**In *The Complete Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, what tensions between religiously fundamental Iranian culture and secular western culture are highlighted by the symbol of the veil?**

Word Count: 1452

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, she instead feels like she is drawing a veil over her past and distancing herself from both her Iranian origins and her newfound western identity in Austria. In *The Complete Persepolis*, the symbol of the veil highlights physical dress and mental ideology differences between religiously fundamental Iranian culture and secular western culture, which perpetuate tension and nonconformance for individuals exposed to both cultures.

Satrapi uses the symbol of the veil to accentuate contrast between accepted dress and behavioral expectations of fundamentalist and secular cultures, and thus highlight 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 initially as an important element throughout the novel. 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 coerces 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’s facial expression tells of her excitement; however, her friend Shirin simply stares perplexedly at Marjane, unable to empathize with her enthusiasm as she had spent much of her life in Austria, where attire requirements never existed. 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 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, young Marjane is depicted as being physically split between her religious background and her family’s western practices, demonstrating how she had been grappling with conflicting expectations since her early youth. In this drawing, veil-wearing is illustrated as a notable representation of this cultural conflict, as Marjane’s religious side portrays her body fully veiled, while her western side shows all of her hair. Thus, the veil is established as a symbol of the divisive nature between physical practices in the fundamental east and secular west.

Satrapi also utilizes the recurring symbol of the veil to contrast differences in beliefs and values, highlighting ideological tension between the cultures of Iran and the secular west. 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). Satrapi’s portrayal of the enforcers’ words as a thinly veiled threat strengthens the charged connotations surrounding the veil. 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 government (Facing History). However, throughout Marjane’s time in Vienna, nobody cared to wear the veil there. 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, framing its contents as significant and catching the reader’s attention. Here, Marjane is wearing the veil, and her eyes are visibly dejected as she stares at herself in a mirror. The symbol of the mirror alludes to a sense of self-reflection – Marjane 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, Marjane explains that “the reason why [she and her peers] were so rebellious was that [their] generation had known secular schools…” (Satrapi 98). At that point in time, though Marjane 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 considerable ideological tension between fundamental Iranian culture and secular western culture, with the veil being one of the most significant areas of confrontation between these cultures.

By symbolizing divisive cultural differences, Satrapi allows the symbol of the veil to be significant as a battleground between religiously fundamental Iranian culture and secular western culture. 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). With this, 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, Satrapi also portrays the veil as a common excuse for criminalizing the public in general. For example, once when Marjane is out on Iranian streets buying tapes, she is 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, demonstrates 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, Marjane 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). Satrapi portrays how veil-wearing rapidly found expression among the more secular and western-minded portion of the Iranian population, allowing them to silently speak out against the religiously fundamental culture that the Iranian regime championed. The veil was an ideological symbol, and refusing to wear it properly becoming synonymous with objection to the regime and its fundamentalism. Over time, Marjane observes that Iranian women had gained 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 this antithesis between winning and losing, Satrapi frames veil-wearing as a struggle against fundamentalist ideals. In this way, the veil is well depicted 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 – Iranian fundamentalism is driven by Islamic ideals, while western culture is characterized by the core value of freedom. These differences often 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 Austrian culture firsthand – a testification to the divisive and inevitable nature of discrepancies when two cultures collide.

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