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Graphic Representation of Oppression and Rebellion in *Persepolis*: *The Story of a Childhood* through the Eyes of a Child

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ABSTRACT This paper aims to explore the ways in which oppression and rebellion are represented in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. Satrapi, in this graphic novel, gives a poignant autobiographical account of her growing up in a troubled country through an Islamic revolution, cruelties of a totalitarian regime and a devastating war with Iraq. What makes this work unique is the telling of a horrendous tale of trauma, oppression and rebellion through the eyes of a child using the medium of graphic narrative. Marji's presence in the novel as a child narrator and witness is characterized by her absence in the sense of her inability to comprehend the complexity of the environment and circumstances that she is a part of. Yet she struggles hard to interpret the events using her childhood consciousness and eventually imbibes the dark realities of a cruel world that play a significant role in shaping her being. The paper discusses the aptness of graphic medium in representing the trauma that the victims of oppression and violence experience. Besides, the paper comments on the effectiveness of autobiography in narrating a tale of historical significance.

KEYWORDS oppression, Iranian revolution, autobiography, graphic novel, memory

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to explore the ways in which oppression and rebellion are represented in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. Satrapi, in this graphic novel, gives a poignant autobiographical account of her growing up in a troubled country through an Islamic revolution, cruelties of a totalitarian regime and a devastating war with Iraq. By choosing to narrate the incidents through the eyes of Marji, her childhood self, Satrapi lends a subtle dark humor to an otherwise oppressive tale. The pictures depicting scenes witnessed by the child Marji or imagined by her makes them all the more credible and multiply the intensity of the impact they create. The child's perspective forces the readers to question their own assumptions and deconstructs reality as perceived by an adult mind. The paper primarily focuses on the child's view of oppression and rebellion and the interplay of presence and absence in the narrative. Marji's presence in the novel as a child narrator and witness is characterized by her absence in the sense of her inability to comprehend the complexity of the environment and circumstances

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that she is a part of. Yet she struggles hard to interpret the events using her childhood consciousness and eventually imbibes the dark realities of a cruel world that play a significant role in shaping her being. The paper discusses such instances reflecting the child's perspective about incidents (often oppressive) beyond the scope of her comprehension. The paper also explores the aptness of graphic medium which Satrapi chooses in representing oppression and how it complements the telling of the tale through a child's perspective. Besides, the paper examines how Satrapi uses the autobiographical mode to subvert unidimensional history and offers alternative personalized versions of reality that are aimed at shattering the stereotypes about Iran and her people.

REPRESENTING OPPRESSION AND MEMORY USING GRAPHIC MEDIUM

What makes *Persepolis* unique compared to any historical document of similar nature is the fact that it is a memoir written in the form of a graphic novel. The graphic novel derivesits roots from comics. The term "comics" is used as a singular noun to refer to a medium of communication that combines both words and images and is particularly suitable for parody and satire owing to its traits of exaggeration and caricature. Scott McCloud in his book *Understanding Comics* defines comics as "juxtaposedpictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response."[1] Compared to comics, the term "graphic novel" is a contentious term as it strives to distinguish itself from its precursor, which is considered to be a periodical for children and claim for itself mature literary themes aimed at an adult audience. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, "*graphic novel*is usually taken to mean a long comic narrative for a mature audience, published in hardback or paperback and sold in bookstores, with serious literary themes and sophisticated artwork."[2] However, there isn't really a rigid line telling apart the two forms except for the purpose of confounding people and reinforcing "the already too present distinction between high and low culture."[3] What also makes such a distinction ineffective is the fact that comics, contrary to being children centric, actually "appeal to many different groups and age ranges, and encompass a huge variety of genres and styles … [and so the] texts that are originally intended for

1. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), p.9.
2. Christopher Murray, "Graphic Novel," The Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropedia (2015)
3. Lauranne Poharec, Showing the Unsayable: Trauma and Juxtaposition in Persepolis and A Child's Life and Other Stories (master's thesis, The University of New Mexico Albuquerque, New Mexico, July 2014), p.10.

publication in book form sometimes take advantage of the possibilities for a longer narrative, different formats, and superior paper quality, which can be seen as an argument for preserving the distinction between comics and graphic novels."[4] Further, the graphic medium, employing both the visual and the verbal means simultaneously, is able to offer multi-layers of meanings, which makes it a rich medium to narrate stories. As per Chute and De Koven;

