



Critical Pedagogy of a Post-9/11 Muslim Memoir

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Abstract

Traditional education of literature would do injustice to both students and the discipline in this age of globalization. This is the era when teachers should use critical pedagogy to teach any genre of literature. Nowadays, a great number of memoirs from the Middle East perpetuate Islamophobia; yet some of them are taught at schools in the West. Perpetrating and perpetuating Islamophobia, as a trait of globalization, can be seen in some Iranian diasporic writings as well. This paper examines *Persepolis: The story of a childhood*, a diasporic Iranian memoir that is included in the educational curriculum of some Western schools. Utilizing Fiore's theory of critical pedagogy, we seek to provide ways for critical pedagogy of this memoir, and our discussion shows teachers how to use a text such as this to teach against Islamophobia.

Keywords: Globalization, teaching critically, West, East, Islamophobia, memoir

1. Introduction

Largely neglected throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Iranian immigrant female writers have become significant to a growing Western readership. One of the most striking traits of this emerging women literature is its obsession with the personal and collective past, which has been translated into the dominance of the memoir as a genre. It is argued that memoir is a recently acquired tool of expression for Iranian immigrant female writers based in the West. Once in the West, they took the opportunity to give voice to their thoughts and ideas about political situations in Iran as well as the status of women under the Islamic regime. What triggered them to write was the Western curiosity about Iran and Iranian women, especially after the event of 9/11, when the curiosity of the West was aroused to learn about a country that was recently labeled as an "Axis of Evil" by the Bush administration. This remunerative industry of Iranian women's memoirs has mushroomed while a war against Iran is pending in American administrations and after the ruinous consequences of US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq (Darznik 2008).

These diasporic memoirs, which gained prestige and became well-known worldwide after the event of 9/11, can be indicative of the fact that they are political and ideological. Memoirs became a tool for the authors to express their ideology and political thoughts in favor of the West. To an increasing number of critics, memoirs by immigrant Iranian women, constitutes "a pernicious outcome of contemporary military campaigns in the Middle East: a restaging of Orientalist and imperialist ideologies by a cadre of native informers" (Darznik, 2008:1). By presenting a sketchy depiction of Iran, particularly its women as oppressed, which in fact have been already represented in the Western discourses of Orientalist, these writers put their works at the disposal of imperialism to create justification for the imperialism project of hegemony disguised as 'war on terror' project or the project of saving women which conjures up Spivak's famous statement of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 1999 cited in Dabashi, 2011: 60). All of these memoirists have been praised by different critics for the authenticity of the text. However, the

critics failed to consider the fact that these life narratives can be easily co-opted into propaganda. They further American imperialistic agenda and confirm Western derogatory perception of Muslims (Whitlock, 2007).

Hamid Dabashi (2011) labels these memoirist 'native informers' and the 'comprador intellectuals' because of their contribution in paving the way and rationalizing the attacks on Muslim countries by imperialism. In Spivak's (1999) terms, these memoirists are native informant as "a certain postcolonial subject" who has "been recoding the colonial subject and appropriating the native informant's position. Today with globalization in full swing, telecommunicative informatics taps the native informant directly in the name of indigenous knowledge and advances biopiracy" (1999: ix). In differentiating the terms 'native informer' and 'native informant', Dabashi argues that "where informant credits comprador intellectuals with the knowledge they claim to possess but in fact do not, informer suggests the moral degeneration specific to the act of betrayal" (2011: 12).

These writers commenced their activities under the guise of "defending human rights, women's rights, and civil rights of Muslims themselves—and the relative lack of those rights in Muslim countries gave them the space and legitimacy they required" (Dabashi, 2011: 17). They can easily demonize their own culture as they know that they are protected and based in the centers of Western powers otherwise it would be too perilous a task to provide such serviceable knowledge directly from the Middle East and in this case, Iran. What created the *conditio sine qua non* for them was the phenomenon of globalization and labor migration. Dabashi further argues that these immigrant authors are being employed by "the imperial power to inform on their home countries" and to justify the invasion which commonly "points to the inner logic of imperial domination in the age of globalization" (Dabashi, 2011: 23). Globalization is, indeed, a good replacement for classical colonialism with new manners of domination. In the age of globalization, these writers or "native informers" (Dabashi, 2011) are manufacturing consent for the public that a military intervention would do good to save the country from barbarism and they are employed to show that the conquer of the world by imperialism is a human project and a liberation. Despite all these challenges posed by globalization and their vulnerability to critics' criticisms, being accused of the authors' one-sided view and perpetrating Islamophobia, some of these memoirs have been included in educational curriculum in the West. One of such memoirs is Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003). Since its initial release, some of the American institutions have utilized her memoir for the secondary school, not only restricted to English classroom, but included in interdisciplinary and cross-content subjects such as women's studies, political science, history, human rights and government (Barzegar, 2012).

