**In *The Complete Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, how does the symbol of the veil highlight tension between religiously fundamental Iranian culture and secular western culture?**

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In *The Complete Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, the author narrates her autobiography through a series of graphical anecdotes. From her memories of a religiously fundamental Iranian regime to her experiences in a liberal Austria, Satrapi illustrates the significant chapters of her life frame by frame. One of the most notable transitions in Marjane’s life occurs when, after entering repeated conflict over cultural conformation with her teachers in Iran, her parents send her off to Vienna to pursue a secular education. When Marjane tries to assimilate in Austria, she instead feels like she is drawing a veil over her past – distancing herself from both her Iranian origins and her newfound western identity. In *The Complete Persepolis*, the symbol of the veil highlights physical and ideological differences between religiously fundamental Iranian culture and secular western culture, which perpetuate tension and nonconformance for individuals exposed to both cultures.

The symbol of the veil accentuates contrast between accepted dress and behavioral expectations of fundamentalist and secular cultures, highlighting tensions regarding physical attire between the fundamental east and the liberal west. The first chapter in *The Complete Persepolis* is titled “The Veil”, drawing attention to this symbol and establishing it as an important element throughout the novel first and foremost. Since 1980, in Iran “it became obligatory to wear the veil” (Satrapi 3). In the visual panels on this first page, Marjane and her peers carry cheerless faces, and she states that she dislikes the veil. Nonetheless, the stern expression of their instructor coerce them into doing so anyways, instituting the idea of the veil as mandatory dress. The rationale behind the government’s decision to mandate veil wearing was to encourage modesty among women by concealing their hair (Globalist). Due to strict enforcement by legal authorities, veil wearing quickly found expression as a behavioral norm in Iran. On the other hand, there were no such dress restrictions in secular Austria. Upon arriving in Vienna, Marjane exclaims that it is “cool to go… without a veil” (Satrapi 156). In this panel, Marjane speaks excitedly; however, her friend Shirin simply stares at Marjane with a perplexed expression, unable to empathize with her enthusiasm, as she had spent much of her life in Austria, where attire requirements were never imposed. These contrasting reactions juxtapose the restrictive dress codes in conservative Iran with the greater freedom of attire in the west, demonstrating a gap between the physical expectations of the respective cultures. Oftentimes, such differences have kindled tensions between the differing cultures. For example, when the veil was first imposed, Marjane explains that she “didn’t really know what to think about the veil. Deep down [she] was very religious but [her family was] very modern and avant-garde” (Satrapi 6). In this panel, Marjane is depicted as being physically split between her veiled religious background and her family’s western practices, demonstrating how the veil symbolizes the divisive nature between physical practices in the fundamental east and secular west, which continues to manifest itself throughout the rest of the novel.

The recurring symbol of the veil also highlights ideological tension between the cultures of Iran and the secular west by contrasting differences in beliefs and values. Once, when Marjane’s mother is outside without a veil, she is told by two fundamentalist enforcers of the law that “if [she] didn’t want [physical consequences] to happen, [she] should wear the veil” (Satrapi 74). In fundamentalist Iran, the veil was deeply intertwined with Islamic religious beliefs, with opposition to veil wearing being synonymous with dissent against Islam in the eyes of the revolution. However, in Vienna, nobody cared to wear the veil. To Marjane, veil wearing was symbolic of a confined and traditionalist mindset, while a lack of such dress codes represented the greater freedom of thought in the west. When leaving Vienna and returning to Iran, Marjane laments that “[she] again put on [her] veil… so much for [her] individual and social liberties” (Satrapi 245). The panel in which Marjane makes this statement covers more than half the page, easily framing itself as significant and catching the reader’s attention. Here, Marjane is wearing the veil; her eyes are visibly dejected as she stares at herself in a mirror. The mirror, along with the fact that the reader can see both Marjane’s back and her face in one frame, alludes to a sense of self reflection. Satrapi silently contemplates how her ideologies have transformed since she moved to Vienna, and how the veil serves as a reminder of these changes. Such differences between secular and religious mindsets generate ideological tension between Iranian and western cultures, which is most significant for those who have experienced both cultures firsthand. For example, Satrapi once explains that “the reason why [Marjane and her peers] were so rebellious was that [their] generation had known secular schools…” (Satrapi 98). At that point in time, though Satrapi and her friends had never lived in the west, they had experienced education mimicking western ideals. Due to the presence of this contrast, they experienced ideological tension between fundamental Iranian culture and secular western culture most prominently, with the veil being one of the most significant areas of confrontation between these cultures.

