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Feminism, globalization and identity in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*

Hong Yu Connie Au

Marjane Satrapi'nin Persepolis'inde feminizm, küreselleşme ve kültürel kimlik

Öğretim Görevlisi, Gaziantep Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, connieauhongyu@gmail.com, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3681-1510

Abstract

Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi is a significant contemporary literary work that explores the interconnected themes of feminism, globalization, identity, and cultural conflict through autobiographical storytelling. The story is set during and after the Iranian Revolution, the graphic memoir portrays the experiences of Marjane as she navigates political oppression, gender expectations, migration, and cultural hybridity. This article examines how the text reflects globalization through transnational experiences, Western cultural influence, migration, and intercultural communication while simultaneously presenting a feminist critique of patriarchal systems in both Eastern and Western societies. The article also argues that Satrapi presents feminism not only as resistance against gender oppression but also as a process of self-expression, education, and identity formation. Through visual narrative and personal testimony, the memoir challenges stereotypes about Muslim women and questions simplistic representations of Iran in global media. Furthermore, the novel demonstrates how globalization influences female identity by exposing women to multiple cultural ideologies regarding freedom, gender roles, and modernity. Ultimately, Persepolis portrays feminism and globalization as interconnected forces that shape personal development, political consciousness, and cultural identity in the modern world.

Keywords: Feminisim, Globalization, Cultural Identity, Persepolis

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Öz

Persepolis, feminizm, küreselleşme, kimlik ve kültürel çatışma temalarını otobiyografik anlatım aracılığıyla ele alan önemli bir çağdaş edebî eserdir. Hikâye, İran Devrimi sırasında ve sonrasında geçmekte olup, Marjane'nin siyasi baskılar, toplumsal cinsiyet beklentileri, göç ve kültürel melezlik arasında yaşadığı deneyimleri anlatmaktadır. Bu makale, eserin küreselleşmeyi ulusötesi deneyimler, Batı kültürünün etkisi, göç ve kültürlerarası iletişim aracılığıyla nasıl yansıttığını incelerken, aynı zamanda hem Doğu hem de Batı toplumlarındaki ataerkil sistemlere yönelik feminist bir eleştiri sunduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Makale ayrıca Satrapi'nin feminizmi yalnızca toplumsal cinsiyet baskısına karşı bir direniş olarak değil, aynı zamanda kendini ifade etme, eğitim ve kimlik oluşumu süreci olarak sunduğunu savunmaktadır. Görsel anlatım ve kişisel tanıklık aracılığıyla eser, Müslüman kadınlara yönelik kalıplaşmış yargılara meydan okumakta ve İran'ın küresel medyada basit ve tek yönlü biçimde temsil edilmesini sorgulamaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra roman, küreselleşmenin kadın kimliğini nasıl etkilediğini; kadınları özgürlük, toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve modernlik hakkındaki farklı kültürel ideolojilerle karşı karşıya bırakarak göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak Persepolis, feminizm ve küreselleşmeyi, modern dünyada bireysel gelişimi, politik bilinci ve kültürel kimliği şekillendiren birbiriyle bağlantılı güçler olarak tasvir etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Feminizm, Küreselleşme, Kültürel Kimlik, Persepolis

Introduction

Globalization has transformed modern societies through migration, cultural exchange, technological communication, political interconnectedness, and the rapid circulation of media and ideas. Literature increasingly reflects these transformations by exploring themes such as diaspora, intercultural conflict, transnational identity, exile, and the negotiation between local traditions and global influences (Giddens, 1990). At the same time, feminist literature has examined how women resist patriarchal systems and construct independent identities within changing political and social environments. Feminist writers often focus on issues such as gender oppression, bodily autonomy, education, identity formation, and female resistance against restrictive social norms (Hooks, 2000). *Persepolis* combines these perspectives by presenting a deeply personal narrative shaped simultaneously by globalization, political transformation, and feminist resistance.