2. Critical pedagogy

To eradicate the traditional way of teaching memoir as a genre of literature, there must be a form of globally accountable education that could address the dehumanizing stereotypical representations of those who are seen as the "Other" in the life narratives. Formal and informal education in the West preaches and stresses exoticism in regard to representation of Muslims. Fed by education in the West, either formal schooling or informal like that of media, students' opinion can be shaped and directed towards a biased view against Islam and Muslims. A memoir can act as a core curriculum of responsible education and be utilized by teachers to obliterate the prejudiced views of the West against the East. However, in many cases, these memoirs present sketchy and colored depictions of Muslims. A great number of teachers take memoirs as authenticated and never question their accuracy. Teachers, oftentimes, use these memoirs to teach social justice and equality but they fail to encourage students to question the memoirs and the memoirists, and to be critical of the status quo.

Before teaching memoirs from the Middle East to students in the West, teachers need to ask themselves how this genre of literature would contribute to their students' ideas about the wars waging in Muslim countries. Who is being represented in these memoirs and who is not? Would the students read the memoirs in earnest? Or would they just read something about an alien culture as if they are reading one of Shahrzad's Arabian Tales? Would any of the students feel interested in these memoirs or would the compulsion to read is because they are included in the curriculum? (Fiore 2010). This is what Fiore (2010) terms as critical pedagogy of a memoir. Critical pedagogy is the questions of "how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not" (McLaren, 2009: 63). Education is absolutely relied on knowledge; the great significance in education goes to the questions of where it comes from and who it comes from. McLaren (2009 cited in Fiore 2010) argues that in critical pedagogy, it is known that "some form of knowledge have more power and legitimacy than others" which causes human suffering. Thus, as Kincheloe (2008: 11-12) puts it, critical pedagogy functions to ease human suffering by "seeking out the causes of such suffering." Fiore (2010: 4-5) believes that there are some tenets that a critical teacher should follow:

A teacher must have a clear educational purpose; social, cultural, political and economic factors affect both students' and teachers' understanding of themselves, each other, the curriculum and knowledge in general; all types of knowledge are valid; dialogue with students is necessary to create a curriculum that is relevant to the lives of students; power affects the way we teach; the classroom and education in general does not exist in a vacuum devoid of a political dimension; positivist notions of the "correct" way to teach must be challenged; the dominant culture holds the privilege of being able to decide whose knowledge is legitimate, and whose is not.

She argues that a critical pedagogical teacher needs to define his/her purpose and positionality as a teacher long before the beginning of the class. It is a must for a critical teacher to know exactly where he/she is coming from and where they wish to end up with their classes. A critical teacher should also be aware that a great number of factors impacted

the cultural, political, social and economic identities of the students before they even begin the class. A critical teacher must show it to students that he/she is not the only one holding power in the classroom just because he/she is a teacher rather students hold the power as well as the education is theirs too. A critical pedagogical teacher needs to understand the significance of culture as it plays an important role in the lives of their students. Thus, a critical teacher must possess knowledge based on a wide range of popular culture such as television, movies, music, radio and internet (Fiore 2010). But they should be mostly concerned with “alternative bodies of knowledge produced by indigenous, marginalized or low-status groups” as a critical teacher they comprehend “the ways different forms of power operate to construct identities and empower and oppress particular groups” (Kincheloe, 2007: 17).

Amongst all the principles for a critical teacher posed by Fiore (2010), there is one tenet that stands out: a teacher should be a researcher. In the traditional way of teaching, teachers are regarded as an automaton; educated only in the skill of transferring knowledge from textbooks to the students which is what Freire (1970) refers to as banking method of schooling. Freire (1970) argues that a teacher in this sense is a narrator who “expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students” whose only job is to “fill the students with the contents of his narration” (71). This is, sadly, a typical function of teachers in today’s educational environment where “education” as Freire continues “becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (72). As Kincheloe (2008: 19) states, a critical teacher should “engage in constant dialogue with students that questions existing knowledge and problematizes the traditional power relations that have served to marginalize specific groups and individuals.”

