

UN-VEILING AND REVEALING: UN-LAYERING CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE SELF IN
MARJANE SATRAPI'S PERSEPOLIS 1 AND PERSEPOLIS 2

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ABSTRACT

In the following pages, I will explore how Marjane Satrapi uses text and images as a medium for enacting her memoir Persepolis 1: The Story of a Childhood and Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return. Nations and homelands play an important part in identity formation. Through national symbols, individuals feel a sense of belonging to their nation; constructions formed by our environment are enacted on the physical body through national symbols. However, identity becomes problematic for those in the diaspora. Nevertheless, this scholarly exploration will illustrate how a shift of landscape signifies that when people move, identities and definitions of oneself and national and cultural identity change.

The symbol of the veil in Marjane Satrapi's memoir fragments her body image by layering on false constructions of her identity. Because identity is linked to the body, Marjane can only enact agency over her identity when she removes the veil and reveals her body. Autobiographical writing allows Marjane to symbolically reveal and un-veil and begin the healing process. By revealing, Marjane can remove all the falseness from her body in order to gain a sense of truthfulness about her identity.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother and father, whose love, encouragement, and support have always allowed me to achieve great things.

INTRODUCTION

Identity and the Nation

We are all storytellers at one point or another in our lives. Whether we tell stories for mere conversation or for therapeutic reasons, revealing past events, secrets, or traumas to a friend, family member, or stranger is common practice. In a sense, we remember our past selves in order to understand our present identities. One's nation and homeland play an essential part in the construction of the self. In Cultural Studies: An Introduction, Simon During points out, "Many individuals are seriously attached to at least some of the identities given to them as members of a particular family, ethnicity, nation and or/gender, and want these not to be fluid but stable" (152). Because identity is ascribed to us by certain physical traits we possess such as race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality, During argues, we have little freedom to choose what defines us. Instead, we often grant institutions such as the nation-state the agency to construct our identities for us. Therefore, identity is tied to notions of community and belonging to a nation composed of individuals who share common traits.

Social environments such as the nation, homeland, and community play an important part in identity formation. During states, "Once nationality carried little weight as an identity trait; now it marks the identity" (146). Nations use symbols such as narratives, rituals, and traditions so that people will believe that they feel a sense of unification and comradeship with other members of their community. For example, symbols such as the national anthem can give people the impression that they are bound together by other members of their country through the history and culture of their nation.

In Marjane Satrapi's graphic memoir Persepolis 1: The Story of a Childhood, Satrapi begins the narrative of her memoir by introducing the veil: how it physically covers her body and

symbolically veils her identity. Satrapi expresses that after she was veiled and separated from her friends as a child, she did not know what to think about the veil, as it divided her traditional sense of self from the modernism that was instilled in her by her parents. Satrapi explains in Persepolis 1 that she was born with religion and states, “At the age of six, I was already sure I was the last prophet,” (6) but Marjane is also torn by her devotion to her French education. When the Islamic regime announces that it will close all bilingual schools because they are symbols of Westernization and capitalism, Marjane’s construction of her identity becomes problematic in Iran.

For Satrapi, the symbol of the veil ties to notions of traditionalism; she is forced to veil in order to signify her ties to her national and cultural identity and her role as an Islamic woman. Over the course of the twentieth century, the veil became a symbol to distinguish the difference between a good, veiled, Iranian woman and an indecent, un-veiled Western woman. In her essay, “One is Not Born a Woman,” Monique Wittig explains that “it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature [...] which is described as feminine” (2016). The veil in Persepolis becomes a symbol of the mark imposed on Satrapi by the patriarchal culture through which new meanings of femininity are adorned on her body. Persepolis examines how women become the bearers of culture and demonstrates how their bodies become tied to their femininity and national identity. Using the symbol of the veil, I will show how Satrapi’s national identity and femininity are reduced to homogenization rather than individualization and are socially constructed for her through her existing environment(s).

In effect, the identities constructed by the nation-state are achieved at the price of reducing a person’s individuality. Homi Bhabha asserts in his essay “DessemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation” that national symbols are unstable

constructions that can never produce the unity they promise. Bhabha's essay shows that there is not one essential identity that can adequately represent all the people of a nation (qtd. in McLeod 117-120). For Marjane¹, it is impossible to assume the role of an Islamic woman through veiling because her identity is composed of multiple selves rather than a single, authentic self.

By the end of her first memoir, Satrapi leaves a war-torn Iran for Austria in a desperate attempt to unify and construct her identity elsewhere. In Austria, Marjane is separated from the veil and feels a lack and insufficiency in her body and identity. In order to make up for the loss of the veil, Marjane attempts to restore her body to wholeness by adapting to standards of femininity under Western ideals. Instead of using the veil to "normalize" her body, Marjane uses makeup and punk attire.

Satrapi enacts her narrative of self through the various "traumatic ruptures" that occur in her life, further fragmenting her identity within. The term "rupture" refers to a "break in the skin" signifying a body which is split, broken, partial, and fragmented. Postcolonial theory extends the term to mean a traumatic event that causes the diasporic subject to be wrenched from his or her mother (father) land. For Satrapi, the trauma she faces as a child causes her to be displaced from her national identity and eventually from her homeland. By the beginning of Persepolis 1, Marjane is traumatized by the imposed Islamic identity she is forced to take on through the act of veiling her body. Through veiling, Marjane is made to realize that as a woman, she is inferior to men and must follow strict guidelines by dressing and acting a certain way towards men in private and in public spaces. Marjane's resistance towards the regime and mandatory veiling is limited in public spaces in both Persepolis 1 and Persepolis 2 as she is always met by a higher authority, the Revolutionary Guards. Also, Marjane is exposed to death

¹ I refer to the protagonist as Marjane and the author as Satrapi throughout the paper to show that the author and protagonist are distinctly separate from each other. This signifies that Persepolis is composed of various selves, narrators, and voices.

and violence during the revolution when many of her parents' friends are executed by the Islamic regime as well as her Uncle Anoosh who is murdered and accused of being a Russian spy. The Iran-Iraq war also traumatizes Marjane's childhood, especially when she witnesses the death of her friend, Neda, who dies after a missile explodes in Marjane's neighborhood. These various traumas in Marjane's life force her to reconceptualize her ideas about her country, nation, community, family, and identity.

The trauma of the Revolution, the imposition of the veil, and the Iran-Iraq-War force Marjane to leave her homeland and abandon her friends, family, country, and childhood. By leaving Iran and crossing borders, Satrapi's identity then becomes "diasporic." According to Global Diasporas: An Introduction, Robin Cohen describes a "diaspora" as a group of people who are forced to leave their country because of various "traumatic ruptures." (qtd in McLeod 203). However, diasporic subjects acknowledge that their homeland will always have a claim on their loyalty and identity.

The diaspora alters the way a person feels about his or her home country. Diasporic subjects are unable to maintain ties with their authentic national identity when they cross borders. In Borderlands: La Frontera, Gloria Anzaldua points out, "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them" (25). When diasporic subjects arrive in a place, they want to feel at home, but sometimes the very customs and symbols that make them accepted members of the homeland are the same factors that make them unwelcome in the host nation. For Marjane, being apart from her homeland and not being accepted by the host nation leaves her feeling "in-between," neither here nor there. Instead, the young Marjane constructs her body under a Western lens to enact a sense of belonging within the host nation.

Unable to disclose the emotional trauma she experienced during the Cultural Revolution, the tension she felt during the Iran/Iraq war, and the reduced status she experienced as a female in Iran, Marjane, as a young adult, returns to her homeland to once again attempt to unify her sense of identity. However, postcolonial theory argues that when individuals become diasporics, home only becomes a mythic illusion of desire. The physical act of returning to the homeland can never bring back what was once lost. Realizing that she would always have her identity constructed for her through Western or Eastern ideology, Marjane decides to embrace her hybrid identity as an Iranian-European. Postcolonial theory suggests that living “in-between” allows the diasporic subject isolation and a space of his or her own to challenge new ideas and notions about his or her ties between the homeland and his or her identity.

In the diaspora, the notion that one needs a homeland to form one’s identity no longer holds true. Instead, the diasporic subject no longer thinks of identity as stable and rooted in the homeland but rather as always altering and changing. Using postcolonial theory, I will demonstrate how Satrapi’s identity as revealed in Persepolis is constantly being constructed for her under nationalistic terms in which she is forced to enact imposed modes of identity to feel a sense of belonging. After a failed attempt at unifying her unstable identity in Iran and Austria, it is only through embracing her hybridity, the space of “in-betweenness,” that she is allowed to reconstruct her identity under her own terms. By the end of Persepolis 2, Marjane leaves Iran for France in order to re-construct her identity, one that is detached from an “authentic” homeland.

Body, Identity, and Autobiography

Autobiographical writing can offer the means to enact agency over the reconstruction of our own identities. In Persepolis 1 and Persepolis 2 Satrapi uses words and comic strip format as

a medium for narrating her memoir. In How Our Lives Become Stories, Paul John Eakin asserts, “Without an ‘I’ to perform actions, to possess feelings and qualities, the possibility of having a story of one’s existence to tell simply evaporates” (3). Identity serves a crucial function in an individual’s life, and writing can organize and clarify a person’s identity, an identity that otherwise might feel fragmented and split. The stories we tell about our past grow complex as we move from childhood into adolescence, and writing can help us develop an understanding of how trauma affects our present selves. The ways we conceptualize and make meaning of these events allows us to self-reflect on the past and reconstruct our identities.

I will explore in the following chapters the importance of understanding the construction of the self by way of the past through the medium of writing and images. I refer to Phillip Lejeune’s definition of “autobiography” in his essay “The Autobiographical Pact” in which he defines the term as “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (qtd. in Eakin 2). Autobiography focuses on the reconstruction of the self through the interplay between cultural environment and individual agency, an interplay that is often complex and poorly understood. Enacting autobiographical writing requires and elicits a sense of understanding and coherence about how past events shape our present selves. For example, after a certain trauma, we repeat and rehearse the event in our minds in order to understand how this event has affected us and altered our identity. We ask questions such as “What am I now?” after a trauma, in an effort to explore how events can revise and change the self. In her article “Constructing the Springboard Effect: Causal Connections, Self-Making, and Growth within the Life Story,” Jennifer L. Pals points out that we must re-visit and explore aspects about our past in order to

make meaning of these experiences and how they affect the construction of the present self. Pals explains:

[T]he narration of the life story involves an interpretive process of self-making through which individuals highlight significant experiences from the past and infuse them with self-defining meaning in the present by interpreting them as having a causal impact on the growth of the self. (176)

Whereas Satrapi's memoir focuses on highlighting significant traumatic events from the past that have changed her, I will show how at the same time, her act of writing allows her agency over the narrative interpretation of her life allowing for the reconstruction of her body and identity.