Persepolis, which was first published in French in 2000, describes Satrapi's early years in Iran during the Islamic Revolution and her subsequent adventures as an immigrant student in Europe. Satrapi depicts political violence, war, cultural relocation, gender discrimination, and emotional isolation through personal narrative and black-and-white pictures from the viewpoint of a young woman attempting to define herself in a world that is changing quickly (Satrapi, 2003). Marjane's early political awareness is reflected when she says, "At the age of six I was already sure that I was the last prophet" (Satrapi, 2003, p.6). The memoir highlights the unique challenges women confront in patriarchal nations while also illuminating the ways in which international political issues impact domestic lives. Satrapi illustrates the confusion surrounding the veil through the statement, "We didn't really like to wear the veil, especially since we didn't understand why we had to" (Satrapi, 2003, p.3). Satrapi turns political history into a personal and emotionally relatable story by fusing visual storytelling with firsthand recollections.

The memoir is also significant because it challenges dominant Western perceptions of Iran and Muslim women. Middle Eastern women are often portrayed in international media as helpless victims devoid of identity or agency. By portraying Iranian women as politically aware, intellectually engaged, emotionally nuanced, and resistant to persecution, Satrapi directly challenges these preconceptions (Naghibi, 2007). The memoir illustrates via Marjane's experiences that Iranian women's identities cannot be reduced to crude stereotypes or stark contrasts between oppression and liberation.

This article argues that *Persepolis* reflects globalization and feminism through four major dimensions: the influence of global culture and political ideas, the experience of migration and hybrid identity, feminist resistance against patriarchal oppression, and the challenge to Western stereotypes regarding Muslim women. Furthermore, the article demonstrates that Satrapi presents feminism as both personal and political, connecting female identity with broader global transformations and intercultural experiences. The memoir ultimately suggests that identity in the modern world is shaped through the interaction of cultural tradition, political history, migration, globalization, and feminist self-realization.

Globalization and Western Cultural Influence

The impact of Western culture on Iranian society is one of *Persepolis's* most important depictions of globalization. Iranian adolescents continue to consume international cultural goods despite the limitations put in place following the Islamic Revolution. Wearing denim jackets, Nike sneakers, and other emblems of global youth culture, Marjane enjoys Western music, fashion, and political philosophy. She listens to artists like Iron Maiden and Kim Wilde (Satrapi, 2003). Marjane openly embraces Western youth culture, stating, "Kim Wilde was my favorite singer" (Satrapi, 2003, p.131). These cultural impacts show that governmental authorities cannot fully regulate cultural globalization and represent the infiltration of global modernity into local culture.

Global culture enters Iran through clandestine markets, media circulation, underground social networks, and direct connection, despite the Iranian government's efforts to limit Western influence through censorship, religious supervision, and moral monitoring. Satrapi demonstrates this underground globalization when Marjane proudly buys “a denim jacket with a Michael Jackson button” (Satrapi, 2003, p.131). Satrapi shows how globalization transcends national boundaries and political constraints. Despite official efforts to maintain ideological purity, young people continue to interact with global cultural trends. This conflict reflects what Appadurai (1996) describes as the global flow of media, culture, and ideas across national boundaries.

Globalization also causes conflict between contemporary global ideals and conventional expectations. Marjane’s rebellious individuality appears when she declares, “I wanted to be justice, love, and the wrath of God all in one” (Satrapi, 2003, p.9). Marjane's quest for uniqueness, independence, and self-expression is reflected in her attraction to Western culture. But these aspirations put her at odds with the conservative laws put in place following the revolution. Because it exposes people to conflicting cultural values and identities, globalization consequently becomes both empowering and destabilizing.

Additionally, Satrapi depicts globalization as cultural interplay and hybridity rather than just Western dominance. Marjane's family blends international political beliefs about democracy, socialism, human rights, and education with Iranian customs. This blend shows that rather than totally displacing regional customs, globalization creates hybrid cultural identities (Bhabha, 1994). As a result, the memoir portrays globalization as a difficult process that involves cultural change, adaptation, and negotiation.