Critical teachers comprehend that the old way of schooling’s assumption which standardized curriculum will serve the students best is not true. This standardized curriculum, indeed, further “privileges the already privileged dominant culture in society, while further marginalizing those who do not hold the cultural capital to successfully ascend the socio-economic standing they were born into” (Fiore, 2010: 9). She further argues that it is through dialog with students that a critical teacher can understand his/her students’ communities, cultures, languages and the different hardships they are confronting. Fiore (2010: 9) believes that this may “take time away from the traditional curriculum” and a critical teacher should realize that “this is a necessary part of what is referred to as the “double curriculum.”” This “double curriculum” is effective in teaching students “the knowledge that their curriculum privileges some, while marginalizes others” (Fiore, 2010: 9). Thus, as Fiore (2010) asserts, a critical teacher should be aware of the fact that everything can be political and pass that knowledge to his/her students. To provide example of political educational environment, Fiore (2010: 10) illustrates a teacher’s classroom:

In it we see the standard items: desks, chairs, books, maybe even a chalk board. If she is lucky enough, we will also see various technologies that will assist her throughout the day: a computer, printer, scanner, and maybe even a Smartboard. We also cannot forget those less inanimate items which also influence her teaching but may not necessarily show up in the class: her principal, a school trustee, or school board superintendent. While our teacher may not go to great lengths to understand how something like a piece of chalk wields power in her classroom, she will have considered why some classrooms have a chalk board, while others have a Smartboard. As a critical pedagogue she will have questioned not only why that item, be it a Smartboard, Macintosh Computer, or MacMillan textbook, is there and how she will use it in class, but she will also question how it got there. Did Apple donate computers in order to encourage brand loyalty in her young students? Did Smartboard donate the technology in order to force administrators to purchase the corresponding programs and curriculum?

Since education is entangled in various power relations; therefore, textbooks can be political. Textbooks have usually been perceived as a voice of authority and students use them and other “printed teaching material 90 to 95 percent of their working time (Firer, 1998: 196). Unfortunately, these books are almost never questioned and the information that is given by the books is simply taken as pure fact. As Peterson (2009: 313) argues a critical teacher should know that “knowledge is not produced somewhere in textbook offices and then transferred to the students”. Peterson (2009) continues that a critical teacher should first recognize that what textbooks present as realities are not “value-free” and therefore, as Fiore (2010: 11) believes those realities are not objective information as objective knowledge is “impossible” because teachers, researchers and authors cannot stand as “objective observers outside reality.”

Fiore (2010) points out another important perspective that a critical teacher should be cognizant of: who is publishing the textbooks? Muslim memoirs are being published by the publishing houses irrespective of the fact that the “realities” given in the memoirs are selective at best (Peterson, 2009), and untrue in the worst-case scenario (Sensoy, 2009), simply to “encourage a worldview that would further privilege the current socio-political climate that benefits corporate interests” (Fiore, 2010: 12). Critical pedagogy is, indeed, aimed to divulge this truth “to teachers through teacher education programs, and to students with the help of teachers themselves” (Fiore, 2010). The norms should be scrutinized and should be put into question. She believes that critical teachers should interrogate the norm as it is the “commonly accepted beliefs, values, assumptions and ideas of the dominant culture” (2010: 12). A critical teacher should make it clear that it is through this ‘norm’ that the ‘other’ is created. She further argues that “the otherization of individuals, when the normativized beliefs of society necessarily drive a person to the periphery of society, leads inevitably to the suffering of these individuals” (Fiore, 2010: 12).

Critical pedagogy might seem a political process but, in fact, it is allocated to ease human suffering; in this sense, education is regarded as a tool to achieve its goal (Fiore 2010). Education is viewed as a “political space in which all its elements, physical, textual or otherwise, are understood to hold power, some having more power and therefore more

legitimacy than others” (Fiore, 2010: 13). Critical teaching seeks to find out why and how these power inequalities hurt some certain students while benefit others, especially in multiethnic classes. It seeks to figure out “whose story is not getting published? How and why do some books remain on the bestseller list for months, while others never make it to the list at all?” (Fiore, 2010: 13). These uncomfortable questions should be asked to reach the ultimate truth.