To reconstruct her own identity, Satrapi must return to her body. The body is the locus, the center of activity and identity, and for women, it can be the site of patriarchal control. In "Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body," Susan Bordo points out that "female bodies become docile bodies—bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, 'improvement'"(2363). This preoccupation with women's physical bodies is always forcing women to practice modes of femininity prescribed to them by various patriarchal cultures. For Satrapi, both the Iranian and Austrian cultures force her to constantly adorn her physical body in order to perform sufficient presentations of femininity in society. In Satrapi's memoir, she is veiled in Iran, un-veiled in Austria, re-veiled when she returns to Iran, and finally, un-veiled when she leaves Iran for France. When an adolescent Marjane is not veiled in Austria, she enacts a different form of veiling by physically altering her appearance. Bordo observes that in the most extreme cases, constant performances of femininity on a woman's body may ultimately lead to the destruction of the woman's identity (2363). If the body is linked to one's identity, then inauthentic constructions of femininity

constantly being adorned on Marjane's body fragment her sense of self. Persepolis 1 and Persepolis 2 show that every time Satrapi crosses boundaries, moving from the host nation to the homeland, her body is reconstructed under someone else's terms, never hers.

In Persepolis Marjane is constantly undergoing some form of trauma. Bordo explains, "I view our bodies as a site of struggle, where we must work to keep our daily practices in the service of resistance to gender domination, not in the service of docility and gender normalization" (2376). Only when Marjane is able to see through the limitations of the veil and is made aware of its oppressiveness can she enact agency over her body and the reconstruction of her identity. Only when Marjane is able to leave both cultures and enact a space of her own, free from the tainted biases of patriarchal culture can she enact a form of agency and healing of the body through writing. Through autobiographical writing, Satrapi is able to re-visit the past, showing how her body has become layered with inauthentic constructions of identity. Through the following pages, I will demonstrate how the act of writing as a form of revealing and healing also allows Satrapi to symbolically un-veil in order to reconstruct her identity.

CHAPTER 1. IDENTITY AND THE VEIL

Part of the Reza Shah Pahlavi regime's National Anthem:

"Cho Iran nabashad tan-e man mabad" [Without Iran, my body would not exist]

(Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister 59)

The Veil

According to Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet's essay "Cultures of Iranianness: The Evolving Polemic of Iranian Nationalism," the Pahlavi regime that ruled Iran from 1925-1979 drew on European sources to "renew the Iranian citizen and his nation through attire, language, and body" (162). When Reza Shah Pahlavi came into power in Iran in 1921, he rapidly tried to impose Western ideals upon Persians in an effort to bring economic progress to the country and modernize Iranian civilization. For hundreds of years, Europeans had seen Iranian men as barbarous and uncivilized, mostly due to the ill treatment of their women as revealed through stories of harems and polygamy. According to postcolonial theorist, Edward Said, these stories about the "Orient" are constructed in order for the West to claim racial superiority over the East. In order to do so, the West had to define the "Orient" as its contrasting image as Said explains:

Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (qtd. in Storey 103)

Such stereotypes confirmed the notion for Europeans that the East desperately needed to be civilized and could only redeem itself by conforming to Western customs of behavior and

attire. Hoping to make Iran as modern as any European country, Reza Shah Pahlavi imposed European attire upon Iranian men and women.

The Shah's policies included the adoption of a Western wardrobe, which included suits and neckties that replaced the traditional garb for men. To redefine the new and modern Iranian woman, Reza Shah Pahlavi took a drastic approach by passing a law calling for the mandatory unveiling of women. Throughout the Western world, the veil had become known as a symbol of a man's domination over a woman in the Middle East. In her essay, "The Meaning of Spatial Boundaries," Fatima Mernissi describes the veil as a "symbolic form of seclusion [...] which to Western eyes is a source of oppression" (493). Veiling was a way to exclude women from entering public society and confining them to the private home. In "The Seen, The Unseen and the Imagined: Private and Public Lives," Sarah Graham-Brown explains that Europeans who traveled to the Middle East were overwhelmed by the "invisibility" of women in public areas (505). The images of veiled Iranian women in the West targeted Islamic men as barbarous and women as their victims. By demanding that women unveil, Reza Shah Pahlavi believed that he could change the West's pre-conceived notions about Iranians as uncivilized people.

Forced un-veiling, as an attempt at national Westernization, was not well received among many groups of Iranian women. Before Reza Shah Pahlavi's regime, veiling was optional for women. Since veiling is mentioned in many Koranic references, some women felt that they needed to veil to identify themselves with Islamic culture. Also, veiling is a custom passed down to women from past generations, and many women wanted to carry on the tradition. Most women had become so accustomed to wearing the veil that the cloth became like their "second-skin." Some women veiled because they wanted to cover their bodies from sexist males' gazes and un-veil only for their husbands. The veil was important to women for varied reasons, and

removing the right to veil was not seen as liberating but rather as oppressing as it removes a woman's agency over her body. Many women showed their resistance to the Shah's policy by refusing to unveil; yet, they were met by the Shah's police, who would often publicly pull the veil off women's heads, leaving their bodies exposed and revealed. Minoo Moallem argues in her book Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister that under the Shah's regime, un-veiling did little to modernize and liberate Iranian women but instead allowed "male citizen soldiers to civilize women" by forcing European modes of attire on their bodies (70). The unveiling of women's bodies became a necessity for women to become accepted citizens of their state. A woman's attire became a reflection of her political stance towards the regime; those who chose to un-veil showed their support for the Shah and the progression towards a Westernized Iran. Those who resisted unveiling in public showed their support for a traditional and religious Iran. Therefore, an un-veiled woman's body became tied to notions of belonging to and accepting one's homeland.

After the abdication of Reza Shah Pahlavi, his son Mohammed Reza Pahlavi succeeded to the throne. Even though Mohammed Reza Pahlavi did away with his father's policy of forced un-veiling, the imprints of forced Westernization left behind by his father had left a bitter taste in the mouth of the Iranian population. Even though the Pahlavi regime had encouraged Westernization through attire, many families and communities continued to adhere to traditional Islamic culture within their private lives. Tensions escalated throughout Mohammed Reza Pahlavi's reign, and by the late 1970s a religious revolution took place led by religious cleric Ayatollah Khomeini. During the revolution, Muslim men and women were called upon to unite Iran under an Islamic religious identity. For women, the symbol of the veil became the site of unification in the call for an Islamic nation. Again, the veil played an important role in the

Cultural Revolution when women voluntarily popularized the black *chador* in an attempt to show their support for overthrowing the Shah and their opposition to his attempt to mimic Western ideologies.

Women wanted the option of becoming members of a Westernized nation while still adhering to the Islamic cultural traditions which had been part of the Iranian tradition for centuries. The revolution proved to be successful, and by 1979, the Shah fled Iran, and religious clerics took over the state. With the overthrow of the Shah, many women believed that they had taken a progressive move forward for themselves and their national identity by reclaiming agency over their bodies. Ironically, March 1979, the month of celebration for Women's National Liberation Day, became the same month that the Ayatollah announced a law that would take women further away from their own progressive movements in Iran: the forced veiling of women.

In Mino Moallem's chapter "Unveiling and Reveiling: Corporeal Inscriptions of Citizenship," the Iranian writer narrates how the forced unveiling her grandmother experienced in 1934-1935 and the forced veiling Moallem incurred in 1979 enable the two women to share simultaneous traumatic ruptures in their identity during two differing regimes:

Both of us share an incorporated traumatic memory of citizenship in the modern nation-state. She was forced to unveil; I was forced to reveal. Living in different times, we were obliged by our fellow countrymen respectively to reject and adopt veiling. Our bodies were othered by civic necessity. We were coerced by the order of the visible and were concealed in the realm of the invisible. (69)

Throughout the Pahlavi regime and into the Ayatollah's regime, a woman's body became a site of conflict where ideals of Westernization and of resistance to imperialism from American and

Western powers were acted upon. The Reza Shah Pahlavi's un-veiling and the Ayatollah Khomeini's forced veiling ruptured women's identities by transforming women into objects, leaving the nation-state in control of their bodies and minds. A woman's identity formation through her relationship with her body has been left in the hands of men and the nation, shuffling between unstable regimes, forcing her body to be un-veiled and re-veiled so that she is never in a state of tranquility with herself, leaving her identity in a state of ambivalence and uncertainty. Throughout the history of Iran, forced veiling has proven to be as oppressive as its forced removal. Both requirements eliminate a woman's right to occupy and take control over her body.

The symbol of the veil played a pivotal role in supporting the creation of first a modern and then a traditional Iran during the Pahlavi regime and Khomeini's rule respectively. In John McLeod's book Beginning Postcolonialism, the author explores the use of symbols, such as the veil, and how they support the construction of a national identity: "The production of the myth of symbols is important to the construction of the myth of the nation, the function of which is to unite many individuals into one people" (72). Both regimes forced women to either veil or unveil in order to unite the nation, but their policies had nothing to do with what women actually wanted for themselves. Instead, according to Minoo Moallem, "unveiling and re-veiling created sites where the history of state intervention [...] was imprinted on female bodies" (70). Instead of uniting the nation, forced un-veiling and re-veiling stimulated divisions, separations, and conflict not only between a woman and her country but also between a woman and a man. Through veiling, a woman was no longer capable of constructing her own identity but had it constructed for her by her social environment(s) through the form of a cloth repeatedly placed and removed from her head.

John McLeod asserts that national symbols are important for the construction of the myth of the nation but that these national symbols play an important part in facilitating one's relationship with one's country. As quickly as Iran had been rapidly westernized during the Pahlavi regime, the process of reversing that Westernization and turning Iran into a religious state happened even more quickly. Iranian women now faced a sense of irony in that they were being forced to veil to show their support to their country, when fifty years before, their mothers and grandmothers were forced to de-veil in order to demonstrate the same idea. By using the veil the Iranian government attempted to gain control over Iranian women to differentiate the Iranian woman from the Western woman.

Veiling was also reinstated in order for Iranian men to claim gender superiority over Iranian women. The veil became the basis for the division of male and female spaces. By forcing a woman to wear the veil, a man could define a woman as his contrasting image. Fatima Mernissi explains: "The spatial division according to sex reflects the divisions between those who hold authority and those who do not" (490). Veiling became a way to separate the men, who hold power through the public sphere, and women, who obey men and are confined to the domestic sphere. In "The Return to the Veil: Individual Autonomy vs. Social Esteem," Pat Mule and Diane Barthel point out:

In theory, Islam assumes that women are powerful and dangerous beings. Their power is the power of seduction, of a sexuality which is seen as irresistible and disruptive. As a source of corruption and a jeopardy to the social order, women's sexuality must be held in check, and confined in a separate sphere, excluded from the world of men. (328)

Through veiling, the nation reconstructed women's roles in the public and private sphere.

Islamic law imposes a traditional role on Iranian women by not only monitoring what they wear in private and public, but by monitoring their behavior towards men. Islamic law also lowered the marrying age for women, put a limit on the types of jobs they could hold, and banned women from attending certain public affairs such as athletic events. As much as Islam viewed the West's ideologies as impositions on Iranian women, Iranian men also forced their religious impositions on women as well. Men used Islamic religion to justify veiling and the inferiority of women.

