

Good book review on the complete persepolis by marjane satrapi

[Parts of the World](#), [Europe](#)



Section 1. Before reading the book by Marjane Satrapi “ Persopolis” I must admit that I knew quite sufficient information about the Islamic Iranian revolution, without a too thorough knowledge of details, though. The following is literally the background I had for the last couple of years, definitely prior to reading the book.

So, the Islamic Iranian revolution was a chain of developments that happened in Iran in 1979 and which resulted in overthrowing the shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi who later became a fugitive and fled to the United States of America. In the wake of the revolution not only the new authority came to power, but the very political system of Iran changed quite drastically – the monarchy, which Iran was under the rule of the shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi evolved into the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the principal authority was held by Imam (ayatollah), which means that the country began to be ruled by religious and not secular forces.

The revolution is considered to have started about a year prior to the declaration of the Republic and the ouster of the shah – in January 1978. This was namely when the first anti-governmental demonstration was suppressed very cruelly notwithstanding that the rally was peaceful in its essence.. In the meanwhile there were more than enough reasons for Iranian to gather in such rallies and protest against the policy of the shah: his policy was grounded on westernization, a thing that in its very core is too much antagonistic towards Islamic values. But that was not the only reason. Apart from westernization and all the liberal attributes of it, reaching as far as justifying free sexual relations and too immodest behavior in every possible meaning of this word, the shah used to conduct too ambivalent a foreign

policy, which was manifestly pro-American. For instance, the shah supported Israel, making Iran the only Muslim country to do so. Also, he backed, both politically and financially, rebellion pro-American movements in many African states. On the top of all of this he was too much oppressive towards political opposition in his own country, and logically enough, this bullied representatives of the opposition very much pushing them incrementally towards what later became known as the Iranian revolution.

The entire year of 1978 was a very dire one in terms of how many rallies organized by the Muslim clericals were cracked down on by the shah guards. The protesters also resorted to economic pressure, organizing strikes which paralyzed Iranian economy. The shah was no longer capable of holding the opposition back so he fled the country handing all the power as well as the responsibility to the prime-minister.

In the wake of the shah's leaving the country ayatollah Khomeini who had been forced to live some time abroad returned and took power in his hands. A new provisional government was formed. In March 1979 a referendum regarding the matter of political system was held. According to its results on April 1, 1979 Iran was declared Islamic Republic of Iran.

Section 2. The first section of the book is in its essence a logical subdivision of it, meaning that it tells us about the developments in the life of the main character – and the author – prior to the radical change in her life, namely prior to her emigration to Europe.

Speaking about what this section is all about, I can tell apart two distinct topics – these are the historical background of the story and the inner development of Marjane. What touches upon the first, no other part of the

book dwells so much on the political turbulence in Iran on the verge of decades. In is namely in this section that the main changes in the Iranian society (like the obligation for women to wear burkas and other traditional garments or the growing fear of gathering for rallies) are described. What touches upon the main character, we become first acquainted with her vision of the world here, when she is still a 10-year old girl, who can just get the general gist of what is going on but still does not understand the details. This is the starting point of her self-search, still based on her childish purity and faith: “ I was born with religion.”

As this section has the very first years of the Iranian revolution in the background the main thesis of it, I think, consists in the desire of the author to tell us the ambivalence and frustration experienced by the Iranian people (and by little Marjane herself) about the fact that the results of the revolution were not altogether good, they also made people (which is illustrated again by the example of Marjane in the book) to constantly come up with new questions and seek for some equilibrium between what they were told was right and what they felt they wanted and, therefore, was right according to themselves.

The evidence basis used by the author is a little bit tricky, as for me. The reason for that is, on the one hand, the fact that we can experience the historical background of the book only through the vision and perception of the main character who is just a child and whose vision of the facts may not be as accurate as we expect. After all, these are just memories of the author – not the most reliable source. There is no historiography in the book, just reflection of its characters. On the other hand, however, the very book is

written by the main character, but who is already a grown up, so she obviously can judge impartially about those developments that used to be just a background of her childhood.

The one moment that certainly complicates my knowledge and perception of the Iranian society and the social relations of that time consists in the attitude of little Marjane towards her dad and uncle. The thing is the phrase of Marjane: “ My father was not a hero.” She explains it with the fact that he never had been to prison in spite of all of his activities and rallies he took part in and so on and so forth. At the same time she feels huge affection towards her uncle Anoosh, who is actually imprisoned. She almost worships him for his bravery. For the girl being imprisoned means being a martyr and subsequently, somehow, the utmost form of self-sacrifice and merit ever possible. This was a very strange thing to learn for me about the Iranian society – instead of personal affection as to a relative in the first place an Iranian (or, more broadly, a Muslim) makes a hero out of a person who becomes a martyr, a symbol of fight, a leader of society. And although after uncle Anoosh is subjected to capital punishment Marjane undergoes a profound transformation regarding her personal values (telling the God: “ Get out of my life!”) it still tells us very much about her as a person and as a fighter for something bigger than comfort and adjustment.