3. Miseducation in the West

The Miseducation of the West emerges from “a long history of distorted Western knowledge production about Islam” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004: 20). The educational systems and the media of the West, as the two sources of knowledge production, influence the Western perspective of the Islamic world. Kincheloe and Steinberg (2004) contend that Bush administration, the Western media, and schools have collectively failed in accurately teaching the West about contemporary Islam and Muslims. This failure is due to their views towards Islam. In actuality, miseducation of the West begins with the notion that Western conception of the “East” is a reflection and a creation of their opinions and beliefs about the East, than an exact depiction of the East itself. The representations of Muslims were impacted by imperialist and colonial concepts that viewed the East as inferior to the superior and potent West. In *Orientalism* (1995), Said “essentialized a radical difference between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority, between the familiar and the strange... This gave the West legitimate authority to not only represent the Orient, but to change its reality” (as cited in Moghissi, 1999: 33). Consequently, an image of the East was created by the superior West that had little to do with facts and realities. Moghissi (1999: 33) argues that the construction of the East by the West posed a danger as this construction was not just a few stereotypes, rather it was a whole body of knowledge that was touched by imperial sentiment and wanted “control of the Other through knowledge”.

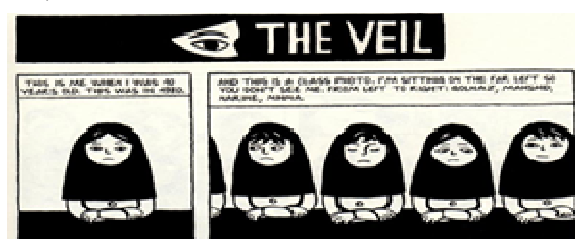
The Miseducation of the West in modern time continued with the Bush administration after the event of 9/11. Kellner argues that Bush’s speech addressed to the congress a week after 9/11 promulgated that the world of Muslim and Islam is a world of wickedness and aggression while constituting America as pure and good (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004). This distorted and polarized view created a binary opposition between good and evil, us and them, civilization and barbarism. This binary opposition is taught and reinforced by Western media and schools education. Nowadays, teachers and the grass roots must deal with the ramifications of these Orientalized constructions of the East. Teachers confront textbooks that exhibit little or misleading information about Muslims. The ordinary people are also in constant confrontation with the Orientalized image of themselves through the media’s incessant use of Muslims as “the radical and bad guys”. This generalization and stereotypical representation of Muslims, certainly, distorted the West’s understanding of the Islamic world.

In asking their sophomore literature students on their perceptions about women in Islam, Lori Cohen and Leyna Perry (2006), assert that many of their students responded with the cliché answer: “submissive to men, not well educated, covered faces and bodies with *hijab* or burka, can’t show ankles, no rights, fragile, loyal and dedicated to families,” and “separated from men” (2006: 20). These students did not understand that their perceptions were, in fact, tantamount to stereotypes. Putting all the Muslim women into the category of oppressed and inferior is certainly a cause of miseducation which reinforces Islamophobia. According to Eirin, one of the students, the image of women in Islam equals “the image of women covered head to toe with clothing; the worship of Islam; the notion that most have the mind of a terrorist” (Cohen & Perry, 2006: 20). These remarks reverberate Westerners’ perspectives of Muslim world, particularly post 9/11. With the crash of twin towers and the emergence of radical oppressive regimes such as Al-Qaeda and Taliban, Westerners has been viewing the Middle East as ‘the home of terrorist’ collectively and has been exhibiting it in their media and the educational system.

4. Teaching against Islamophobia: Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood

As in-depth analysis of the major themes and instances of the memoir is beyond the scope of this paper, we focus on the predominant theme, Islam, and several related examples just to provide examples of critical teaching of the memoir. Knowing that this textbook is a memoir whose author is Iranian and the publication’s date in the 2000s, it is, thus, essentially important for a critical teacher to find out about the author and her status within the society before even delving into the text itself. This is fundamentally significant because memoirs from the Middle East published post-9/11 could be vulnerably one-sided and written in favor of Western globalization. Providing this brief background of the author is the first step in the right direction to study the memoir: Satrapi is from the upper sect of the society, she attended a French school in Iran and she left the country for Austria when she was 14.

Satrapi starts her memoir with a chapter called “The Veil.” The Veil, which Westerners usually identify with Islam and oppression of women, is being introduced through a child’s eyes. She starts her graphic memoir with two frames: The first frame is the replication of the image on the cover, the unsmiling Marji which reads: “This is me when I was 10 year old. This was in 1980” (2003: 3).



Panel 1: Persepolis: The story of childhood.