Separation and Isolation

In the graphic memoir Persepolis 1: The Story of a Childhood, Satrapi begins her childhood narrative with the introduction of the veil to the Islamic Republic of Iran during the late 1970s after the overthrow of the Shah and the beginning of the Ayatollah's religious regime. In a chapter entitled "The Veil" the protagonist recreates an historical moment in Iranian history through the eyes of a child. Through black and white images and written text, the audience is introduced to the first traumatic rupture that affects Satrapi's identity, the re-introduction of the veil to the Republic of Iran, forcing the young girl to cover her body. At the beginning of Persepolis 1, Satrapi illustrates how the veil physically separates her from the society around her:

Then came 1980. The year it became obligatory to wear the veil at school. We didn't really like to wear the veil, especially since we didn't understand why we had to. And also because the year before, in 1979, we were in a French non-religious school where boys and girls were together. And then suddenly in 1980, all bilingual schools must be closed down. They are symbols of capitalism, of decadence [...]. We found ourselves veiled and separated from our friends. (3-4)

Therefore, the first traumatic rupture that affects Marjane occurs when wearing the veil creates a sense of physical alienation from her friends and the opposite sex at school. Even though she is a child and does not understand the full reasons for wearing the veil, she is fully aware that this national symbol separates her in numerous ways, body and mind. Minoo Moallem argues that “the very idea of citizenship depends upon the notions of a civic body” (60), and by wearing the veil, Marjane’s body becomes the symbol of unification among citizens of Iran in the process of establishing traditionalism by Khomeini’s regime. To wear the veil meant that a woman showed her support for a traditional and religious Iran and steered away from Western customs, ideas, and capitalism. Even as a child, Satrapi recognizes that the government exerts patriarchal control over her body by forcing her to become a devoted and accepted member of the nation-state, regardless of what the young child decides or wants.

By the first few pages of Persepolis 1, the young Marjane immediately notices how the veil fragments her mind and identity when she states, “I really don’t know what to think about the veil, deep down I was very religious but as a family we were very modern and avant-garde”(6). Even though Marjane struggles between her Islamic religion and her modern, French education, she remains divided over which side to choose. By not choosing the veil, Marjane would face physical alienation within her country, but by choosing the veil, she could embrace her religious side while demonstrating her devotion to her country and regime. Torn between modernism and her country, Marjane shows off her fragmented identity and portrays a side of her rebellious youth through her attire. She tells the reader, “I put my 1983 Nikes on and my denim jacket with the Michael Jackson button, and of course, my headscarf” (Persepolis 1 131). The mixture of western clothing and the veil shows how Marjane is split between two identities and experiences a lack of agency. Her identity remains divided between modernism and

fundamentalism, two extreme views that continue to haunt Marjane Satrapi both in Iran and in her later exile in Austria.

Satrapi explains that the veil became like a yardstick with which to measure women according to Islamic standards, traditional women or modern women. By equating women who wear the veil with devout believers in their religion, the veil defined Iran under an Islamic identity in which it became a woman's responsibility to maintain this religious symbol.

According to the essay "The Newly Veiled Woman: Irigaray, Specularity, and the Islamic Veil," Algerian sociolinguist Djamila Saadi observes:

Bodies are talked about as either naked [without the hijab] or veiled, dialectically connected with one another, forcing each woman to measure herself by the hijab, the Islamic garment being instituted as the criterion of resemblance and difference. (106)

Saadi explains that Islam only recognizes two types of women in the world: those who are veiled and those who are unveiled. In Persepolis 1, Satrapi illustrates these divisions between women when she describes a demonstration that occurs after the revolution. The author shows how on the left hand side, a group of women are covered from head to toe in black chadors while on the right hand side, women are dressed in European attire (5). The veil becomes a site of contestation and struggle which separates women and categorizes those who went out "naked"--unveiled--as not only symbols of decadence but also traitors to the revolution and their country.

In Persepolis 1 Satrapi encounters a first-hand account of the consequences of not wearing the veil in public means when her mother is attacked by fundamentalists. Marjane's mother explains, "They insulted me. They said that women like me should be pushed up against the wall and fucked and then thrown in the garbage [...] and that if I didn't want that to happen, I

should wear the veil” (74). Satrapi reveals to her audience through the attack upon her mother the power that men exert over women’s moral status in Iran as they attempt to “guard” it. As the revolution progressed, women found that there was no escaping the veil unless one physically left the country. Forced either to conform or to abandon their country, women who chose to veil surrendered rights to adorn their bodies to portray the image of generic, veiled, Muslim women.

As the revolution progressed and the Revolutionary guards gained more power over imposing the veil, the criterion of difference among women slowly diminished. In a chapter entitled “The Trip,” in Persepolis 1, the physical differences between traditional and modern women become less noticeable when Satrapi portrays the new version of modern women. While the fundamentalist woman continues to wear the black chador, covering her body from head to toe, the modern woman now has her hair covered with a *roosarie* with which she could show her resistance to the regime by “letting a few strands of hair show”(75) and now covers her body with a long *manteau* (a jacket). No longer able to un-veil in order to show resistance, women are only left with the option of showing a few strands of hair to signify their political opinions.

The veil not only hid women’s unique features but also became a clear marker of separation between a man and a woman. From the very beginning of Persepolis 1, the boys and girls at Marjane’s school are separated, which reinforces to children at a very young age the vast physical and social differences between men and women in Islamic Iran. Re-veiling thus became a key element in the construction of a traditional, Iranian society in which patriarchy rules. The role of symbolic differentiation was to be carried out by women; yet it became the duty of men to monitor this symbol. By proclaiming that the veil protected women from the opposite sex, the Islamic Republic implicitly considered all men to be potential rapists and perverts and women to be at fault because they represented lustful objects which triggered these

desires within men. The nation state proclaimed that since a woman's hair is a sign of lust and sexuality and the main aesthetic feature which causes men to make sexual advances towards women, wearing the veil protected women from harm. Therefore, a woman's body became a sign of sexuality, which then transformed her into a sexual object, a commodity. Pat Mule and Diane Barthel argue that the veil empowers women in the sense that it may end men's harassment and allow women to "cross gender boundaries without being penalized as intruders" (328). However, the veil simultaneously reaffirms that it is only through being covered that women are able to enter the public sphere of men and demonstrates that their proper place will always be in the private sphere, the home. Therefore, the veil becomes a reminder to women of their social limitations and their status as invaders of men's spheres within society.

This engendering of space is reflected in the separation of boundaries and allocation of spaces given to each member of each sex. Fatima Mernissi argues, "Muslim sexuality is territorial" (489). For men, this space consists of the *umma*, or occupiers of "world religion and power" (490) whereas a women's space consists of being a mother, a wife, and the holder of forbidden sexuality. According to Mernissi, men are the occupiers of the public sphere while women occupy the domestic sphere. The crossing of paths between these two groups is an intrusion upon the other's sphere, and particularly comes under attack when women cross into the public sphere.

In Persepolis 2, an older Marjane illustrates several instances at the university she attends in Tehran where she is reminded that she is intruding upon a man's sphere. Instead of drawing nude models in Marjane's anatomy class, the female artists are forced to draw a woman covered in a chador, on which from every angle, the only thing visible to draw is the overflowing drapes that cover her body. Seeing the absurdity in not having a distinguishable human body to draw

for art class, Marjane declares, “It was preferable to have a model on whom you could at least distinguish the limbs” (146). Marjane convinces her professor to allow them to bring in a male model to draw. One evening, Marjane stays late to finish her drawing of the male model when a supervisor of the university scolds her for looking into the male model’s eyes because it is against the moral code. Even though she wears a *magneh* covering her hair, Marjane is still accused of displaying to a man a sinful gaze that could lure him into temptation. She is told to lower her gaze and look at the door while drawing the man, which makes it impossible for her to draw the male model for her anatomy class. On another occasion, Marjane is late to her dental appointment and has to run to catch her bus when suddenly she is halted by the revolutionary guards and ordered to stop because her butt makes obscene gestures when she runs, attracting men’s stares.

Fatima Mernissi notes that such social boundaries are constructed with a specific purpose: to clearly divide the lines between those who have power and those who don’t; and any intrusions on those social lines constitutes a disruption on the “acknowledged allocation of power” (489). Veiling and un-veiling are always reminders to Marjane and other Iranian women of how their appearance in society can be provocative and their ability to move freely within society is not without limits.

Veiling becomes a symbolic form of seclusion not only with regards to separating human sexual relations, but also separating a woman from acknowledging and recognizing her own body and sexual identity. In “The Blind Spot” Luce Irigaray refers to veiling as the “industry of wrapping” in which women are turned into “generic objects of consumption [...] which make possible the exchange of women” (qtd. in Berger 101). Throughout both novels, Marjane is constantly being reminded to cover herself at school as a child and as an adult at the university,

at the airport, and in public, reinforcing the idea that her body must be rendered invisible within the public sphere.

According to Ann Berger's article, many veiled women that she interviewed explained that the hijab's purpose was to hide the *aourat* of a woman, which literally translates as a "stain" and refers to "female sexual parts" (107). By covering up a woman's sexuality through veiling her sexual organs, the Islamic republic allows for the symbolic value of the phallus. A woman is forced to cover her body to symbolize her void, her lack of a penis. According to Berger, the veil "seems to stage or posit the spectral presence of the phallus" (101) thereby fetishizing the male organ, which in turn fetishizes the woman as a mother and wife. At Marjane's university in Tehran, the school reinforces that the female students must cover up appropriately in order to present themselves as moral and righteous women. By equating the term "stain" with the female organ, a woman is made to feel ashamed of her body and sexuality, to feel as if her genitalia were defective and must be veiled. Rather than embracing her sexuality, a woman recognizes the burden that her body imposes upon men and society. If a woman's organ is rendered as stained and fragmented, then veiling is an attempt to restore her body to wholeness through the act of covering herself. Since women are considered as dangerous and lustful objects according to the Koran, they are forced to veil in order to constrain their dangerous sexuality.

Through the forced masking of female bodies, Islamic law signifies women's powerlessness over their sexuality and separation from their sexual identities. In this way, women are made to believe that they are objects of an exchange for which their bodies serve one useful purpose, procreation. By rendering women's bodies as all the same, serving only to fulfill the obligations of motherhood, the veiling gesture masks any physical differences between women. Luce Irigaray describes the process as "rendering them invisible in order to make them

look identical, hence ready for infinite substitutability and commercial circulation” (qtd. in Berger 99). In Persepolis 2, While the men at Marjane’s university walked around with tight T-shirts and jeans in front of women and supposedly become aroused at the sight of a few strands of a woman’s hair, a woman is made to feel shameful and alienated if she shows any signs of “indecenty.”

Veiling leaves no room for women’s agency in a country where the *roosarie* and *manteau* are deemed obligatory. Towards the end of Persepolis 1, an adolescent Marjane displays signs of resistance against the veil through her attire and actions in the public sphere. Marjane embraces Western symbols of popular culture through icons such as Iron Maiden, Kim Wilde, and Michael Jackson and reveals her newfound Westernized identity by wearing in public Western clothing such as a denim jacket, sneakers, and a Michael Jackson button. When confronted by the Guardians of the Revolution, she is scolded for wearing tight pants and even called a whore when one of the women yanks the scarf over her hair, covering the few strands she has let loose. After Marjane is made aware that her Western attire can get her into serious danger, she retreats back to her home where she blasts the song “We’re the Kids in America, Whoa” in her own private sphere (134).