> "(G)raphic narrative is anautographic form in which the mark of handwriting is an important part of the rich extra-semantic information a reader receives. Andgraphic narrative offers an intricately layered narrative language—thelanguage of comics—that comprises the verbal, the visual, and theway these two representational modes interact on a page."[5]

The comics/ graphic medium with its wide ranging possibilities and artistic scope is apt for conveying narratives involving oppression, childhood trauma, memory and history. The visual image has "an intensified power to move an audience … as a result, readers, viewers, and spectators are more directly affected by what they see than by what they hear or read, for instance, and as such might have a better understanding of the trauma felt by the victims"[6] The fragmented form of comics consisting of panels or boxes (that depict a segment of an action) and 'gutters' (the space between the panels) makes them an effective medium to reconstruct the experiences related to flashbacks, recollections and fragmentation of memory. Moreover, owing to their fragmented forms, comics constantly require and invite the readers to participate actively in the process of making meaning by interacting with the their visual aspects or presences and filling the gaps or absences between them. As explained by Hilary Chute, "it is through the flexible architecture of their pages, with their stitching of absence and presence, that graphic narratives comment powerfully on the efficacy and the limitations of narrativizinghistory."[7] Besides, it is through what McCloud calls "closure" which is the "phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole"[8] that the readers comprehend the entire story by interlinking the images present and mentally piecing together the missing links. McCloud further adds that in comics," panels fracture both time and space, offering a

4. Christopher Murray, "Graphic Novel," The Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropedia (2015)
5. Hillary L. Chute, and Marianne DeKoven, "Introduction: Graphic Narrative," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies, 52/4* (Winter 2006), p.767.
6. Lauranne Poharec, Showing the Unsayable: Trauma and Juxtaposition in Persepolis and A Child's Life and Other Stories, p.23.
7. Hillary Chute, "Ragtime, Kavalier & Clay, and the Framing of Comics," *MFS Modern fiction studies 54/2* (2008), p.270.
8. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, p.63.

jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality."[9] The reading of comics facilitates the construction of meaning through both manifestations of frames conveying meaning in a fragmented manner and absences that in particular give the freedom to the readers to create meanings using their imagination. The medium of comics provides common grounds for reality and flights of fantasy to coexist simultaneously allowing interplay of the real and the imaginary, a space which is crucial to victims of oppression for survival. This interplay between reality and fantasy is considered crucial from a psychological perspective particularly in the context of individuals having gone through disturbing experiences in their childhood. Such individuals dissociate themselves from the real world which they relate with the unpleasant memories of their traumatic past and often create a parallel fantasy world which they frequently lapse into in order to escape their distorted sense of reality. Commenting on the link between trauma and dissociation, Haaken says, "In order to survive emotionally overwhelming experiences, the individual splits off the memory of the traumatic experience from consciousness. The dissociated memories are preserved in an alter ego state, or latent state of consciousness… [and emerge] over time in a fragmentary re-experiencing of the trauma.[10] The comic medium has its usefulness in being able to show the fragmentation of memory that is associated with a traumatic/shocking childhood experience. It thus makes visible the unspeakable or the unrepresented usually associated with extreme pain/oppression or humiliation by means of the absences that are as significant as the fragmented presences that make up the structure of the comic medium.

Another interesting feature about the comics medium is the way space is used to represent the concept of time. According to McCloud, "In learning to read comics we all learned to perceive time spatially, for in the world of comics, time and space are one and the same."[11] Further, the size of the panel and the style of writing are manipulated to highlight certain parts in terms of their significance in the narrative and to indicate the time length of a particular scene. Large panels with highlighted style of writing and huge pictures appear longer in duration so that the reader needs to pay more attention and spend more time while comprehending the information presented through them. This

9. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, p.67.
10. Janice Haaken, "The Recovery of Memory, Fantasy, and Desire in Women's Trauma Stories: Feminist Approaches to Sexual Abuse and Psychotherapy," in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds.), *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader (*Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p.354.
11. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, p.100.

feature proves effective in representing trauma/oppression especially when narrated from a child's perspective as the graphic medium can compensate the child's limited comprehension and verbal expression of trauma through visual and spatial means.