The unsmiling Marji insinuates that she is unhappy with the present situation. The second frame shows four other girls with the same facial expression, all frowning and with crossed arms, and a sliver of a fifth girl on the far left which just shows a bent hand and a chest-length veil. It reads: "And this is the class photo. I'm sitting on the far left so you don't see me..." (2003: 3). The expression on the fourth girl's face shows certain disapproval. Here, Satrapi cuts herself out, suggesting that being veiled renders one invisible. It implies that she is disembodied, fragmented and has no visibility. This idea of her is confirmed in a scene where she describes her mother's photo of the passport where she had to veil: "she sure didn't look very happy. In fact, she was unrecognizable" (2003: 126). Her mother is reduced to invisibility with the veil on; Satrapi seems to imply that Muslim women are invisible in society.

At the outset of *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, Satrapi demonstrates how the forced veiling physically segregates her from the rest of the society "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" (2003: 3-4). What is peculiarly strange about the assertion is her claim not to understand why to veil. Despite her class position, it is hard to believe that Satrapi was not aware of the context of the veil as she lived in Iran so long. The exotic and the stereotypical representation of Muslims are immediately provided in the first few pages of the graphic memoir. What Satrapi tries to show is the negative impact of veiling on women, especially on young girls. Reading the memoir, students who are unfamiliar with Muslim culture will feel awkward towards veiling and Islam; however, a critical teacher will never confirm Satrapi's ideas about veiling as he/she knows that this view is absolutely personal. While admitting that forced veiling is to be condemned, the teacher should put the issue in its proper context for students and should reveal that there are also a great number of women with contrasting views on veiling. By providing that account, a critical teacher certainly does not and should not dismiss the author's agency. A critical teacher will have to explain to the students that Satrapi's writing is selective as she has not put the issue of veiling in its suitable context.

Satrapi presents negative images of Islam; she portrays Islamic rituals and scoffs them. Her depiction leads Western readers to the idea that Islam is a religion of violence and barbarism. To show this, Satrapi asserts that "hitting yourself is one of the country's rituals, during certain religious ceremonies, some people flagellated themselves brutally. Sometimes even with chains. It could go very far. Sometimes it was considered a macho thing" (2003: 96). In one panel, she depicts a man stabbing his head with a dagger:



Panel 2: *Persepolis: The story of childhood*.

This panel is perfectly fit to convey exoticism of Islam. Unless a critical teacher explains the whole ritual in its proper context, which in this case is Ashura, this image will allude to Islamic exoticism and violence. A critical teacher needs to explain that Ashura is a Shia Islamic holiday observed on the 10th of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic year. For the Shia Muslims, Ashura and the ten days afterward are days of lamentation and mourning marking the death of Imam Hossein, the third Shia Imam and the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed. After doing some research about it, a critical teacher should make it clear to his/her students that Satrapi is wrong in implying that these rituals and customs, which were presented as torture, were carried out to show machismo and not for devout religious reasons. The teacher has to make it clear that the depiction is portrayed with exaggeration and hitting yourself with a dagger is absolutely a rare phenomenon in Iran. A critical teacher will understand that Western readers are bound to have distorted information about these Islamic rituals as they are portrayed without contextualization. By deleting its context, Satrapi is, in fact, bolstering such distorted images to her readers in the West, "using her authority as a Native to add to the damage of such misconceptions" (Barzegar, 2012: 45) and a critical teacher should be enabled to elaborate this for his/her students.

This is the stage where a critical teacher should explain the author's link to the Western ideology machinery. Students should be provided with the fact that how Satrapi's memoir, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003) falls under the disposal of Western ideological machinery. A teacher should elaborate the fact that Marjane Satrapi's graphic memoir, since its publication, has never faced a serious negative criticism comparing to other life narratives like that of Nafisi's. Nafisi's memoir, a highly commercialized memoir, sparked a controversy about the popularity of Iranians women's memoirs during the time of the West's intolerance towards the ideological power and the current regime of Iran. Iranian women memoirs like that of Satrapi's gain popularity especially after the event of 9/11 and the present discussion about a possible "American intervention" in Iran due to its nuclear energy program. Dabashi (2011) criticizes these life narratives as these narratives provide the customary justification for moral and cultural legitimization of intervention by imperialism. Satrapi's graphic text also falls under criticism of Dabashi as it is a perpetuation of anti-Islamic and anti-Iranian sentiments.