For Satrapi and many other Iranian women during the Revolution, retreating back to their homes, their private spheres, and rendering themselves invisible in the public eye resulted in fragmented identities. Women struggled with conflicting polar opposites in their identities when in public they were forced to veil and in private, they usually could dress, speak, and act however they wanted. However, Satrapi declares that the image women portrayed in public and the real lives they lived behind closed doors created a “disparity [that] made [them] schizophrenic” (Persepolis 2 151). Under the Islamic revolution, the veil’s purpose was to unite all women under

one Islamic identity and to eradicate all sense of individuality; a woman's body was either united and veiled or naked and unveiled and there was no in-between. The forced veiling leaves Marjane in a state of fragmentation and struggle with her body. She can find no access to embracing her freedoms and liberated identity while she is constantly reminded that she is trespassing into the public sphere, a place she does not belong.

Worried about Marjane's defiant behavior in public, Marjane's parents decide to send her abroad to Austria that she might more safely seek the freedoms that she so desires and is unable to find in Iran. By the end of Persepolis 1, Marjane leaves behind her family, childhood, nation, and veil in an attempt to seek an identity under terms other than Islamic and religious.

Veiling and Unveiling: Revealing the Body

Pat Mule and Diane Barthel point out that the image Islamic women have of Western women is one "[w]hose life is free of the chador, and supposedly, of social constraints" (327). When Marjane's mother and father decide to send their daughter to Austria, they portray a life that is free from chaos and violence with promises of a better education and real independence. In Persepolis 2, when Marjane finally leaves Iran at the age of fourteen for Austria, she undergoes a process of self-revelation by discovering a "sexual revolution" in which she is able to explore her sexual identity and sexual difference. She is able to reflect on her body from outside the veil, instead of accepting or resisting the image imposed on her by the nation. However, this process of identity negotiation is fraught with ambiguity, contradiction, and struggle, due to the all-encompassing power the veil has over Marjane's perception of herself both in Iran and in Austria. The veil becomes what Michel Foucault would term a *panoptical*

instrument through which Marjane constantly feels under surveillance whether she is veiled or unveiled.

For Marjane, the veil haunts her in Iran and in Austria, because her body is constantly put on display and under the scrutiny of conflicting Western and Eastern ideals. In Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Michel Foucault explains that for power to be exercised over subjects, it is “their visibility [that] assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them” (187). When Marjane was veiled in Iran, she was under the control of the Islamic nation; yet, when she enters Austria, her body is now examined through the lens of Western ideals. According to Islamic tradition, the veil’s purpose was to cover up women’s bodies in order to render their sexuality invisible and give unity to a fragmented, or naked, stained body. When Marjane unveils her body, she renders her sexuality visible to the public sphere; her body is put on display to society. While the veil tied her to notions of national identity in Iran, her abandonment of the veil haunts Marjane’s cultural identity as she becomes alienated from the veil, causing her to feel dis-loyal to and dis-connected from her cultural values. During her time in Austria, Marjane feels a sense of castration when she is de-veiled, as she has adapted to the cloth that has become like her second skin. Her removal of the veil does not give her a sense of completeness as she had envisioned; instead, her body becomes “naked” and she is left disoriented and unrecognizable to herself.

Since the veil has become a mask to cover up Marjane’s perceived physical faults, she now has to find other means of compensating for her loss of the veil. In Iran, the veil physically homogenized all women, rendering individual identity within the public sphere non-existent. After discovering the meaning of the “sexual revolution” in Austria in Persepolis 2, Marjane undergoes not only a mental but also a physical transformation and cuts off her hair in order to

assimilate by revisiting her identity and her femininity: “I tried a few new haircuts. A little snip of the scissors on the left, and a week later, a little snip of the scissors on the right [...]. To my enormous surprise, my new look even pleased the hall monitors” (36). According to Irigaray, “Woman’s use of make-up and jewels [is] an attempt to compete in the phallic economy” (qtd. in Berger 99). Whereas the way she wore her veil in Iran was a “yardstick” of her devotion to her cultural identity, in Austria, physical appearance and vanity become Marjane’s means of finding inclusion in phallic society. Because women’s hair is a sign of dangerous sexuality and considered a defect among women in Iran, Marjane cuts off her hair in order to “normalize” her physical appearance. Also, Marjane takes on a radical haircut so that she may also fit in with her new “punk” friends in Austria.

Marjane realizes that a life without the veil does not necessarily liberate a woman from social constraints and that her discovery of the sexual revolution does not equate with freedom of choice over her body. One night before a party, Marjane wonders why her friend Julia is putting perfume “down there,” to which Julia replies that she is perfuming her *minou*, or vagina; Marjane replies that *minou* is also her aunt’s name, which means *paradise* in Farsi. For the first time, Marjane sees a women’s sex as being equated with something other than a “stain.” However, the sexual revolution Julia exposes her to involves public displays of affection and having sex with multiple partners, as Julia does, and Marjane feels alienated because, after all, she has come from an Islamic country. Marjane realizes that, like wearers of the veil in Iran, women in Europe do not have autonomy over their bodies and sexuality, and the *minou* Julia refers to is really the site of a man’s desire, to which Julia, revealing herself to be a patriarchal subject, exclaims, “Gentleman, welcome to paradise!”(30). According to Marjane, Julia’s

conformity to multiple men's desires is no different from Iranian women veiling in order to conform to Islamic codes of behavior that are prescribed by men for women.

Marjane is revolted by how women become the sexual objects of a male desire and how willingly women like Julia submit to male demands by having multiple sexual partners. Marjane is filled with an overwhelming sense of guilt by conforming and betraying her cultural traditions through physically altering her appearance. Even though veiling has served to transform women into sexual objects, de-veiling also makes Marjane feel as if men are appropriating her body to their own sexual desires. Marjane compensates for her lack, a clear sense of identity, through her dependency on her boyfriend Markus. Instead of using the veil to construct her identity, Marjane problematically relies on a man to construct her identity for her. In Persepolis 2 Marjane explains that her failed relationship with Markus represented more than just a love relationship; he was “the only person who cared for [her], and to whom [she] was wholly attached” (79). Marjane realizes that Markus, the only person who was interested in her during her time in Vienna, had enormous influence on the construction of her identity: “In retrospect...I wanted [Markus] to be at once my boyfriend, my father, my mother, my twin...I had projected everything onto him”(83). Her purpose to leave Iran and construct her own identity had failed, and she had not adhered to her grandmother's words to stay true to herself while in Vienna. Instead, Marjane feels betrayed because she allows Markus to exert control over her identity, only to use her and her body for his own selfish purposes and dispose of her when he is finished. By allowing herself to mimic Western ideals and abandon her own culture, Marjane is left in a state of guilt and isolation. She finally decides to return to Iran, leaving behind the individual and social liberties that she so falsely believed would unify her identity.

Again, Marjane re-veils in order to be intimately fused with her mother country in an attempt once again to come to terms with her national identity. By leaving Iran at the age of fourteen, Marjane believes that departing from the veil will free her body from social constraints and allow her to form her own identity. Instead, being separated from the veil only subjects her mind and body through a different form of power, under Westernized standards, which she cannot wholly resist or adapt to.

According to Anne Berger, the veil is a “prosthetic eye whose gaze cannot be escaped, while it sends back to women an image of their selves, which they strive to appropriate” (109). Soon, women no longer needed the Revolutionary guards and men to guard their moral status as good Islamic women but the veil automatically reinforced the ideas for them. In Persepolis 2, Marjane returns to Iran; yet she finds that the veil has mentally transformed her friends. When Marjane tells them about her sexual experiences in Austria, they immediately call her a whore. Marjane realizes that even though her friends show their defiance to the regime by wearing makeup under their veils, they still project an image that has been imposed on them by the fundamentalist regime. Marjane realizes that the veil has transformed them mentally and they too are holding her up to a measure of Iranianness. Not only have Marjane’s friends undergone a mental transformation, but Marjane’s experiences apart from the veil have allowed her to be more comfortable with her sexual identity and have a more Western outlook on sex, resulting in isolation from her friends. While Marjane has returned to Iran re-veiled in order to reattach herself to a national identity, she finds herself further detached from the nation she once called “home.” Now, Marjane has been transformed into the decadent Western woman she was taught to abhor by her homeland.

Marjane realizes that after the revolution, the veil's "prosthetic eye" became more visible and powerful as women lost more control over their minds and bodies with every passing year.

In Persepolis 2, Satrapi explains:

The regime had understood that one person leaving her house while asking herself : Are my trousers long enough? Is my veil in place? Can my make-up be seen? Are they going to whip me? No longer asks herself: Where is my freedom of thought? Where is my freedom of speech? My life, is it livable? What's going on in the political prisons? (148)

As the revolution progressed, women showed their rebellion through their attire less and less. Questions of free speech were replaced with questions of whether one's shade of lipstick would be reason for a revolutionary guard to stop her. Satrapi tells of the time she was interrogated all day over wearing a pair of red socks, a lustful color. Fear had paralyzed women's thoughts and ideas; yet, fear of revolutionary Guards was not the main concern for women. The fear that de-veiling might detach a person from her religious and national identity became a greater threat to women. Forced veiling reinforced a woman's dependency on her country, religion, and husband. Slowly, a woman's own capacity for self-awareness and self- reflection on her identity diminishes, forcing her to take on the image constructed for her under nationalistic terms.

By the end of Persepolis 2 Marjane's struggle to maintain agency over her mind and body comes to a screeching halt when she agrees to get married to her longtime boyfriend in Iran, Reza. Unable to enjoy freedoms and sexual rights as a couple, Marjane and Reza feel trapped in Iran, where showing public affection towards one another is only allowed in their parents' homes. Because the situation in their relationship begins to suffocate Marjane and Reza, they decide to get married in order to gain the freedom to act like a couple in public without

prosecution from the Revolutionary Guards. During the reception, Marjane exudes the image of a radiant bride, undergoing the traditional Iranian wedding ceremony; yet her demeanor takes on a different cast when she retreats back to her home with her husband. Drawing an image of herself locked behind prison bars, the protagonist signifies to her audience what had ultimately happened to her identity:

I had suddenly become a married woman. I had conformed to society, while I had always wanted to remain in the margins. In my mind, a married woman wasn't like me. It required too many compromises. I couldn't accept it, but it was too late. (163)

Draped underneath the *roosarie* and *manteau*, women had become the most important symbols of Islamic revivalism but at the cost of surrendering all rights to their minds, bodies, and voices so that they could portray the generic image of the Islamic woman, bound to the domestic sphere, confined to private spaces.

