

Persepolis

BY MARJANE SATRAPI

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- Satrapi was born in Rasht, Iran, and grew up in Tehran in a middle-class Iranian family. Both her parents were politically active and supported Marxist causes against the monarchy of the last Shah. When the Iranian Revolution took place in 1979, they were dismayed and intimidated by the Muslim fundamentalists who took power.
- During her youth, Marjane was constantly exposed to the growing brutalities of the various regimes. She witnessed many family friends being persecuted, arrested, and even murdered. She found a hero in her paternal uncle, Anoosh, who had been a political prisoner and lived in exile in the Soviet Union for a time. Tragically, as detailed in Satrapi's autobiography, Anoosh was arrested again and executed; his body was buried in an unmarked grave in the prison. Anoosh was only allowed one visitor before his execution, and he requested Marjane. The loss of her uncle left her deeply upset. As a young teen, Marjane began to act out, getting into trouble with the police for breaking modesty codes and buying music banned by the regime.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- Her parents grew concerned that the young Marjane, a strong-willed and rambunctious teenager, would run afoul of the strict new public codes for women. They arranged for her to study abroad, and in 1983 she arrived in Vienna, Austria to attend school. According to her autobiographical graphic novel, *Persepolis*, she stayed in Vienna through her high-school years, staying in friends' homes, but spent two months living on the streets. After an almost deadly bout of pneumonia, she returned to Iran. She studied visual communication, eventually obtaining a master's degree from Islamic Azad University in Tehran.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- *Persepolis* is a graphic autobiography by Marjane Satrapi depicting her childhood up to her early adult years in Iran during and after the Islamic revolution. The title is a reference to the ancient capital of the Persian Empire, Persepolis.
- For 2500 years, Persia, known modernly as Iran, was ruled by a monarchy of shahs (kings). Demonstrations against the shah began as early as 1977 with the shah eventually fleeing into exile at the beginning of 1979.
- Tension increased in Iran with protests against the shah and US government being led both by anti-capitalists (Marxists) and radical Islamic sects.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- Toward the end of 1979, the US embassy in Tehran was overthrown and 52 American diplomats and citizens were held hostage for 444 days.
- The new government installed by the guerillas and rebels was ruled by the Ayatollah Khomeini, an Iranian Shia Muslim leader, who held strict religious views, including those that oppressed women, people of non-Muslim faiths, homosexuals, and more.
- The Mullahs and Revolutionary Guard of Iran now impose strict laws that favor Shia Muslims and forbid things such a women working, homosexuality, popular music, and more. Books, audiotapes, movies and magazines cannot be published without the permission of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.
- Persepolis begins in 1980, the year after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, when Marji is 10 years old.

CAPITALISM VS COMMUNISM

- One of the many conflicts underlying the Iranian Revolution was the debate about whether capitalism or Marxism should prevail in Iran.
- According to the article you just read, what is capitalism?
- What are socialism and communism?

CAPITALISM VS COMMUNISM

CAPITALISM

- An economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state
- US economic and political system; often debated because private industry does not consider the health and welfare of citizens and puts profits first

MARXISM (COMMUNISM/SOCIALISM)

- A society in which all property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs
- Often fails because corrupt leaders do not actually distribute wealth and some abuse human rights

DISCUSSION

- Based on the information in the article, do you believe you are more of a capitalist or a socialist/communist?
- Have you ever thought that the capitalist system used in the US (and other countries) might be flawed? Why?

DISCUSSION

- Supporters of capitalism often say that capitalism makes it easy to bring the best products or services to the market, which is great for the average person. In the context of the article you read, does capitalism encourage and help people start their own businesses? Is this important for the economy?

DISCUSSION

- One common criticism of capitalism is that it encourages greed and harsh competition for money. In the context of the article you read, does money buy happiness?

ARGO

- We will now watch the first two minutes of the film Argo, which tells the story of the overthrow of the US Embassy in Tehran in November 1979, and the subsequent escape and extraction of 6 Americans who hid in the home of the Canadian ambassador.
- The US CIA devised a plot to extract the Americans hiding outside the embassy by creating a cover story that they were a film crew scouting locations for a movie called Argo. The 2012 film Argo tells this story along with a brief overview of the revolution which we will now watch.