienation may be a recurring theme in Dumas' memoir, it is truthful and consequently a recurring theme in possibly

any immigrant's life. Humorous indeed, it could be Funny in Any Language; there are no restrictions on where social alienation might pop up, but Dumas provides a great example nonetheless.