As a child, Marjane's home had been a safe retreat to oppose fundamentalism; yet, as an adult, Marjane experiences how the regime had begun to consolidate its power within the public and private realms. Women were now expected to display prescribed attitudes and behavior with regards to Islamic codes and standards in private and in public. In order to find a sense of balance between the private and public sphere, Marjane attends parties with her friends where they dance, drink, and freely mingle with the opposite sex, but the police do not leave them alone, even in the privacy of their own homes. Sometimes, Marjane and her friends are hauled off to prison; in one incident, Marjane's friend, Farzad, falls from the roof of a building and dies while the guards chase him. Instead of offering condolences to Farzad's friends, the guard

instead utters, “Your pal has gone to hell! Go on, put on your veils! Let’s load up these whores!”(Persepolis 2 156).

Frustrated by always feeling forced into performing a certain cultural identity through national symbols in order to adorn her body and mind as genuinely modern or authentically Iranian, Marjane decides to leave Iran permanently and reconstruct her identity in Paris. Embarking to France for good, in order to pursue her social liberties, Marjane realizes that the veil is only a piece of cloth, falsely used to compel loyalties to one’s nation. Marjane ultimately realizes that the symbol of the veil does not strengthen or minimize one’s loyalty and connection to her cultural identity. Throughout Persepolis 1 and Persepolis 2, the veil as a national and cultural symbol seems to complicate Marjane’s relationship with her body and her mind, because she has been forced to choose between modernism or traditionalism with no room for personal choice. However, Marjane discovers that being apart from the veil subjects women’s bodies to different standards from what she had faced in Iran. Feeling a sense of guilt and disloyalty by conforming to Western standards, Marjane again reveils, reconnecting to her relationship with her nation, and returns to Iran under the assumption that veiling will again render her identity as whole. However, as Anne Berger argues, “When some women re-veil themselves [...] the veil will never be the same” (112).

Shuffling between the two nations, Marjane is constantly enacting new constructions of her identity by adorning her body. Geraldine Brooks states in her nonfiction book Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women that getting to the truth of the veil is a matter of wearing it, “a matter of layers to be stripped away, a piece at a time. In the end, under all the concealing devices-- the chador, jalabiya or abaya, the magneh, roosarie, or shayla--was the body” (32). Whether she is covered or not, Marjane is always performing a symbolic form of

veiling over her body, layering on inauthentic constructions of her identity wherever she moves. In Borderlands: La Frontera, Gloria Anzaldua expresses her search for validation of women and their identities when she states:

I seek our woman's face, our true features, the positive and the negative seen clearly, free of the tainted biases of male dominance. I seek new images of identity, new beliefs about ourselves, our humanity and worth no longer in question (109).

By the end of the memoir, Marjane un-veils and begins to reveal something that she has never seen before. Under the veil and the punk attire, Marjane is able to self-reflect on her body, free from an Islamic society, and reconstruct her identity.

CHAPTER 2. NATION AND IDENTITY

Identity and Homeland

According to Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction, Simon During explains, “People identify with their identities to a greater or lesser extent because identities constitute the framework of their lives” (147). However, identities are not constructed by ourselves but are rather constructed for us through such outside influences as the symbol of the nation/homeland. The concept of having a “home” is an important factor in the lives of many people and plays an important role in the construction of one’s identity. The concept of a “home” provides us with our “roots”; it tells us where we originated and gives us a sense of meaning and place in the world. The idea of a home stands for shelter, stability, comfort, and a place where we can be embraced by others who share with us common ideas and traits.

Nations use traditions such as narratives, rituals, and symbols, like the veil in Persepolis 1 and Persepolis 2, in order to unite people and stimulate their sense of national identity and citizenship. However, Benedict Anderson argues in his book Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism that the concept of the “nation” is simply an idea and defines the nation as “an imagined political community” (qtd. in McLeod 68-69). Anderson further explains that members of a nation may never physically meet each other, but through the use of national symbols they believe that they “share a deep, horizontal comradeship” (69) or a common bond with other members of the nation-state. National symbols serve to unite people under common origins; yet, national symbols can also divide and marginalize members of a nation state, especially those who live in a diaspora and in exile. Even though individuals may enter nations that offer new traditions and symbols, members of a diaspora still have loyalty and ties to their nation and traditions back home. National symbols

give citizens a sense of belonging, but what happens to this idea of home and nation to those who move away from their homeland?

In the beginning of Persepolis 2, Marjane begins her narrative in November 1984 after she has left her homeland for Austria. After leaving her home, family, and friends, the protagonist embarks on a journey with her personal belongings, which include her material possessions along with her beliefs, traditions, and customs. Entering a new land, Marjane envisions a place where she can be free from the chaos and turmoil that surrounded her in Iran. When people move, they tend to desperately cling to a community with other diasporics to feel a mutual sense of belonging while embracing their new homelands and still trying to maintain their old customs and traditions. According to Monika Fludernik's introductory essay "The Diasporic Imaginary," in present-day diasporas "one encounters utopian visions [...] that promise peaceful existence in a tolerant society, a society in which one's collective identity can be cherished and preserved despite physical distance from the homeland"(xvi). Even though diasporics may occupy spaces and homes within these new nations, they can be made to feel unwelcome because of their culture, gender, race, and rituals. For Marjane, her Iranian culture and rituals make her an accepted member of her homeland, but these same factors are also used to exclude her from becoming an accepted citizen of Austria. These new nations do not always figure as one's "home away from home," and diasporics can find themselves being excluded and not accommodated within the borders of their host nations.

According to Vijay Mishra's "The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora," those who live in displacement from their home nations tend to construct imaginary homelands in which the motherland becomes an illusion, dream, or vision. In the case of the

Indian diaspora, Mishra explains that diasporic subjects express the image of their homeland in purist terms:

The fantasy of the homeland is then linked [...] to that recollected moment of when diasporic subjects feel they were wrenched from their motherland [...].

What is clear is that the moment of rupture is transformed into a trauma around an absence that because it cannot be fully symbolized becomes part of the fantasy itself. (423)

Traveling across borders alters the way one person or a diaspora thinks about the homeland. For example, an individual may look at another nation as a place of opportunity in order to provide better working conditions for himself. When viewed from his homeland, the host nation seems welcoming; yet when the immigrant arrives in the host nation, he realizes that cultural and language barriers prevent a smooth transition for him. The illusion of a promising nation soon transforms into an unfulfilling reality for the immigrant because the host nation did not fully live up to his expectations. The nostalgia of a return to his homeland now seems promising, but upon arrival back home he realizes that the conditions in his nation do not lessen his hardship, reminding him instead of the ruptures that forced him to leave his homeland in the first place. For the immigrant, the nation of origin then becomes an illusory place to which there is no actual return possible except in the imagination.

Remaining in the host nation becomes the only option left for immigrants, and according to John McLeod, those who live in the diaspora often experience a sense of limbo, “living in-between different nations, feeling neither here nor there, unable to indulge in sentiments of belonging to either place”(214). Instead, families float between the borders of their homeland and host nation, never having secure and attached roots to one place. Therefore, identities

become jumbled and the immigrant must face issues of whether to be partially or completely assimilated into the host country. Longing for a fixed and stable identity, diasporic persons attempt to maintain equilibrium between the spaces they currently occupy while maintaining an involvement back home. However, this doubled relationship creates loyalty issues in which the immigrant, to fit into a new culture, might mimic certain ideologies that ultimately make them feel disloyal to their homeland.

Often, diasporics firmly believe that their sense of identity is rooted in their homeland; thus a sense of “in-betweenness” proves to be problematic. In R. Radhakrishnan’s essay “Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora” the author ponders the idea of how a person could occupy two spaces at one time without feeling guilt and a sense of betrayal towards their homeland. There is no doubt that the question of loyalty arises, and Radhakrishnan poses questions that haunt the immigrant in the diaspora:

How could someone be both one and something other? How could the unity of identity have more than one face or name? Which is the real self and which is the other? How do these two selves co-exist and how do they weld into one identity?
(120)

Diasporics may feel a sense of frustration because in the state of “in-betweenness,” stability is never achieved. In an essay entitled “The Rainbow Sign,” by Hanif Kureishi, the author argues that even though immigrants must live with the fact that their identity can never be firmly stabilized in one, secure place, “the space of the in-between becomes re-thought as a place of immense creativity and possibility” (qtd. in McLeod 215). In a process called *hybridization*, the immigrant’s identity ceases to be fixed or stable and instead is reconstructed through various

forms, practices, places, and cultures. Therefore, a diasporic's identity is constantly moving, shifting, and open to change.

The term *hybridity* is a concept that refers to an identity that is constructed between cultural borders. In "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha" the author explains that hybridity occurs at the moment in which other positions are able to emerge: "This third space displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority [...] which are adequately understood through received wisdom"(211). In other words, Homi Bhabha explains that this cultural hybridity allows for new meanings and a new area for negotiation and representation that can be fulfilling and meaningful for the immigrant.

Diasporics constantly grapple with the questions that Radakrishnan poses in his essay because the myth of the nation suggests that there is only one true, authentic identity, which is linked to the homeland. It is easy to see why issues of loyalty occupy such a central role in the diaspora as uprooted people try to construct a stable identity in their host nation while trying to maintain ties with their homeland. Radakrishnan states that the process of hybridization does not have to be problematic, but that the hyphenation it produces becomes an area in which an immigrant can embrace both national and ethnic identities without feeling disloyal towards one over the other. Therefore, one's identity can take a hyphenated form such as Japanese-American, Indian-American, or Iranian-European without having to worry whether the ethnic and national practices create divided allegiances. The diaspora shows that no one true authentic culture exists and refutes the idea that identity is always stable and rooted in one place.

Radakrishnan offers the perspective that when people move across borders, identities also shift and take on new perspectives and definitions. Authenticity is a false illusion and the notion that living within the homeland will guarantee a true ethnic identity is a false promise. I agree

with Amitav Ghosh's standpoint in his novel The Shadow Lines when he states, "We can know places that are distant as much as we can misunderstand and misrepresent places we inhabit" (qtd. in Radakrishnan 126). When we open ourselves to new cultures and homelands, then identities shift. Through this "third sphere," diasporics realize that identity does not exist in one authentic form.

Crossing Borders

While in Iran, Marjane Satrapi envisions Europe as a place that can fulfill her cultural expectations through popular icons such as Kim Wilde and Iron Maiden and where she can be unveiled and wear "punk rock" attire such as denim jackets and Nike sneakers. However, soon after her arrival, Marjane realizes that Austria is far from what she had imagined it would be like in Iran. From the perspective of her homeland, Austria had become an illusion and a haven from Revolutionary Iran, based on commonly held assumptions of the West; yet, when she enters the host nation, she instead discovers that this view of Austria is more imaginary than true.

In Persepolis 2 Marjane realizes that some of the students at school take an interest in her primarily through the stories she has to tell of her life in Iran. Julia, Momo and the rest of her "friends" are only interested in her because she represents a dark, war-torn, fragmented Iran. In Makarand Paranjape's essay "What about Those who Stayed Back Home? Interrogating the Privileging of Diasporic Writing," the author analyzes Indian diasporic writers such as Salman Rushdie and V.S Naipaul and explains that their crossover success in the UK and America is due to the fact that they portray an India that is dark, fragmented, poor, exotic, and corrupt. According to Paranjape, "Only a devalued and abused India is marketable in the West" (239). Marjane only becomes interesting among her friends when she portrays Iran as politically

unstable and corrupt. During Christmas, everyone makes plans to go away, but when she attempts to explain that in Iran, they do not celebrate Christmas, that Persians celebrate the New Year on March 21, she finds that they are no longer interested in her stories.