Feminism and Resistance Against Patriarchal Oppression

Feminism is central to *Persepolis* because the memoir consistently examines how patriarchal systems limit women’s freedom, identity, and autonomy. Following the Islamic Revolution, women in Iran face strict regulations concerning clothing, public behavior, education, and participation in society. The compulsory veil becomes one of the most powerful symbols of female oppression in the memoir (Satrapi, 2003). Satrapi writes, “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 makeup be seen?’ was asking herself no more questions” (Satrapi, 2003, p.74).

Satrapi depicts the veil as a political tool that controls women's bodies and social identities in addition to being a religious symbol. Marjane finds it difficult to comprehend as a kid why women suddenly lose the liberties they once enjoyed. The memoir demonstrates how the state uses submission, silence, modesty, and obedience to try and define female identity. Satrapi, however, continuously defies these expectations by engaging in acts of disobedience, intellectual autonomy, and self-expression.

The women in Marjane's immediate environment, especially her mother and grandmother, have a big impact on her feminist consciousness. While her grandma urges Marjane to maintain her individuality, dignity, and integrity, her mother publicly denounces governmental persecution and takes part in protests. Marjane’s mother warns her directly: “Fear is the price of our conscience” (Satrapi, 2003, p.74). These women show that feminist resistance exists within Iranian society itself, challenging notions of submissive Middle Eastern femininity (Naghibi, 2007).

Importantly, Satrapi shows how feminism is related to critical thinking and education. Throughout the narrative, Marjane challenges authority, condemns injustice, and pursues intellectual independence. Her acts of defiance, such as dressing in forbidden attire, listening to music that is illegal, and publicly voicing her political beliefs, represent her reluctance to submit to patriarchal control over her identity and body. Marjane resists authority when she states, “I will always be true to myself” (Satrapi, 2003, p.301). According to Hooks (2000), these behaviors are a reflection of feminism's fight against oppressive and unequal structures.

The memoir also critiques patriarchy beyond Iran. Marjane encounters objectification, emotional isolation, sexism, and cultural prejudice while in Europe. As a result, Satrapi refrains from portraying the West as totally free in contrast to the East. Rather, she contends that gender injustice takes many forms throughout the world, making feminism a worldwide issue rather than a local one.

Migration, Diaspora, and Hybrid Identity

Globalization is further reflected through Marjane's migration to Vienna, where she experiences displacement, loneliness, and cultural alienation. Her loneliness in Europe is emphasized when she admits, "I had become a stranger in the West" (Satrapi, 2003, p.193). Migration represents one of the defining conditions of globalization because political conflict, educational mobility, and economic interconnectedness increasingly produce transnational movement and diasporic identities (Hall, 1990). According to Stuart (1990), identity within diaspora is never fixed or stable; instead, it is continuously shaped through history, memory, and cultural interaction. This concept becomes central to Marjane's experiences as she struggles to define herself between Iranian and European cultural systems. *Perspolis* offers a significant intervention in this highly polarized era of East and West relations. Satrapi portrays the increasingly mobilized stereotypes of the Islamic Republic as oppressive and backward against the Western conviction over its own progressive liberalism (Naghibi & O'Malley, 2005).

Marjane makes an effort to maintain her Iranian identity while adjusting to Western habits in Europe. She comes across preconceived notions about Iran and frequently feels under pressure to conceal elements of her nationality to prevent prejudice and miscommunication (Satrapi, 2003). Marjane confesses, "For the first time, I felt ashamed to be Iranian" (Satrapi, 2003, p.197). For instance, some Europeans reduce Iranian identity to oversimplified media portrayals and exclusively connect Iran with political turmoil, war, and religious extremism. These experiences demonstrate how globalization can increase intercultural communication while also exacerbating cultural misunderstandings (Said, 1978).

Marjane's perspective on freedom, individuality, sexuality, and independence is also expanded by her exposure to Western culture. In contrast to the limitations imposed in post-revolutionary Iran, she is exposed to new forms of self-expression, alternative political philosophies, and liberal social norms (Satrapi, 2003). Satrapi, however, purposefully avoids portraying Europe as an idealistic region of unrestricted freedom. During her time overseas, Marjane also encounters racism, emotional loneliness, homelessness, melancholy, and societal disintegration. Because globalization fosters chances for individual freedom while also causing alienation and identity conflict, it appears to be both liberating and destabilizing (Bhabha, 1994). Satrapi reflects this emotional instability when Marjane says, "I felt lost, without any bearings" (Satrapi, 2003, p.233).