According to Chute and DeKoven; "Graphic narratives, on the whole, have the potential to be powerful precisely because they intervene against a culture of invisibility by taking the risk of representation."[12] Besides, the chief tools of exaggeration and caricature that the comics employ have subversive potential and make great tools for satire and parody. Satrapi uses these in her work to undermine the oppressive forces of fundamentalism. For this reason, writers especially women being a marginalized class are using the graphic medium for the unique platform it provides them for voicing their concerns and experiences which otherwise struggle to find expression.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MODE AS AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO HISTORY

Named after the capital city of the great Persian Empire, *Persepolis* is an autobiographical tale that tells the plight of the author and her fellow Iranians during the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the subsequent Iran – Iraq war in the 1970's and 80's. According to Lejeune, an autobiography is 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."[13] The definition of the term autobiography carries an implication of relationship built on trust between the author and the audience that renders the author accountable for the narration and is necessary for the narrative to acquire its credibility. An autobiography adopts the individual's perspective and is inherently subjective deriving its claim to authority from a presumed identity between author and subject as opposed to history which deals with collective time and experience with its claim to objectively verifiable knowledge.[14] Autobiography thus offers an alternative approach to the historical version of a particular event by personalizing history andproviding greater access to and representation of reality. Notwithstanding the factthat autobiographies are personal accounts, they are powerful "means for women to claim a voice and subtly subvert the binary divisions that tend to associate men with the public sphere and women with the

12. Hillary L. Chute, and Marianne DeKoven, "Introduction: Graphic Narrative," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies, 52/4*, p.772.
13. Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p.4.
14. Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians, & Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), p.11.

private one."[15] *Persepolis* is certainly inspired from socio-political reasonsand combines these personal/privateand the public spheres. The Introduction to the book mentions that ever since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the country has come to be associated with unfortunate epithets such as "fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism"[16] especially in the eyes of the Western world and the Western media whose only impression of Iran is of "women in chadors and guys with guns."[17] Through *Persepolis*, Satrapi while giving a child's view of the Revolution remembered during adulthood attempts to shatter the stereotypical one-dimensional image of Iran as a country associated only with the veil, tyranny and bombs and present instead a realistic, complexand multi-faceted picture of the Iranian society. Commenting on the style adopted by Satrapi in *Persepolis*, Hilary Chute in her book *Graphic Women* writes that "[Satrapi's] style locates itself along a continuum of Persian art,"[18] but that "[her] insistence on black and white marks a difference from the color-rich classic tradition of Persian art."[19] Her minimalistic use of black and white further points to the avant-garde tradition that she seems to be influenced by.[20] She mixes European and Persian influences to disrupt the fixed categories and subvert the hierarchies that exist between the west and the east, and give voice to the trauma of a childhood lived during the chaotic times of the Iranian Revolution, which was as much a cultural revolution as it was a socio-political one.

DISCUSSION

Persepolis in many ways is a sort of revenge and rebellion employed by Satrapi against the oppressive Islamic regime that destroyed her childhood and estranged her from her family. By choosing to narrate the incidents through the eyes of Marji, her childhood self, Satrapi lends a subtle dark humor to an otherwise oppressive tale. The pictures depicting scenes witnessed by the child Marji or imagined by her makes them all the more credible and multiply the intensity of the impact they create. The child's perspective

15. Lauranne Poharec, Showing the Unsayable: Trauma and Juxtaposition in Persepolis and A Child's Life and Other Stories, p.22.
16. Marjane Satrapi, "Introduction." Introduction in *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003)
17. Farideh Goldin, "Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs," *Iran Chamber Society* (2004). Web. 19 Oct. 2015.
18. Hillary Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p.144.
19. Hillary Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*, p.145.
20. Hillary Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*, p.145.

forces the readers, mainly presumed to be adults, to question their own assumptions and deconstructs reality as perceived by an adult mind. Equally effective is her style of language that is simple and unsophisticated, as that of a ten year old ought to be. The short broken sentences mostly in dialogic form that she has used to suit the comics mode give her narration a bold andshocking appeal.

The first chapter of the novel titled "The Veil" opens with frames depicting imposition of veil as an instrument of subjugation. The first picture shows a sullen Marji wearing a veil and it reads, "This is me when I was 10 years old. This was in 1980."[21] The second frame shows five veiled girls looking subdued and confined, one almost out of the frame with only an arm visible and reads, "and this is a class photo. I'm sitting on the far east so you don't see me. From left to right:Golnaz, Mashid, Narine, Minna."[22] Despite identical veils and postures, Satrapi gives them individual names and draws them with unique facial expressions and hair-styles emphasizing their individuality. The last frame on the same page depicts the unveiled girls in the school playground, using their veils like playthings: one as a jump-rope, another as reins and yet another as a scary monster-mask.The veils in this frame cease to be associated with oppression as kids put them to different creative uses. As Richards and Williams put it: "Here the veil loses its reiterative function as clothing; girls use to mimic violence surrounding them … [which] indicates that violence is becoming normative everywhere."[23]