Desperate to feel a sense of belonging within the larger community of friends she encounters in Austria, Marjane attempts to mimic the rituals, behaviors, and ideals she learns from her friends. From the social events that she attends in Austria, she learns that partaking in drugs plays a central role in the lives of her friends at school. Willing to conform to fit in, Marjane joins in on these social rituals:

So I pretended to participate, but I never inhaled the smoke. And as soon as my friends' backs were turned, I stuck my fingers in my eyes to make make them good and red. Then I imitated their laughter. I was quite believable. (Persepolis 2 38)

Marjane even manages to deny her nationality during a party in school when she tells a young boy that she is French and that her name is Marie-Jeanne (she explains that at the time, to be Iranian was equated with being evil). Instead of embracing her unique, Iranian, individuality, Marjane thus partakes in a process of homogenization in order to blend in with the rest of her friends in Austria. Satrapi again “veils” her body in accordance with European modes of attire. She layers on the makeup and clothes in order to portray a different type of identity. While in Iran, she was forced to identify herself by the veil; in Austria, she voluntarily identifies herself by her punk image.

Marjane's attempts to mimic Western ideals fail because no matter how hard she tries to blend in, she finds herself being excluded on the basis of her ethnicity. John McLeod explains that when people cross over borders, immigrants are often made to feel like outsiders due to their

race, ethnicity, or gender. For Satrapi, hiding her nationality is problematic because her body is “marked.” She is not blonde, blue-eyed, and light skinned, and her accent is a clear giveaway that she is an immigrant. While Marjane goes to Austria to pursue her French education, she finds it ironic that she now lives in a country where the norm is light-haired, light-eyed, citizens. Her physical attributes are enough for people to reinforce to the young teenager that she does not belong in Austria. When Marjane first arrives in Austria, she attempts to create a false home in order to feel a sense of belonging. However, not only is she isolated from her friends, but Marjane feels at odds with herself, making her feel uncomfortable with the new identity she has taken on for herself. Marjane realizes that as a foreigner in Austria, she has to make twice the effort to be accepted; yet, no matter how hard she tries, she can never be fully assimilated and welcomed.

Marjane’s isolation forces her to reevaluate her concept of “home.” She feels a sense of loss and regret for leaving Iran but mostly betrayal for having conformed to social norms in Austria which would have been condemned in her homeland. Marjane’s efforts to assimilate make her feel a sense of disloyalty towards her nation. Like the veiled Iranian women back home who were forced to portray the decent, Islamic women in the public sphere and the dutiful housewife in private spaces, Marjane faces a sense of division in her identity between the public and private spaces she occupies. While in public with her friends, Marjane is made up like a punk, smokes joints with her friends, and discovers a sexual revolution; but in private, she is overcome with a sense of guilt: “The harder I tried to assimilate, the more I had the feeling that I was distancing myself from my culture, betraying my friends and my origins, that I was playing a game by somebody else’s rules” (39).

Marjane feels an overwhelming sense of guilt because she feels forced into performing according to certain social norms in order to authenticate herself as a legitimate member within the “imaginary borders” of Austria. She leaves Iran, hoping to be relieved of the traumatic ruptures and social constraints she has faced in her native home. However, when she crosses into her new territory, she not only finds herself discriminated against based on her native culture but also finds herself in the midst of an identity crisis. As a result, her fragmentation hinders her objective of assimilating in the host nation while maintaining ties back home. Monika Fludernik illustrates the point that those who immigrate to another country can never de-attach themselves from the past. For Marjane, her ethnicity is (to use Fludernik’s words) “a ghost that has followed [her] and catches up with [her] after arrival” (xxii).

Ashamed at having been overly Westernized, Marjane attempts to re-establish her origins by returning to Iran and fulfilling her desire to occupy a home. By returning home and re-attaching herself with her homeland, Marjane believes that she will relieve the isolation she had endured in Austria. However, when Marjane first arrives in Tehran at Mehrabad Airport, she is instantly reminded of the reason she left Iran in the first place. The customs agent interrogates her and searches her belongings, attempting to confiscate any signs of Western decadence, then tells her to fix her veil. In the city, Marjane is surrounded with images of death, with billboards of martyrs and street names changed to honor the victims of the Iran-Iraq war. After four years of waiting to be reunited with her culture, Marjane finds her return unsettling and unbearable, claiming that from the moment she entered Iran, “[She] immediately felt the repressive air of [her] country” (Persepolis 2 92).

Numerous visits by friends and family members fail to ease Marjane in her return to Iran. Marjane does not want to start her life over in Iran until those who surround her know what she

has endured in Austria, but she knows that telling the truth will prove to be impossible. Even though her friends and family had suffered during the war in Iran, they had the privilege of knowing that they had a home and a community to belong to. She does not want to burden them with her past in Austria because she knows that they would never know “the confusion of being a third-worlder” without a home (Persepolis 2 113).

Similar to her experiences in Austria, Marjane finds herself submerged in living the “Iranian” public life and the “European” private life with little negotiation between the two. Marjane’s return to her homeland creates the problem of divided allegiance between the parts of her new hyphenated identity. When Marjane returns to Iran, she envisions herself as maintaining the same Iranianness as she had when she left in 1984, but she realizes that the Iranian in Iranian-European is no longer the same; her Iranianness had now been westernized. Her new, hyphenated identity puts her at odds with several of the women at the university because they cannot tolerate her western behavior.

By the end of Persepolis 2, Marjane and Reza are offered a project by their University to design a plan for a theme park based on Iran’s mythological heroes. Immediately, Marjane envisions a plan to build a theme park based on Western symbols: “We wanted to create the equivalent of Disneyland in Tehran. We had thought of all the details: Dining, Lodging, Attractions...” (175). Marjane incorporates Iran’s history but gives it a modern outlook by displaying unveiled women on mythic creatures with their hair flowing and revealing the shapes of their bodies. In part, the theme park project reflects Marjane’s own body and identity. She wants to live as a Westerner while still allowing her culture and homeland to have an emotional influence over her. The theme park project becomes a last effort for Marjane to find a sense of completeness in her homeland once more, but when the Mayor declares the project

“unachievable,” Marjane realizes that maintaining her “in-betweenness” in Iran is also impossible (177). Entering Iran as an Iranian-European, Marjane realizes that she cannot be both traditional and modern at the same time in a country that only sees two types of women, veiled and un-veiled. Because Marjane’s identity had evolved and taken on a new form in Austria, she believed that Iran was capable of the same modernity. Unable to embrace both traditionalism and modernism, Marjane makes a third and final move, this time to France, where she constructs a “third sphere” for her identity.

A Space of One’s Own

Tired of constantly being forced to portray the role of the traditional, Iranian woman in private and public spaces, Marjane’s hybridity allows her to recreate a sphere in France where she can embrace her Iranian-European identity. Excluded in Austria because she was not modern enough and marginalized in Iran because she was too modern, Marjane leaves for France in order to reconstruct her identity. R. Radhakrishnan points out that there is no one authentic interpretation of what it means to be of a certain nationality, arguing that the idea that one can understand a place only when one lives in that place is a misconception. Radakrishnan points out in his essay that it is important for those who migrate to lands and encounter customs not their own to realize that this does not necessarily result in an estrangement from their homelands but can serve as a form of enlightenment:

It is also quite normal for [...] people, who now have lived a number of years in their adopted country, to return through critical negotiation to aspects of their culture that they had not really studied before and to develop criticisms of their chosen world. (126)

Radhakrishnan points out that as a result of opening our homelands to new standards, mutations occur in our identities, a development that occurs in Persepolis 2 when Marjane must ask herself what being an Iranian-European woman is all about.

Homi Bhabha points out that this “third space” makes possible any number of positions to form. Whereas crossing borders earlier in her memoir created divisions and conflict between Satrapi’s modernism and traditionalism, Satrapi discovers, as Homi Bhabha argues, “the border is the place where conventional patterns of thought are disturbed and can be disrupted by the possibility of crossing. At the border, past and present, inside and outside no longer remain separated as binary oppositions but instead commingle and conflict”(qtd. in McLeod 217). By the time Marjane leaves for France, she does not see any conflicts and divisions in her identity but rather sees the new space she will occupy as a place of immense possibility. Vijay Mishra points out that diasporas always call into question the idea that “a people must have a land in order to be a people” (426).

Borrowing from Paul Gilroy’s terms in his book The Black Atlantic, one may conclude that instead of finding Marjane’s identity in her homeland, or in her “roots”, she must find her self through “routes” (qtd. in McLeod). The “third sphere” allows for a space of her own where she no longer has to mirror Austrian or Iranian standards. She is able to reconstruct her own identity where she can see with multiple perspectives and consciousnesses instead of always defining herself by how others see her. Satrapi realizes that the myth of the nation gives the illusion that one must live in Iran and adhere to its symbols and traditions in order to be authentically Iranian. Satrapi’s reconceptualized interpretation of her homeland is just as meaningful as the state’s version of what it means to be Iranian. Belonging and a sense of

community can be discovered by the values and interpretations that are formed during one's travels.

The "third sphere" also allows for Satrapi her own private and public spaces in which she can remove the veil and begin to reconstruct her identity. According to Gloria Anzaldua, "Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create" (95). Throughout Satrapi's memoir, she constantly faces trauma and suffering, but by living in this "third sphere" she can discover the impetus to write in order to enact a process of healing and rendering her self or selves as whole. By living in the borderlands, Satrapi can remove layers of false identity and reconstruct her identity through writing. In essence, Persepolis becomes a hybrid text in itself, "an endless cycle of a [narrative] making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning out of the experience" (Anzaldua 95).

CHAPTER 3. TRAUMA AND COMICS

Trauma

Philippe Lejeune defines the term “autobiography” in his book *L'Autobiographie en France* as a “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (qtd. in Eakin 57). A person’s existence and personality are defined by many factors that make up the self, one’s identity. The concept of identity is complex and fluid for everyone, not just in the diaspora. As shown in the first two volumes of Satrapi’s memoir, *Persepolis 1* and *Persepolis 2*, identity is never stable and is constantly being reconstructed by the protagonist.

Identity is susceptible to change for various reasons; yet one of the reasons for Marjane’s ever changing identity is due in part to the various traumatic ruptures that occur in her life. An event that is described as being “traumatic” negatively affects our identity. Because of the painful and distressing events that occur as a result of the trauma, we are often forced to suppress the nature of trauma, which results in a fragmentation of the mind and the self. Even though trauma is extremely common and occurs at one point or another in the lives of most people, we suppress traumatic memories because they leave us devastated and uncomfortable with ourselves and those surrounding us. As a result, the private and secretive nature of trauma prevents the sufferer’s healing from the devastating effects of the trauma.