The concept of "hybrid identity" becomes especially important in this section of the memoir. Marjane no longer feels complete belonging in either Iran or Europe. When she is in Europe, she is viewed as Iranian and foreign; when she returns to Iran, her experiences abroad make her appear Westernized and culturally distant. This condition reflects the fragmented identity experienced by many migrants in a globalized world, where individuals exist between cultures rather than fully inside one cultural framework (Bhabha, 1994).

From a feminist standpoint, Marjane's conception of autonomy and womanhood is likewise altered by migration. Her exposure to European gender relations makes her more skeptical of patriarchal norms. However, she also understands that social injustice and misogyny are not exclusive to Eastern cultures. Thus, Satrapi highlights that oppression can take many cultural forms and criticizes both Iranian patriarchy and Western hypocrisy (Hooks, 2000). The memoir illustrates how globalization challenges

cultural stability and emotional belonging while also reshaping human identity through Marjane's experiences.

Challenging Stereotypes and Global Media Representations

Satrapi's critique of Western misconceptions about Iran and Muslim women is another significant facet of globalization in *Persepolis*. Middle Eastern women have often been portrayed in Western media as helpless victims devoid of agency, intelligence, or originality (Said, 1978). By depicting Iranian women as politically conscious, emotionally nuanced, intellectually engaged, and resistive to persecution, Satrapi openly challenges these oversimplified portrayals (Satrapi, 2003). Marjane criticizes Western assumptions by explaining, “To be honest, as a student arriving from the Middle East, I had a lot to learn” (Satrapi, 2003, p.182).

The memoir's autobiographical format humanizes Iranian society for readers around the world. Satrapi depicts commonplace experiences like family relationships, education, youth, friendship, comedy, and emotional suffering rather than concentrating solely on war, terrorism, or religious extremism. She shows that Iranian society has the same emotional complexity and humanity as other societies by focusing on daily life. Satrapi humanizes Iranian families through ordinary moments such as: “In every religion you find the same extremists” (Satrapi, 2003, p.114). This viewpoint invites readers to identify common human experiences that go across political and cultural divides (Chute, 2010).

Satrapi also criticizes how the media around the world creates false perceptions of non-Western cultures. The main way that many Western audiences learn about Iran is through political news coverage that emphasizes extremism and conflict. By offering a very personal viewpoint that prioritizes uniqueness over political generality, Persepolis challenges these prevailing myths (Said, 1978). Instead of seeing Iran solely as a geopolitical problem, Marjane's viewpoint helps readers understand the psychological effects of revolution, exile, and cultural discrimination.

The memoir's accessibility on a global scale is greatly enhanced by the graphic novel format. Through visual storytelling, readers from diverse cultural backgrounds can emotionally connect with Marjane's experiences despite language obstacles. Because images and text combine to convey trauma, memory, and identity, Chute (2010) contends that graphic memoirs produce potent forms of historical testimony. The black-and-white graphics in *Persepolis* both heighten the emotional effect and simplify complicated political realities.

Furthermore, Satrapi rejects simplistic oppositions between East and West. She demonstrates that both societies contain contradictions, inequalities, and forms of oppression. While Iran imposes political and religious restrictions, Europe is shown to contain racism, social isolation, consumerism, and emotional detachment. By rejecting binary thinking, Satrapi reflects the complexity of globalization and cultural identity in the modern world (Bhabha, 1994). Her memoir ultimately encourages intercultural understanding by presenting identity as multidimensional rather than nationally or culturally fixed.

Feminist Self-Realization and Personal Development

Marjane’s personal development throughout the memoir can also be interpreted as a feminist coming-of-age narrative, closely connected to the tradition of the Bildungsroman. As she matures, she develops stronger self-awareness, political consciousness, emotional independence, and intellectual autonomy. Her experiences with war, migration, discrimination, cultural conflict, and exile all contribute to her understanding of herself as both a woman and an individual (Satrapi, 2003).