Few frames later, an angry, law-enforcing revolutionarydepicted by a stern figure with constricted brows and a face 'veiled' behind his beard appears announcing the closing of bilingual and co-ed schools, denouncing them as symbols of decadence and calls for a "cultural revolution."[24] Satrapidraws the revolutionary's face almost hidden behind the beard so that it appears 'veiled' andsignifies oppression and subjugation of women. A few frames later, "Satrapi destabilizes the male, patriarchal performance by inserting a frame of women in veils with fists up confronting a group of non-veiled women."[25]

21. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), p.3.
22. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.3.
23. Judith Richards, and Cynthia M. Williams, "Performing the Veil," in Lan Dong (ed.), *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives: Essays on Theory, Strategy and Practice* (North Carolina: Mcfarland, 2012), pp.137.
24. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.4.
25. Judith Richards, and Cynthia M. Williams, "Performing the Veil," in Lan Dong (ed.), *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives: Essays on Theory, Strategy and Practice*, pp.137.

The subsequent chapters show the tortures that the state inflicts on the people resisting its policies, a child's response to this trauma and her efforts to understand this torture. In the chapter titled "The Water Cell," Marji hears from her mother that her grandfather was tortured by being "put … in a cell filled with water for hours"[26] by the fundamentalists. Unable to comprehend the torture yet disturbed by what she hears, Marji decides to experience it firsthand and a caption in the frame reads: "That night I stayed a very long time in the bath. I wanted to know what it felt like to be in a cell filled with water."[27] The frame shows a picture of little Marji lying in the bath with eyes wide open trying to understand the experience with God seated on her left inquiring about her action. In the subsequent frame, Marjiappears standing in a puddle of water naked out of the bath looking at the hands and saying, "My hands were wrinkled when I came out, like Grandpa's."[28] The scene points to the child's naïve perception of torture and her re-creationand internalizing of the experience to feel the discomfort it might have caused to her grandfather, perhaps still failing to understand how far it is an instrument of torture. In the chapter titled "The Heroes," a family friend narrates incidents of brutal torture that the political prisoners were subjected to. One of the frames shows a prisoner named Ahmadistrapped at the wrists and an arm gripping a hot iron burning his back while another shows an iron on the ironing table and little Marji wondering; "I never imagined that you could use that appliance for torture."[29] The caption in the next frame reads, "In the end, he was cut to pieces"[30] while the picture that follows shows Ahmadi'sbody wearing only an underwear appearing as a doll broken apart by a child with his neck, arms, torso and knees coming lose. Through this scene, Satrapi suggests how a child unable to comprehend dismemberment conceptualizes the same by construing up an image of a broken toy. There is an attempt to understand torture, but as a child Marji repeatedly fails to comprehend the persecution, however, there is certainly an internalization of the resulting shock. Referring to the perception of reality by a child, Corinne F. Gerwe explains:

> "A child's reality can be distorted by individual perception, and a child's perception of an experience can increase the intensity of the experience … If a child perceives something to be real … that reality will be associated with response it generates."[31]

26. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.24.
27. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.25.
28. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.25.
29. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.51.
30. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.52.
31. Corinne F. Gerwe, *The Orchestration of Joy and Suffering: Understanding Chronic Addiction* (New York: Algora Pub., 2001), p.23.

In "The Trip," Satrapi depicts the scene of a flagrant attack on woman's dignity in the chapter when two fundamentalists mistreat her mother. On being roughed up by fundamentalists, a petrified Taji says, "Two guys, two bearded guys! Two fundamentalist bastards… the bastard… the bastards…they…"[32] Use of broken sentencesand the repetitive manner reflectthe hysterical and mortified state of her mindmore intensely than any lengthy prosecould. The technique employed by Satrapi is piercing and hard hitting. Later, as she recuperates from the shock, she is able to put her misery into a sentence as she says, "They insulted me. They said that women like me should be pushed up against a wall and fucked. And then thrown into garbage. And that if I didn't want that to happen, I should wear the veil."[33] Besides depicting the painful and unjust treatment of women, the episode exposes the child, Marji, to a misogynistic and patriarchal ideology. Equally shocking and insightful is the 'absence' of any reaction on Marji's part as her childhood consciousness is not yet able to comprehend the implication of such a dreadful incident. All we learn about her reaction is from a petrified look on her face and bulging eyes that depict a strange mix of shock, horror and vacuity due to her inability to grasp the full meaning of the episode. The child in her simply absorbs the fear and insecurity into her nascent psyche that starts finding an expression gradually. Expounding the impact of trauma on children, Avigdor Klingman writes:

> "Children often attempt to shield their parents from knowing how much the children's own trauma has affected them…[Such denial] may be considered an adaptive strategy … to cope and survive dangerous wartime situations, and it also serves the function of preserving the child's internal representation of his or her parents as a secure base."[34]

Similarly, "In Shabbat," Satrapi recalls the traumatizing memory of losing a friend in a missile explosion that took place on the street where she and Nedalived. Walking past the Baba-Levy's house with her mother, Satrapi noticed a turquoise bracelet belonging to Neda in the rubble. A caption inside the frame reads; "The bracelet was still attached to … I don't know what…"[35] The picture in the frame shows Satrapi with her hand covering her mouth and bulging eyes, dumbstruck with terror. The next frame is without a caption and pictures Satrapi covering her eyes with her hands as if to erase the horrifying image

32. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), p.74.
33. Marjane Satrapi,*Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), p.74.
34. Avigdor Klingman, "Children and War Trauma" in Ann K. Renninger and Irving Sigel (eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology, Child Psychology in Practice* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), pp.625.
35. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.142.

that has already left its imprint on her mind. The last frame is done entirely in black with a caption at the bottom that reads: "No scream in the world could have relieved my suffering and my anger."[36] Using a blank black frame, Satrapi represents the horror and grief that she went through as a child watching her friend's mutilated arm, which any picture or any number of words however eloquently written would have failed to express. The black frame signifies the un representability of the emotion involved here which Marjiwould rather forget than remember by recalling which explains her obvious choice of depicting it so. It also points to limitation of language or even pictures to express complex emotions that are better represented by their absences than presences.

Satrapi has used dark hum our effectively to show how history could be different for people belonging to different social classes. In the chapter titled "The Key," she describes how young poor boys are brainwashed and lured into war with false promises of attaining heaven replete with food, women and houses. A frame shows shadows of boys being blown into air with keys to 'paradise' dangling from their necks while the caption reads, "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."[37] In a parallel of sorts that speaks volumes about the class differences, another frame right below depicts a party where kids belonging to the socially privileged class appear jumping and dancing, a heaven on earth perhaps! On the extreme right upfront is young Marji "looking sharp"[38] dressed like a punk with her hair upblown.Satrapicontrasts the exploding and flying of bodies in the frame on top with kids jumping to punk rockin the frame below. This juxtaposing of visually similar yet thematically opposite scenes heightens the contrast between the two (one signifying celebrations while the other death) and makes them appear a lot more intense. According to Richards and Williams, "Satrapi's artful useof expressionist drawings and skillful pairing of violent scenes with those of 'normal' life maximizes the opportunities the graphic novel offers for representing that which is unrepresentable."[39]

Marjane uses an ironical tone to describe how self-beating and self-torture become rituals that everyone is forced to follow to express one's allegiance to the state. But for the girls at the school, it becomes a game that everyone starts deriving fun from. A frame

36. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.142.
37. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.102.
38. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.102.
39. Judith Richards, and Cynthia M. Williams, "Performing the Veil," in Lan Dong (ed.), *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives: Essays on Theory, Strategy and Practice*, pp.136.

in the chapter titled "The Key" shows little Marji lying on the ground with her arms and feet in the air and yelling, "kill me"[40] while the next one shows her face down on the ground. On being asked about what she is doing on the ground, she replies defiantly, "I am suffering, can't you see?"[41] The imitation of violence and suffering by Marji and her friends as a game can be seen as a psychological defense mechanism used by children to mock authority and overcomeoppression. This also points to the fact that a violent environment can have its implications on the psychology of children and lead to undesirable changes in their behaviour. While imitative behaviour can be taken for a child's normal reaction to any prevalent state, prolonged exposure to terror and violence could lead to its replication through behaviour.

> "During times of war, aggression and violence are legitimized by norms of behaviour previously unacceptable…War time aggression may affect the upbringing and socialization of children…[who may] absorb a cultural indoctrination of hate and violence, often based on religious or cultural supremacy..."[42]

In the same chapter, girls again show their defiance of the religious restrictions by using toilet paper instead of ribbons to decorate their classrooms for a religious ceremony.This apparent act of blasphemy by the girls is suggestive of their unwillingness to have their freedom curtailed. Such acts are also indicative of the girls' assertion of personal freedom in the face of religious authority.