Traumatic memories can be overwhelming if left undisclosed. As a child, Marjane is faced with the trauma of knowing the devastating effects of war. The trauma of the Cultural Revolution of Iran and the Iran-Iraq war force a fourteen-year-old Marjane to be uprooted from her homeland and family. Sent to Austria to be safe from the war, Marjane faces the trauma of being thrust into the culture of a new nation, one that is unwelcoming towards her. Desperately

needing to reveal her traumatic past, Marjane turns to her friends and her teachers, all of whom are uninterested in her story because they believe that she is exaggerating and lying to draw attention to herself, rendering her sense of self as abnormal.

Trauma victims may find that even those closest to us, with good intentions, may also be the same people who reinforce the idea to silence our traumas. Janet Mason Ellerby argues in Intimate Reading: The Contemporary Women's Memoir that "[...] because the trauma is so devastating, we ask survivors to be convincingly strong, to heal quickly, to hide their scars, to restore that prior self so that we can have our own sense of well being established"(141). Because traumatic memories can be so overwhelming and shocking, it is often difficult for those around us to help us cope with the trauma itself. Unable to reveal to her friends in Austria the emotional trauma of war in Iran, trauma that had imposed silence which had distanced her from her family and home, and unable to tell her parents the shame and guilt of the lies and suffering she had undergone in Austria, Marjane begins to self-destruct, both emotionally and physically.

However, suppressing the past begins to overpower her. Because she is unable to confess her secrets in Austria, Marjane feels isolated from those around her in Austria and Iran. Feeling guilty by lying to her parents about her drug use and being rejected by her friends in Austria, Marjane uses her body to inflict self-punishment for the overwhelming shame. After living on the streets for three months, living off scraps of food and cigarettes, Marjane becomes seriously ill and lands herself in the hospital. Isolated from everyone, Marjane's secrets weigh on her. Instead, Marjane resorts to self-punishment by inflicting pain upon herself through isolation, drug use, and ultimately, the decision to commit suicide to help bury her shame. Satrapi explains:

I think that I preferred to put myself in serious danger rather than confront my shame, my shame at not having become someone, the shame of not having made my parents proud after all the sacrifices they had made for me. The shame of having become a mediocre nihilist. (Persepolis 2 90)

Marjane's untold stories become self-destructive to her identity. Gloria Anzaldua explains of a woman in this situation: "That's why she makes herself sick--to postpone having to jump blindfolded into the abyss of her own being and there in the depths confront her face, the face underneath the mask"(95). Because of the backlash that she experiences in Austria by revealing her trauma, Marjane realizes that she must "veil" her secrets from her family so that they are not ashamed of how she so easily forfeited her culture, traditions, and values. Unable to face the past--her lies, her trauma, and her body--Marjane makes an agreement with herself not to speak about the past events of her life in Austria and Iran. By denying the past, Marjane fails to see how her disparity in Iran as a young adult is due to unresolved issues in the past.

Satrapi's inability to reveal her secrets to her friends and family causes her to develop a distorted sense of her identity. Because she does not fully deal with the trauma of her past, she struggles to find her sense of self, believing for a time that returning to her homeland will once again unify her sense of identity. Instead, she realizes that the traumatic ruptures that occurred in her childhood and uprooted her from her homeland had changed her. As Ellerby points out, "[I]n the aftermath of the trauma, the self which emerges is vastly different from the earlier self" (136). Ellerby explains that while life will always move on after the trauma, it will never resemble what we once were accustomed to. Because she felt like a foreigner in Austria and Iran, Satrapi confessed, "My calamity could be summarized in one sentence: I was nothing [...]. I had no identity. I didn't even know anymore why I was living" (Persepolis 2 118). The ordeal

of the trauma in Iran and living in the diaspora where her identity is divided between her homeland and host nation invariably change Marjane.

After a failed suicide attempt, Marjane tells her audience that she would now take control of her life and reclaim her identity. However, her solution to alleviate her calamity is in the form of a cosmetic makeover. By altering her appearance, Marjane believes that she will unify her identity and simultaneously be healed from her past trauma. Believing that a healthy mind and body would allow her to have a clean slate and banish the past, Marjane changes her wardrobe and becomes an aerobics instructor. When this does not work, she gets married as a last resort to cure her ailment. By layering on inauthentic identities one after the other, Marjane's situation only becomes more and more suffocating.

Satrapi is unable to heal from her trauma because she links her authentic identity to the site of the traumatic rupture, her homeland. Being in Iran is only a reminder to her of why she left in the first place. Marjane finds herself even further displaced in a country where no woman is safe from the fundamentalist regime, neither in the private nor public sphere. Satrapi points out, "The regime had absolute power...And most people, in search of a cloud of happiness, had forgotten their political conscience. I wasn't any different from them [...]. I lived from day to day without asking myself any questions" (170). Satrapi illustrates how people living under the regime masked themselves by "veiling" any sign of resistance or suffering, signifying how the regime left people paralyzed with fear. By the end of Persepolis 2, Marjane declares, "...Not having been able to build anything in my own country, I prepared to leave it once again" (185).

The burden of knowing that she has metamorphosed mentally and physically because of her trauma forces her to constantly shift around, in desperation, to retrieve a single, unifying identity. However, postmodern thinking dismisses the notion of an authentic identity, suggesting

that identity is not stable but rather always being reconstructed. By the end of Persepolis 2, an adult Marjane realizes the devastating effects of avoiding the past; she would always be on the run. Without ever enacting a form of healing and understanding of the trauma, Satrapi realizes that she could never come to terms with her self and her identity. The reader can see how Marjane physically adorns her body in order to enact a false identity, constantly “veiling” and layering on inauthentic constructions imposed on her by her social environment(s). According to Eakin’s How Our Lives Become Stories, “[I]t is possession of a body image that anchors and sustains our sense of identity” (11). Wherever she goes, Marjane attempts to layer on the identity that is constructed by the social environment(s) that invent the false notion of an authentic identity. By not questioning and just enacting what is socially accepted, Marjane acts out an inauthentic identity, an identity to which Hertha D. Sweet-Wong refers as “a performance, a mask, yet another commodity” (171). Satrapi’s identity is destabilized, fragmented, and conflicted by the veil. Whether the protagonist is veiled or unveiled, how she adorns her body in Iran and in Austria can serve as a “mask” that covers inauthentic forms of her self.

Writing and Healing

At the end of Persepolis 2, the protagonist leaves Iran (in June 1994) to attend the School of Decorative Arts in Strasbourg in France. By 2002 and 2003, Satrapi reveals to the world her memoir in the first two books in a still evolving series, Persepolis 1: The Story of a Childhood and Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return. Upon settling in France, Satrapi decides to re-visit her past in the form of a written narrative. Writing can be therapeutic because it helps us to understand the past and the traumas that have affected our identity formation. Through writing,

Satrapı can have a deeper understanding of the trauma in her life and realize that this is something in her past that she must accept in order to heal from it and move on with her life.

Through writing, Satrapı enacts a process of *revealing* by symbolically *unveiling*, transforming her private narrative into a public one. By revisiting the past, Satrapı realizes that one way that she defines herself in the diaspora is by the image that her homeland and her host nation project on her. The story of one's life is always focused on one's relationship with persons or objects, one is never autonomous. As Eakin points out, "[A]ll identity is relational" (43). In *Persepolis 1*, Satrapı's narrative is relational in the sense that she always focuses on her community and, especially, her relationship with her mother, grandmother, and father, but that community has also played a pivotal role in silencing her narrative. As one feminist writer says of such women, Satrapı "is the battlefield for the pitched fight between the inner image and the words trying to recreate it" (Anzaldua 96). Throughout the memoir, Satrapı is silenced but by the end of the narrative, she realizes that a voice must come out and a body must be revealed. By removing herself from Iran and its fundamentalist regime, Satrapı is able to peel away layers of inauthenticity in order to enact a manner of identity formation through writing.

The popularity of Marjane Satrapı's memoir may be attributed to her use of this distinct sub-genre of autobiography, the confessional narrative. Rita Felski defines the term in her essay "On Confession" as "a type of autobiographical writing which signals its intention to foreground the most personal and intimate details of the author's life [...]. Confession is personal history that seeks to communicate or express the essential nature, the truth of the self" (83). As human beings, we may become overwhelmed with the desire to confess our secrets to others, whether in written form or spoken words to family members and our closest friends. With the recent surge of autobiographical works by diverse Iranian authors such as Azar Nafisi and Nahid Rachlin over

the past few decades, it can be undoubtedly said that many individuals feel an urgency to confess our secrets, even as people are attracted to listening and reading about other people's confessions.

The reader becomes crucial for Satrapi in that the author feels the need to tell her secrets in order to evoke empathy. Ellerby points out in her memoir that "[...] we need readers; they are crucial collaborators in completing the writing transaction" (73). In Persepolis 2, when Marjane Satrapi returns to Iran she explains:

I just wanted them to know that I too had suffered...My life in Vienna was far from easy...I lived in the street. I was alone. No one loved me...[And] for them to feel some compassion for me..."Oh my dear, You have suffered too much"... "Drink this herb tea"... "It's fresh-squeezed orange juice, I made it myself." "Do you want me to do a little dance for you?" For them to understand me. (113)

Without confessions, we would be forced to bury our secrets and cover up our traumas, perhaps living with overwhelming guilt for the rest of our lives. Through confession, we seek reassurance, consolation, and intimacy between the reader and the author of the text. Satrapi's memoir then becomes a cry for help in which she seeks some validation from her audience in order to make them understand what she has been through. We also seek validation from the audience to show that our traumas are common, making us feel "normalized" when we know that others like us have also gone through what we have.

Text and Comics

In the article “A Graphic Self: Comics as Autobiography” Rocio G. Davis points out that in Satrapi’s Persepolis “the protagonist uses “sequential text and image--as a medium for her memoir that enacts her process of self-identification and negotiation of cultural and/or national affiliation” (264). By using words and images, Satrapi not only manages to supply the audience with detailed accounts of her narrative but also supplements her story with images which illustrate character and atmosphere in order to validate her accounts as a child growing up in pre-revolutionary Iran. By reading the multi text and image narrative, the audience is also able to visit the reenactment of those memories that Satrapi has managed to replicate in a visual way.

What gives Persepolis credibility is the way that Satrapi enacts a moment in history that the rest of the world has very little information about or access to. During that time in history, most people around the world associated Iran with fundamentalism and terrorism. Satrapi allows the reader to see, through a comic book format, a very human glimpse into the world of a young girl trying to cope with all these events. Because the writing is supplemented by images, Satrapi can convey the feelings and emotions that Marjane felt as a child trying to grow up in pre-revolutionary Iran.

In “Identity Light: Entertainment Stories as a Vehicle for Self-Development,” Kate McLean and Avril Thorne examine how some memoirs use “light writing” as a form of healing and understanding traumatic experiences. McLean and Thorne define “light writing” as a manner of writing about the “entertaining side of narrative identity” rather than the more serious identity that is found in most memoirs (112). Satrapi enacts comedy in her memoir in order to “lighten” a very dark and fragmented part of her life and of Iranian history. Amy Malek also points out in her essay “Memoir as Iranian Exile Cultural Production” that Satrapi’s stories are

so harrowing that she uses humor to “see readers through the most trying parts of her story”(372). Because Satrapi depicts her trauma with a bit of humor, she sends out the message to her audience that even though she faced war, depression, loss of homeland, and a fractured identity, she survived.