In *Persepolis*, self-realization entails creating an authentic sense of self and rejecting forced identities. Marjane rejects Western clichés that victimize or exoticize Eastern women while also refusing to fully adhere to conservative Iranian norms around female obedience and modesty. Her independent

identity is expressed in the line, “Nothing’s worse than saying goodbye. It’s a little like dying” (Satrapi, 2003, p.287). Rather, she forms a multifaceted identity that is influenced by a variety of cultural experiences, feminist concepts, and individual resistance (Hooks, 2000).

Education plays an essential role in this process of self-realization. Marjane’s intellectual independence is visible when she says, “The more time went by, the more I became conscious of the injustice around me” (Satrapi, 2003, p.177). Throughout the memoir, Marjane values intellectual freedom, critical thinking, literature, music, and political discussion. These elements become tools of resistance against authoritarian control. Her desire for knowledge reflects feminist arguments that education empowers women to challenge patriarchal systems and gain independence (Hooks, 2000).

Additionally, Satrapi presents self-realization as emotionally challenging rather than merely powerful. Throughout her maturation, Marjane encounters psychological instability, loneliness, guilt, bewilderment, and broken relationships. These difficulties highlight how difficult and unclear it is to develop an identity in a globalized environment. However, these struggles help her become more politically conscious and emotionally mature (Hall, 1990).

Her final choice to permanently leave Iran represents both personal empowerment and emotional sorrow. The emotional pain of exile appears in the final scene when Satrapi writes, “Freedom had a price” (Satrapi, 2003, p.341). Even if being away from her native country hurts, it also shows how determined she is to pursue self-expression, autonomy, and intellectual freedom. As a result, the memoir's conclusion is both tragic and freeing. Marjane obtains the opportunity to create an independent life free from political and cultural constraints, but she also loses direct ties to her native country (Satrapi, 2003).

In the end, Satrapi presents feminist self-realization as an ongoing process of identity creation, adaptation, and resistance in a globalized society. Marjane's journey serves as an example of how a person's identity is influenced by a variety of factors, including migration, political history, intercultural experience, gender, nationality, and emotional fortitude (Bhabha, 1994).

Conclusion

Persepolis presents a powerful exploration of globalization, feminism, migration, and identity through autobiographical narrative and visual storytelling. The memoir demonstrates how global cultural exchange, political transformation, and transnational migration shape individual experiences and social relationships. At the same time, it offers a feminist critique of patriarchal oppression in both Eastern and Western societies (Satrapi, 2003).

Through Marjane’s experiences, Marjane Satrapi challenges stereotypes regarding Muslim women and highlights the complexity of cultural identity in a globalized world. Feminism in the memoir appears not only as resistance against political and gender oppression but also as a process of self-expression, education, intellectual independence, and personal autonomy (Hooks, 2000).

Furthermore, the novel portrays globalization as both liberating and destabilizing. On one hand, globalization creates opportunities for education, intercultural communication, and personal freedom. On the other hand, it produces alienation, displacement, identity fragmentation, and cultural conflict (Hall, 1990). Marjane’s experiences reveal the emotional consequences of existing between cultures and demonstrate how globalization reshapes personal identity in deeply complex ways.

The memoir also highlights the value of narrative in dispelling political prejudices and fostering empathy across ethnic boundaries. Satrapi uses the graphic memoir genre to turn personal

recollections into an international dialogue on freedom, identity, exile, and belonging. Instead of using oversimplified political narratives, her work enables readers from all cultural backgrounds to interact with Iranian history on a profoundly personal level (Chute, 2010).

Ultimately, *Persepolis* reveals that identity in the modern world is shaped through the interaction of local traditions, global influences, feminist resistance, migration, and personal experience. By combining political history with autobiographical storytelling, Satrapi creates a deeply human exploration of belonging, freedom, and self-realization in contemporary society. The memoir remains significant because it demonstrates that globalization is not merely an economic or political process, but also a deeply personal experience that transforms culture, identity, and human relationships (Bhabha, 1994).

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