Teachers are to depict that Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* can be even more threatening than others of its ilk as this graphic memoir is being utilized as educational equipment in primary and secondary classrooms in the West to teach the audience about an exoticized and "a distant culture that has been stigmatized as an "Eastern Other"." (Barzegar, 2012: 3). It is even being used as historical lesson in some schools in the West. The readers face savagery and oppression in the memoir. According to Dabashi these kinds of writers are native informers whose principal task is to fake "authority, authenticity, and native knowledge" (2011: 72) by giving information to the Western public about the outrageous behaviors happening in their birthplace; thence, justifying the imperial projects of the West. The fact that Satrapi's text is recruited for the Western ideology machinery can be obviously seen in its marketing strategy. It is significantly important for students to be cognizant of the fact that Satrapi's graphic memoir, *Persepolis* (2003), emerged exactly at a time when France was toying with the idea of banning veiled Muslim girls in public schools. This, in fact, can be a political endeavor to form comprehension about cultural customs of the Middle East by "presenting a liberal Middle Eastern viewpoint amidst radical unrest" (Costantino, 2008: 433). It could be argued that the implicit inscription through marketing strategies is that this graphic memoir is an instrument in bolstering a national political agenda in France at the time when President Jacques Chirac promulgated the plan of the government in passing a law forbidding the veil in public schools in December 2003 (Barzegar 2012). *Persepolis* is used in public schools seemingly to teach young French students about a different culture, but it is used to reinforce and support the national political agenda on banning the veil in France and committing Islamophobia throughout the West.

Satrapi's graphic memoir is topical for the time of its publication in America as well. Its first publication in English (2003) appeared right at a time when President George W. Bush has begun to extend efforts in his global project of 'war on terror' and after his notorious 'Axis of Evil' addressed to Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. Since then, writings about Iran, Iranian women, and Islam create a good alibi for the Western intervention and Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* is no exception. It should be mentioned that Satrapi's graphic memoir was one of the reading items in the West Point, the United States military academy, and it was on the reading list of some other educational centers of North America as well. It was accompanied by unit guides and teaching supplements. Barzegar (2012: 18) argues that "the fact that the memoir has become part of a curriculum at a military institution reinforces Dabashi's claim that such literary pieces contribute for justification for imperial rule and intervention as well as helping to promote Islamophobia in the West" and consequently, it shows Satrapi's position as a native informer. Her narrative can be seen as a colonizing instrument which promotes war against Iran and Islam; hence, it is recruited for the imperialism and the Western ideological machinery.

While we completely sympathize with Satrapi's concerns with the women's right in the Islamic Republic and with Iranian women as subordinated to enact the male Islamist patriarchal rules, we think that diasporic cultural approach should not be universalized. While we never disacknowledge the fact that stringent rules are imposed upon women, Satrapi's graphic memoir is less to unveil those outrageous behaviors than to promote Islamophobia. What is common to almost all the memoirs from the Middle East is the perpetuation of Islamophobia. A critical teacher will understand that a common trait of such neo-Orientalist texts is the denigration of Islam and Islamic rituals to create Islamophobia. To depict the Oriental Other, portraying religious fundamentalism and extremism is of necessity in these texts and that should be explained to students.

5. Conclusion

It is high time for teachers to understand that the traditional way of teaching literature such as teaching protagonist, antagonist, plot, setting and character, would do injustice to both students and literature. The robotic repetitions and memorizations will not ease the challenges and problems posed by globalization. Simply asking the students to find the protagonist, describe the setting and figure out the plot is not sufficient to provide students the equipment they need "to address the social problems afflicting their world today" (Fiore 2010: 105). The contents of textbooks should be scrutinized, no matter how objective the textbook might seem. Teachers should be critical of its knowledge because it was written by a person who "researched a subject, analyzed data and eventually produced a textbook" (Fiore, 2010: 11). The author of this book, certainly, has assumptions and experiences that impact the way he/she writes. Because textbooks reach a great number of students around the world and shape and affect their ideas about the world, it comes of utmost significance to uncover who writes the textbooks.

Critical pedagogy is the vehicle that drives both teachers and students to be informed in better ways regarding the literature brought into their environment. A critical teacher needs to constantly question whose story is being told and whose is not? He/she needs to encourage their students to never take a book as pure reality and question its contents. Instead of continuing the already sketchy Western ideas and letting the book fall into the trap of globalization, it is a task for the teachers to make sure that the students peruse these texts critically, humbly and thoughtfully. Reading in this way, a memoir such as Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003) can be used to teach against Islamophobia.

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