The child Marji is not willing to accept the world with its oppression, suffering, pain and fear.Therefore,she uses her imagination to create a parallel world where she envisions God as a buddy and has frequent discussions with him about things that bother her inexperienced mind. She even aspires to be the next prophet and writes down rules for a perfect, misery-free world while the fundamentalist are designing a living hell in the real world. A frame depicts God, a figure in white with flowing beard and a benevolent demeanor holding her in his lap, affirming her claims to be a prophet, "Yes, you are celestial light, you are my choice, my last and best choice."[43] This points to the creative spark little Marji possesses as a child which enables her to channel her imagination in a constructive manner during troubled times and make up a friend.

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40. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.97.
41. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.97.
42. Cole P. Dodge, and Magne Raundalen, *Reaching Children in War: Sudan, Uganda, and Mozambique* (Bergen: Sigma Forlag, 1991), p.92.
43. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.8.

> "In the case of an Imaginary Friend, the child's central identity remains consistent, but he or she projects alternate personality traits onto an invisible target or inanimate object … the Imaginary Friend possesses capabilities that the individual perceives the self to personally lack … kids who create Imaginary Companions are more creative, less shy, …[and] possess good coping skills ..."[44]

Thus for Marji, the fantasizing can be seen as a way of her coping with the oppression and chaos that's prevailing about her. Another frame shows her in triplicate, the left looking poised and holding a balance, the middle calm with her hand making a peace sign, and the right one with an angry expression wielding a sword and shield. The caption on top of the frame reads; "I wanted to be justice, love and the wrath of God all in one."[45]

As Marji grows older, she starts expressing her freedom and rebellion by ways typical to teenagers around the world that include wearing jeans, dressing like punk and listening to pop music. Even though she can't help wearing the veil, she flaunts a denim jacket on top with a Michael Jackson badge and sneakers and on getting questioned by the guardians of revolution makes up a fake story saying, "Ma'am, my mother's dead. My stepmother is really cruel and if I don't go home right away, she'll kill me. She'll burn me with the clothes iron!"[46] Here, we find Marji using tales of torture she heard as a child to her advantage. Throughout the narrative, a desire to savour life and enjoy every moment despite the oppression and carnageremains a dominant theme. By depicting her parents and adults partying, enjoying music and drinking alcohol, Satrapi shows the rebellious, fun-loving and life cherishing side of the Iranians, contrary to the stereotypical fundamentalist one.These are also the efforts by the adults around her to maintain a semblance of a known normality to a world quickly becoming abnormal. A frame in the chapter "The Wine" aptly describes the joie de vivre of the people and the caption reads; "In spite of all the dangers, the parties went on.'Without them it wouldn't be psychologically bearable,' some said. 'Without parties, we might as well just bury ourselves now.' My uncle invited us to his house to celebrate the birth of my cousin. Everyone was there. Even grandma was dancing."[47]

44. S. Bowman, *The Functions of Role-playing Games: How Participants Create Community, Solve Problems and Explore Identity* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2010), p.133.
45. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.9.
46. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.134.
47. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, p.106.

CONCLUSION

It can be safely concluded that *Persepolis* as a graphical novel manages to represent the oppression and rebellion of Iranian middleclass poignantly. The graphic medium applied by Satrapi in particular seems apt in bringing out the pathos of a terror-afflicted people and their zeal to resist and survive the doom spelled by the autocratic fundamentalist regime as witnessed and experienced through the eyes of a child. The child's view with its humor, naivety, and sense of wonder lends to the narrative a moving yet refreshing appeal. At the same time, by employing the autobiographical mode, Satrapi is able to offer a parallel version of reality that's far unlike the documented history and offers a different way of looking at Iran and its common people. *Persepolis* thus attempts to redeem the image of Iran and its people by drawing a complex myriad of images related to Iran and Iranians that range from fundamentalism, fear, oppression, bombs, torture, mayhem, and carnage to contraband rock music, teenage rebellion, school pranks, carousing and merrymaking, peace and wisdom. It reaffirms our faith in the dignity and freedom of individual and the invincible force of life that dares to find an expression and assert itself amidst the toughest circumstances. Finally, *Persepolis* is an endeavor to keep alive the memories of the Iranians who lost their homes, families and lives during the period of revolution and war. It would be apt to conclude with the following words from the Introduction: "I also don't want those Iranians who lost their lives in prisons defending freedom, who died in the war against Iraq, who suffered under various oppressive regimes, or who were forced to leave their families and leave their homeland to be forgotten."[48]

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