In addition to symbolizing divisive cultural differences, veil wearing also serves as a battleground between religiously fundamental Iranian culture and secular western culture, fully highlighting tensions between those respective cultures. To start, the veil is often characterized as a tool of oppression in *The Complete Persepolis*. Marjane observes that a woman leaving her house asking, “is my veil in place?” no longer asks herself “where is my freedom of speech? Where is my freedom of thought?” (Satrapi 302). Satrapi hints at how the fundamentalist Iranian regime had been utilizing veil policies, justified on the surface with religious ideology, to consolidate power and quell dissenting voices. Similarly, the veil was also a common excuse for criminalizing the public in general. For example, once when Marjane was out on Iranian streets buying tapes, she was stopped by two Guardians of the Revolution – armed enforcers of law – and questioned about her westernized attire. Notably, Marjane was called out for wearing her veil improperly – the Guardians yelled “Lower your scarf, you little whore!” (Satrapi 133). This encounter, among others throughout the novel, demonstrate how the veil was often used as justification to antagonize citizens, thus symbolizing oppression. In response to such tyranny by the regime, much of the Iranian population showed dissent in implicitly rebellious ways. These defiant acts were greatly fueled by western ideals such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion – as aforementioned, Marjane hypothesized that her generation was especially rebellious because they had “known secular schools”. Veil wearing soon became symbolic as a form of expression for such objections. For instance, over time, Satrapi notes that “the way people dressed became an ideological sign… You showed your opposition to the regime by letting a few strands of hair show” (Satrapi 75). Veil wearing quickly became a form of expression for the part of the Iranian population with more secular and western mindsets, allowing them to speak out against the religiously fundamental culture that the Iranian regime championed. The veil was an ideological symbol, with refusal to wear it properly becoming synonymous with objection to the regime and its fundamentalism. Over the years, Marjane observes that Iranian women have been gaining more and more ground regarding veil wearing – they “were winning an eighth of an inch of hair and losing an eighth of an inch of veil [year by year]” (Satrapi 293). Through the words “winning” and “losing”, Satrapi frames veil wearing as a struggle against fundamentalist ideals. In this way, the veil is well characterized as a symbol which highlights the inherent clash between secular western culture and fundamentalist eastern culture.

In conclusion, In *The Complete Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, the symbol of the veil highlights differences between fundamentalist Iranian culture and secular western culture, which manifest themselves in the form of tensions between the respective cultures. At times, veil wearing even becomes an area of confrontation between traditionalist and liberal cultures, fought by those with secular western ideals on the inside but bound to religiously fundamental systems on the outside. Having been part of two distinct cultures, Satrapi experienced the tensions between fundamentalist Iranian culture and secular Viennese culture firsthand. Whenever an individual is positioned between two or more cultures, conflict is almost surely inevitable – it is then rather the individual’s responsibility to alleviate the conflict and express their personality and opinions in ways that are appropriate.

**For peer reviewers, check my:**

* Verb tense (was too lazy to read through & correct at 1am)
* Strength of analysis – everything ties back?
* Focus – do I connect back to topic sentences and thesis?
* Flow – does everything *seem* to make sense?
* Conclusion – uhhhh rewrote it all tonight at 1am, kinda bad (I tried to connect to concepts beyond the text though)

**Bibliography:**

“Iran - Behind the Veil.” The Globalist, 1 June 2001, [www.theglobalist.com/iran-behind-the-veil/](http://www.theglobalist.com/iran-behind-the-veil/).

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