Historical Events traced in Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*

**1951:** A group of Iranian nationalists led by Mohammad Mossadegh demanded an end to British control of the oil industry. He became Iran’s Soviet-leaning prime minister (Marjane’s grandfather), and the oil industry was placed under government ownership and control. The shah was reduced to a figurehead. The CIA engineered a coup that would restore the shah and he regains power. (p. 18-25 in *Persepolis*).

**1960s:** “The White Revolution” Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was the Shah of Iran from 1941-1979, attempted a series of economic and social reforms, including a land reform program that redistributed the holdings of the wealthy landlords among the peasants who worked the land. He also promoted education, improved social welfare services, and gave women the right to vote and the right to divorce without the husband’s permission (all legal matters involving families were transferred from religious to secular courts)—all an attempt at modernization. At the same time, he exercised nearly absolute control over the government through a secret police force, called the SAVAK who have been charged with torture and imposed martial law. It was believed that the White Revolution only benefited the ruling class. He also continued repression in other ways—book censorships, raiding mosque libraries and open fire at any public demonstration. Opposition began to grow, especially among students and conservative Muslims.

**September 1978:** Black Friday (p. 38-39 in *Persepolis*).

**January-February 1979:** The Shah of Iran, a military dictator established in 1954 through a CIA-backed coup, is overthrown and forced into exile. Mass demonstrations, strikes, and riots led to the shah’s departure from Iran (p. 42 in *Persepolis*). After 15 years in exile, the fundamentalist Islamic cleric Ayatollah Khomeini declared Iran an Islamic republic, and the Ayatollah became the country’s leader. (p. 62-76 in *Persepolis*).

*Note:* When President Carter allowed the shah to enter the U.S. for medical treatment and refused to hand him over for trial in Iran, Iranian revolutionaries seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran, taking a group of 52 Americans as hostages for 444 days, who were freed the moment Reagan took office in 1981.

**December 1979:** Iran’s Constitution is ratified. It is based on *velayat-e faqih*, or the rule of the Islamic jurist. It establishes a religious authority, the Supreme leader, who has ultimate authority.

**January 1980:** Bani Sadr elected Islamic Republic’s first president. Yet Khomeini is still supreme leader.

**July 1980:** The exiled shah dies in Egypt.

**Iran-Iraq War, 1980-88:** September 1980: Iraq (Hussein who is financially backed by the U.S.) invades Iran and launches airstrikes. This is the first Persian Gulf War (the second being the Iraqi-Kuwait Persian Gulf War, 1990-91). (begins on p. 77 in *Persepolis*).

**1989:** Khomeini dies and Ali Khamenei becomes Iran’s Supreme leader.

**1997:** Moderate Mohammad Khatami (who had opposed the Shah) wins Presidency

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**Iranian History**

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**Historical Events traced in Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood***
2001: Khatami wins re-election. The relationship between President Mohammad Khatami and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is at the very heart of Iran's political struggle between the reformers and hardliners. "The Supreme Leader's wishes supersede the will of the Iranian people, even when this is expressed through popular election."

2003: Anti-government protests by several thousand students take place in Tehran.

2005: Mohammad Khatami is succeeded by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, considered an “ultra-conservative.”

2006: Numerous Human Right's protests take place.

The Veil
During the rule of Reza Shah (1924-1941): (The Shah's father)
The veil was outlawed as it came to represent the backwardness of their society. A few number of elite and intellectual women benefited, but lower middle class and rural women saw the veil as the only legitimate way of dressing. Therefore, many felt obliged to stay home and gave up their public lives. The de-veiling law and its harsh enforcement not only failed to liberate women of these classes, but sequestered them and forced them to rely on their husbands, sons, and male relatives for public tasks which they normally carried out themselves (Hoodfar, 1999).

When Reza Shah’s son regained power in the 60s, the veil remained illegal although the law’s enforcement was relaxed. Gradually, women wearing scarves appeared side by side with those without headgear. Traditionally-dressed women asserted that religious and cultural beliefs did not exclude modernity. To many women who belonged to the non-veiled middle class, the adoption of the veil was a temporary action that symbolized their rejection of the state's (read: the Shah's) gender ideology. The veil became the symbol of the popular revolution. By 1981, the veil became compulsory in all public spaces under Khomeini. And those who had always chosen to wear the hijab criticized the government's move to make it compulsory. Ultimately, the debate is all about 'choice.'

“The meaning of Muslim varies with the type of Islam adopted. Theologically, Islam is one faith; it is the religion of all Muslims. However, there are socially and politically different 'Islams,' and various kinds of Muslims have different interpretations of the Islamic sources and form different sects (Shia and Sunni), schools (Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki or Shafii), and political states (secular or non-secular)” (IWS 452).

Present History: Struggle for Democracy
Iran is now ruled (since 1989) by Ayatollah Khamenei and a council who control the prisons, courts and security forces. Opponents desire a more democratic government, but the Islamic regime has come down hard on political opponents. Ten Iranian journalist are currently jailed for writing critically about the regime, and foreign journalists are seriously restricted in Iran. In July 2003, Canadian journalist Zahra Kazemi was tortured and murdered by Iranian security agents after she attempted to report on the growing opposition in Iran.

Raid in a student dormitory in Tehran in 2003: the raid was carried out by vigilantes armed with machetes, metal pipes, chains, and butcher knives. Writers are imprisoned who suffer regular beatings and torture.

Issue: 70% of Iranians are under age 30 and many have access to Western ideas and culture via the internet and satellite television. The internet is becoming a main form of protest for dissidents who are being known as the "Third Force."