

Totalitarianism and literary reference online

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Imagine living in a country where it is illegal to watch movies, listen to music, or even play cards. To this day, there are still billions of people who live in these types of totalitarian countries. This movie focuses on one of these countries in particular, Iran, an Islamic-fascist state home to 75 million people, and the plight of a young woman named Marjane Satrapi who tries to escape this political oppression. In this movie, Marjane tries to reconcile her national identity with her desire to live in a free society, and this causes conflict within her family and her newly found European friends.

The movie *Persepolis* brilliantly illustrates the cultural and personal struggles that millions of immigrants go through when they flee a religious theocracy in search for freedom. In a totalitarian state, all forms of free expression are suppressed. In Iran's case, the acculturating free culture from the westernized, secular world poses a threat to the religious laws that are used by Iran's government to control the people. For example, any sense of fashion is considered sinful and is therefore illegal. " They're selling tapes on Gandhi Avenue. Popular mainstream music like Michael Jackson and the Bee Gees must be sold on the black market in the streets. This is a personal struggle for any unfortunate member of such a society because they risk their freedom every time they dare to rock out to Iron Maiden. In a fundamental-religious theocracy such as Iran, women are not exactly treated with respect. This society uses religious propaganda such as " the veil stands for freedom" to brainwash women into subservience. And if a woman dares to show a single strand of hair in public, a man will " screw women like you and dump them in the trash.

This degree of religious fundamentalism treats women like trophies; that pious men will be rewarded in heaven with “ food, women, gold houses and diamonds! ” This level of misogyny is disgusting because it is taken to the point where a woman must be married and raped before she is executed because “ it's illegal to kill a virgin” according to Islamic law. This magnifies Marjane’s struggle because she is unfortunate enough to be a woman living in such a misogynistic society. History repeats itself over and over, and Iran is just another example of what happens when overthrowing a dictator goes wrong. It's normal, every revolution has a period of transition. ”

When a relatively benevolent dictator such as the Shah, who wanted to modernize and secularize Iran, is overthrown by an uneducated populace where “ half the country is illiterate” and where “ only nationalism and religion can unite people”, you cannot expect a better result to come out of that. When illiterate religious fanatics who are upset at the moral “ decay” caused by westernization are allowed to vote, who do you think they will elect? Probably religious nutcases (Ayatollah Khomeini and President Ahmadinejad) who represent their views.

Iran is also a developing nation where the majority of the people are under 30 years old, so young, fickle teenagers who probably don’t work or study are easily swayed into becoming soldiers who enforce the fascist laws of the state. “ I could be your mother. How old are you? Fifteen? ” This relates to Marjane’s battle to break away from this aspect of her cultural heritage. In order for a democracy to work, the electorate must be educated enough to not elect a fascist idiot.

In the movie, the so-called “ winners” of the post-dictatorship election claimed that “ 99. 99% of the people have voted democratically for the Islamic Republic. They also went on to later claim that “ under our new government, we no longer have political prisoners”, when in fact, the number of prisoners increased 100 fold from 3, 000 under the Shah to 300, 000 under the new Islamic regime. Marjane was later chastised by her school’s authorities for correcting these phony statistics that her teacher was instructed to teach in class. This type of propaganda is the government’s attempt to keep the people on their side, but thankfully, there are a few informed rebels like Marjane who are not completely oblivious to the truth and who do not blindly accept the government’s lies.

You cannot indoctrinate an intelligent thinker, like Marjane, who questions everything she is told. After having enough of Iran’s brutal totalitarianism, Marjane finally decided to immigrate to Europe to pursue freedom. What she discovered in Vienna is that the free world has its own problems as well. She had to put up with the spoiled political ignorance of her high school classmates, who were sheltered their entire lives but yet claimed to know what it is like to die for a worthy political cause. “ Life is a void. When man realizes that he can no longer live, he invents power games”, to which Marjane, deeply offended, responded: “ Bullshit!

Life isn't absurd! Some people give their lives for freedom. You think my uncle died for fun? Egotistical prick. ” Other problems Marjane faced in Austria include trying to find love and being betrayed, and being homeless while “ in the West, nobody cares if you die on the street. ” This movie was based on real events that happened in Satrapi’s life growing up in Iran. “

First published in France as a serial, *Persepolis I* portrays Satrapi's early years in Iran until her departure for Vienna at the age of 14. This novel interweaves Satrapi's personal history with that of her country to reveal the idiosyncrasies of both. (Companion to the World Novel). This sums up the basic theme of the whole story, which was Marjane's inner conflict in having to choose between a free, materialistic society where everyone fends for themselves or sacrificing her political freedom to live in her home country with her family and where people look out for each other.

“ Through family storytelling from her parents and Uncle Anoosh, she learns that Iran's history has been one oppressive regime after another, punctuated by invasions by Arabs and Mongols and by exploiters from Great Britain and the United States. (Encyclopedia of the Literature of Empire). This highlights the conflict in which Marjane had to decide which element(s) of her Persian heritage she would rather identify herself with. “ There were in fact two famous historical courtesans named Thais with whose stories Dante would have been acquainted: One was an Athenian mistress of Alexander the Great who reportedly persuaded Alexander to burn the ancient Persian capital of Persepolis. ” (Critical Companion to Dante: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work, Critical Companion).

The title of this movie was cleverly named after the ancient capital of the former Persian Empire that encompasses what is modern-day Iran. *Persepolis* was an excellent film that portrayed the life of Iranians struggling through the turmoil during a major transition of power between one totalitarian dictator and another totalitarian regime. It shows how every

human wants to be free and happy, and how difficult it is to find the perfect balance between that and personal responsibility.

It showed how Marjane wanted to remain true to herself and her roots while, at the same time, attempting to assimilate into a foreign country that would provide her refuge from political oppression. This story teaches a lesson to everyone fortunate enough to live in the free world: do not take your freedom for granted, and how important it is to guard those freedoms from those who want to take them away. It is important to always stay involved with politics because this kind of thing doesn't only happen in the Middle East; it can certainly happen here in America as well.