Section 3. This section of the book, especially as compared to the first one, is more about self-search of the main character than about Iran, its social system and everything that follows from here. And though it makes me refer at this point to the quotation at the very end of the book, I still think that the best way to summarize the thesis of this section is to cite this phrase: “

Freedom had a price.” The section tells us about Marjane’s trip to Europe, about how alien she felt there and how her search both for assimilation in the European society and for accepting European values failed; the section also tells us about the decision of Marjane to return to Iran which means that there were two maxima clashing inside her – staying with her loved ones in Iran but sacrificing liberty or choosing liberty over having at least someone who understands and loves her. Anyway, Marjane meets both inspirations (“ I had a new set of parents and Lucia was my sister,” – she says about people who care about her and who take her for holidays with them and are, literally, her guarding angels for a good period of time during her stay in Europe) helping her to live in a brand new society and frustrations (“ You were all prostitutes before becoming nuns,” – she says to nuns with which she lived for some time and whose behavior she could not put down to her system of values, profoundly religious in its essence).

I must say that this section compliments my perception of the Iranian mentality quite significantly. This means, that of course, I understand and understood it earlier, what are the basic peculiarities of the Iranian (and Muslim in general) mentality, but bringing them in the European context, placing a person raised in Iranian circumstances into a world living up to a completely different set of values seriously accentuates the perception of not only how different Marjane is but also of how impossible it is for her to give up on her identity. Namely, this is the reason that makes her eventually stop hiding the fact that she is not French, but Iranian.

Speaking about how all of the above clashes with my worldview and with what I feel is right and what is wrong, I must say that as I acquire more

knowledge about the topic I somehow feel the desire to justify how the story about human rights and values goes in the Muslim society. Of course there is a verge to draw the line at and Iran with its executions and excessive restrictions is beyond that verge (which means that I do not, all in all, feel sympathetic to the vast majority of things about Iranian society described in the book), but as a person of the Western origin who is so much told about equality I also believe that freedom and equality consists in choosing the system of values even we consider those values not liberal or just not according to our own point of view. Let's take the example of Marjane who returned for some time to Iran. This means that she knows that even if Iranian values are far from impeccable they still constitute a worldview very dear to many, who cannot live otherwise than within the framework of these values. All in all, I am trying to say here that of course there are certain taboos taking their origin from violence and other unacceptable things, but we must respect what others live up to.

Section 4. I must admit that reading Persepolis which seems to me like a story of a small person and its destiny in the system of political and social values has made me reconsider much of what I thought about Middle East, Iran and all the related topics. There are things about which I changed my opinion, but there are ones about which I didn't either. Among this latter is the notion that we still have to recognize that the values that may in no way correspond to others still can and have to be the core of some other's nation living – because it's their nature and their beliefs.

Among the main flashpoints what this book illustrated to me are certainly these several following things. First of all, the book provides for an example

of not only how hard it is for a person with an eastern worldview to adjust to the western one, but also how hard it is to literally understand it. The book says that there are lines which are obviously impossible to cross. The next thing highlighted by the book is the one around the influence of the West. The firmness with which the Iranian opposition rejected it and the fact that the Islamic Republic in Iran exists even today proves one more time that Muslim values are a very robust set of principles which are worth considering equal in their importance and scope to any such Western set.

Of course, the book clashes with my own worldview since I am a person of Western origin and do not live up to the set of values which is native for the main character of the book and its author. I may therefore not understand many things about how the Iranian society works but I would never challenge the right of Iranians to do it their way.

Finally I would certainly recommend this book not only to everybody who is interested in the Middle East and Iran, but to everybody who is undergoing some kind of a self-search, who does not know how to decide which way to go and what living environment to choose. I think the book will teach these people much in terms of understanding how to understand who you are, how to choose between personal and more conceptual things as well as how to strike a delicate balance between the desire to have what you want to and stay what you really are.

Therefore, I think that the author accomplished her goal completely. She told us a personal story of how a person struggles between what's right and what's desired.

Bibliograhya

Satrapi, Marjane. The Complete Persepolis. Pantheon E-books, 2004.

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