Many readers might be taken aback by how Satrapi might incorporate comedy into some of the most devastating and harrowing scenes in the novel. For example, in a scene in Persepolis 1, Satrapi speaks about the young children in Iran recruited to be martyrs during the Iran-Iraq war: “The key to paradise was for poor people, thousands of young kids, promised a better life, exploded on the minefields with their keys around their necks” (102). Drawing a picture of children exploding on the minefields, Satrapi makes readers find a sense of irony in that the very next scene shows Marjane running around at a party laughing and smiling. Marjane exclaims, “Meanwhile, I got to go to my first party, not only did my mom let me go, she also knitted me a sweater full of holes and made me a necklace with chains and nails. Punk rock was in, I was looking sharp!”(102). While many readers might expect Satrapi’s tone to be distressing because the memoir focuses on war and death, readers are faced with a sense of irony in that Satrapi uses comics as a way to illustrate how she copes with trauma.

In a world dominated by the prose novel and memoir, graphic texts are not typical reading material. However, Satrapi creates a portrait of daily life in Iran that reveals more about her country and society than perhaps any history book shows. It is through these child-like illustrations that Satrapi gives a human voice to a dark point in Iranian history. Even though readers are accustomed to written memoirs, Satrapi proves that images can represent life just as well or even better than prose alone does.

We interpret the world through images and language. It is through images stored in our brains as much as through language that we are able to recollect the past. Sometimes these images are triggered by a familiar smell, sense, or touch and can offer us a glimpse of our memories. Something direct and more universal is achieved by using images along with words to convey the past to an audience. Satrapi uses simple, flat-lined, one-dimensional, drawn out characters in her memoir and adds minimal text to describe each scene. Even though her characters are drawn with no rounded dimension to them, Satrapi has a clever way of drawing facial expressions and body language for her characters. In a chapter titled “The Sheep” in Persepolis 1, Marjane learns that the Revolutionary Guards have just executed her Uncle Anoosh. She states, “And so I was lost, without any bearings [...]. What could be worse than that?”(71). While the caption states that she was upset over her uncle’s death, the picture of Marjane floating in space with a look of hopelessness on her face allows the audience to have a better understanding of her trauma.

Also, in a critical moment of desperation, in a chapter titled “The Veil” in Persepolis 2, Satrapi uses the juxtaposition of words and images for a dramatic effect. After being homeless for three months in the streets of Austria, Marjane is faced with the dilemma of whether to stay or leave for Iran once more. Deciding to go home, Marjane explains, “And so much for my individual and social liberties [...]. I needed so badly to go home” (91). The caption is as powerful as the illustration, in which we see a tired and shame-filled Marjane staring at herself in the mirror with the veil on her head once more. Unable to escape the panoptical gaze implied by the veil, Marjane re-layers another inauthentic construction upon her identity. By returning to the veil, Satrapi makes the audience see in the picture and the language how the veil, following and haunting her wherever she goes, is attached to notions of her Iranian identity.

Satrapi's juxtaposition of language and images allows the two to comment upon and complement each other, allowing for the enhancement of her memoir. In the essay "Memoir as Iranian Exile Cultural Production" James Storace explains:

In the cartoon world that she creates, pictures function less as illustration than as records of action, a kind of visual journalism. On the other hand, dialogue and description, changing unpredictably in visual style and placement on the page within its balloons, advance frame by frame like the verbal equivalent of a movie. Either element would be quite useless without the other; like a pair of dancing partners. (qtd. in Malek 374)

Even though Satrapi uses flatly drawn characters and simple language, her message is gripping and compelling, and the graphic form allows for more understanding and intimacy between Satrapi and her audience. Although the memoir would have been just as convincing if she had simply used words, the use of both language and pictures adds a dash of playfulness and realism to her story.

By the second half of Persepolis 2, Satrapi's illustrations not only become a way of remembering the past but also a way to show resistance to the regime. Instead, through her pictures, Satrapi's memoir gives the audience a glimpse of un-veiled women in the privacy of their own homes. During the late 1990s, Iran enacted a law that made it a crime to print pictures exploiting women or "encouraging women to ornamentation" (qtd in Esfandiari 88). However, Satrapi draws her friends, mother, and grandmother unveiled, and draws the Revolutionary Guards in an un-flattering manner, a risk that the author takes even though she is aware that the penalty is imprisonment for depicting unveiled woman and portraying Mullahs in an unfavorable way.

In the essay, “Why Communities of Women Aren’t Enough,” Nina Auerbach argues, “Some feminists claim that writing about men reinforces the patriarchy at the expense of a female literary power base” (156). Satrapi’s memoir predominantly focuses on living in a patriarchal society in Iran run by Revolutionary Guards and fanatical, Islamic clerics. By drawing and writing about the patriarchy, Satrapi can gain an understanding of its power and thereby claim control over it. Auerbach explains, “By writing about the patriarchy, as by eating it, I can engorge its power” (156). In Persepolis, Satrapi writes about the patriarchy in such a way that it loses its power over her, thereby granting herself agency in the reconstruction of her identity.

By abandoning the veil, Marjane realizes that this revealing is the only way that she can self-reflect and seek new images of herself; peeling back all the layers by literally and metaphorically unveiling the body, this unlayering becomes the ultimate act of reconstructing her identity. In reconstructing her trauma through words and illustrations, Marjane makes sense of them and inscribes them with meaning. Satrapi’s stories are veiled and layered with uncertainty and trauma, and by enacting a process of remembering, she is gaining an understanding of her past and herself through the medium of words and art. Satrapi not only pulls back the veil on her culture but also grants herself agency in writing, an act which reveals the body and uncovers her identity.

According to Anzaldua, “This is the sacrifice that the act of creation requires, a blood sacrifice. For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body--flesh and bone” (97). Anzaldua points out that it is only through a symbolic act of cutting up and opening the body that an individual can see what her identity is

composed of. Only when we cut open through the inauthentic layers and the flesh and begin to bleed are we able to write the story of our lives.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to book one of Marjane Satrapi's memoir, the author explains that the reason she wrote this memoir was to offer a very human perspective on the world of Iran, a country that has been associated with terrorism and fundamentalism for the past thirty years. Satrapi explains, "As an Iranian who has lived more than half of my life in Iran, I know that this image is far from the truth. This is why writing Persepolis was so important to me"

(Introduction). As an Iranian woman who has lived in America most of my life, I find that Satrapi's memoir has become a way for me to understand my own identity and the implications that veiling has for me and my family.

During the 1930s, my great-grandmother was forced to un-veil during the Reza Shah Pahlavi's regime, and during the 1970s, my mother was forced to veil during the Ayatollah's Revolution. Both these women's bodies were transformed into objects, leaving the nation-state in control of their identities. Similar to its place in Satrapi's memoir, the veil has also haunted the women in my family since the early 1930s. Throughout the history of Iran, the government has exerted power over women's bodies by forcing generations of women in families like mine to un-veil and re-veil.

During the 1980s, my mother says that she was one of the last women she knew to veil. She faced taunts and comments from men when she walked out uncovered. The revolution claimed that in order to be accepted as an equal to men, she had to be veiled. The veil meant to her that she had submitted to defeat in a patriarchal regime and had acknowledged the distinct power that men had over women. Soon, universities enforced segregation between men and women, and on buses women were forced to sit at the back of the bus while men sat in the front.

Even though my mother would veil, this did not stop men from harassing women like my mother in public.

The Ayatollah Khomeini claimed that veiling grants women the license to enter into public space as well as providing them with a means to strike down barriers between men and women. However, my mother felt that the veil only reinforced the idea to men that a woman only belongs in the domestic sphere. The government claimed that the veil would end men's harassment towards women; yet my mother claims that such advances only got worse. She was taunted by the Revolutionary Guards always demanding that she cover her hair or degrading her by calling her names if she had a bit of hair sticking out. The worst, my mother claimed, were the taxis where men and women were crammed into one car together and women felt men's hands move freely across their laps.

By 1985, my mother had enough, and along with my father, moved to America with my sister and me. My parents had lived in America briefly in the early seventies and saw it as a haven from Iran. By the time we left, the Iran-Iraq war was also underway, and my parents decided that Iran was no place to raise children, especially two girls. Even though they had left a war-torn country, their troubles in America were not quite alleviated. At the time, Iran was only associated with its religious clerics, veiled women, and the hostage crisis of the American embassy in Tehran. My mother recalls that when she told Americans she was from Iran, they would cringe. Sometimes, Americans were too quick to assume that they knew everything about my mother when she told them where she was from; yet all they knew was what they had seen on television.

My parents speak about Iran from time to time, expressing how they wish they could go back and live there. However, the country they speak of exists only in the time before the

Revolution, when Iranian men and women were free to do as they pleased. In that period, my mother says, Iran was a country that was little different from Europe: everything from their clothes to their television shows to their universities was westernized. Every few years, my parents visit Iran to fulfill their nostalgia for their homeland; yet every time, they come rushing back, unable to fulfill what they could never again retrieve. After a trip, I always wait for my father to come home and say, “Things just aren’t the same anymore.” Before a trip, my mother is exhilarated to return to Iran to visit old friends and family members; yet every time she puts on her veil, she is reminded why they left in the first place.

I have only been to Iran twice since my family left in the mid 1980s. I have had a good time visiting cousins, aunts, and uncles, but when I leave, I am relieved to remove the veil and head back home to America. I do not support the veil for my own reasons, but I have full respect for any women who choose to veil. Throughout the history of Iran, women have been either forced to veil or forced to un-veil; yet at no time in the past thirty years have they been asked how they feel about such impositions. My mother left because she refused to have her status, body, and identity dictated to her by the government through the symbol of the veil. My great-grandmother refused to un-veil because, for her, the veil was a demonstration of her devotion to the Islamic faith. I believe that forcing women to veil is just as oppressive as forcing a woman to un-veil; both remove her right to her body.

Writing and reading about the veil has allowed me to see the implications it has for me. Satrapi’s memoir has allowed me to see the importance of the body and how it is linked to a woman’s identity. I have also come to realize that the symbolic act of veiling is prevalent in all forms of society whether it is in the visible form of a veil or through makeup and clothes. All forms of “veiling” are what Luce Irigaray refers to as the “industry of wrapping” in which

femininity becomes a yardstick by which women measure themselves. What I now understand is the importance of making sure that we always enact a sense of awareness about ourselves and the ways we construct our bodies. Borrowing Virginia Woolf's terms in A Room of One's Own, I have come to understand the importance for women to have a room of their own in which to write. Satrapi requires a space of her own, in the form of a "third sphere" where she becomes a writer and claims agency over her body. Writing in the "third sphere" allows Satrapi to un-veil or peel away representations of herself while revealing the body.

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