Wounds Water the Buds. An Iranian Immigrates to Canada; An Illustrated Autobiographical Short Story

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# Abstract

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Shaghayegh Darabi

In this study, I explore the reasons for migration, my development as an art educator and artist, and resilience among adult immigrants. As a visual storyteller, I present a graphic novel as a means to explore the experiences of immigrant art educators from a sociopolitical, economic, and cultural perspective. For this investigation, I employ art-based research and a research-creation approach that involves collecting and visualizing my experiences in a digital notebook and incorporating these images into adults' autobiographical graphic novel/ comics.

This study has implications for art education as it constitutes a meaningful attempt to understand the pedagogical turning points in the value of graphic novels. Moreover, the study is also significant for demonstrating that earlier experiences are a crucial area of inquiry in art instruction. I developed my personal history into a graphic novel in order to portray my experience in a visual form.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

Human beings are members of a whole

In creation of one essence and soul

If one member is afflicted with pain

Other members uneasy will remain

If you have no sympathy for human pain

The name of human you cannot retain

Sa'adi Shirazi, Golestan, translated by

Lundberg (2011)

بنی آدم اعضای یکدیگرند

که در آفرینش ز یک گوهرند

چو عضوی به درد آورد روزگار

دگر عضوها را نماند قرار

تو کز محنت دیگران بی غمی

نشاید که نامت نهند آدمی

«گلستان سعدی؛ باب اول: در سیرت پادشاهان»

I begin this study by introducing this well-known Persian poem by the Iranian poet Saadi, who lived from 1210 to 1291. This poem is one of the first poems taught to young students during their first few years of elementary school in Iran. Although these verses are only part of the poem, these lines are the most well-known among the general public. This is similar to how a part of an artwork can be more memorable and remarkable to audiences.

In these few verses, Saadi beautifully depicts humankind as a single body by erasing the barriers of gender, ethnicity, nationality, and all other forms of difference between humans. Saadi asks people to try and understand and care for one another. This is similar to how if a small thorn stabs a finger, all of the body's components will feel the anguish of the finger and work hard to ensure a full recovery. He not only forbids indifference but also asserts that this problem cannot exist.

Although years have passed since I first read these verses, they continue to inspire and motivate me. Despite the scope of these verses, I witnessed considerable disregard for other people's experiences and occasional intense bitterness during my childhood, which occurred amidst the struggles of the Islamic revolution and the war. I have always been an artist, yet I have never considered myself a poet. I wish to depict my ideal universe using a pencil and paper in the manner that the Great Saadi did. I would like to spread awareness, no matter how minuscule.

For this study, I investigated the migration process, the rationale of immigration, and my personal development as an art educator and artist. On this basis, I describe the resilience of adult immigrants. As an artist, I explored the format of the graphic novel as a visual means of reflecting on my personal experiences to create socio-political, economic, and cultural possibilities for exploring the experiences of immigrant art educators. For this purpose, I adopted a methodology of art-based research and research-creation, informing adult comics and graphic novels,

autobiographical comics, and memory by collecting and visualizing my stories and memories in the form of a digital notebook.

My personal evolution as an Iranian immigrant teacher and artist encouraged me to reflect on my experiences. Moreover, I began this studio-based research in order to obtain a new perspective on the factors and paradigms that influence artist-teachers' methods to demonstrate how an art educator's personal life can influence their work process and profession. I also seek to demonstrate how the past influences one's present and future intentions (Furlong, 2013; Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014). In the education field, there is widespread recognition of the personal and professional benefits of exploring one's life history (Johnson, 2002; Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014; Miller & Shifflet, 2016). Indeed, it is understood that a teacher's past experiences can significantly influence how they perceive education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012).

As an artist, I was hoping to do more than just record my experiences and memories as an immigrant solely in the form of words. Therefore, for this project, I wanted to unpack my personal history in a more artistic way. I wanted to use creative means to enhance my ability to stimulate inquiry and facilitate retrospection (McGarr, Gavaldon, & Adana, 2020). For this reason, and also to promote honesty and insight, I used visual tactics and art-based strategies (Weber & Mitchell, 1995; Bailey & Van Harken, 2014; Grushka & Young, 2014). Although I have created art using various methods, such as traditional painting, digital-drawing, doodling, embroidering, and knitting, I decided to challenge myself for this project by adopting a new perspective and creating art using the medium of autobiographical comics for the first time to visualize my memories and examine my own experiences and their outcomes.

I also investigated the pedagogical potential to connect pedagogical matters to the visual arts, particularly graphic novels, by translating written narratives into images (Oliveira & Vearey,

2017; Leavy, 2018). I believe that through storytelling and sharing memories, arts-based research can transform autobiographic stories into our classrooms.

Creating my autobiographical comic involved the initial step of recollecting and documenting my old memories and experiences using a digital notepad. I first visualized them in a comic format and then classified them based on commonalities. I also prepared several questions to help me develop new ideas. I wrote my autobiography in my native language, and then I translated it into English. The second step was to visualize the initial words. I first drew basic sketches, and next, after deciding on a suitable composition for each page, I made the necessary modifications. The third step involved adding the quotes and thoughts to the speech bubbles; then, I finished the drawings.

Throughout this process, I found it fascinating that complicated ideas and narratives can be conveyed through comics in a more interesting and effective manner compared to standard prose (Sones, 1944). Hence, comics have the potential to enhance learning, comprehension, and retention among all age groups. In my paper, I am explicitly targeting adults' comics, as can be used to enhance learning, leading to their adoption into educational settings (Nalu & Bliss, 2011; Short, Randolph-Seng, & McKenny, 2013; Syma & Weiner, 2013).

 I realized that since comics make the artist's intended message easier to understand and enable it to appeal to a larger audience, they may be an important medium for sharing memories. This study allowed me to assume a novel perspective on my own life's narrative, and I used comics to portray my life as I would like it to be seen. This research, presents my experiences during the Islamic Revolution, war, post-war memories, and immigration putting the tragedy of those events—which also impacted my memories—into perspective.

The act of including these autobiographical visual memories in my arts-based research is significant and serves a considerable teaching function. My strategy as an art educator reflects the experience of living history. I learned to comprehend the chaotic effects of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the eight years of the Iran–Iraq War, and subsequent issues related to immigration concerns and their hidden reality about myself. As a student in North America, I was also able to comprehend the critical power of art production as a research method for creating new modes of inquiry.

**Research questions**

The research questions of this project are as follows: What role do memories play in visual stories? How do comics help with memory retrieval? Finally, what effects do comics have on art education?

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

To comprehensively review the literature related to my research topic, I divided this chapter into two main sections: comics and graphic novels as well as autobiographical comics. I elaborate on each category in the following pages.

**Comics and Graphic Novels**

What are comics? Author and theorist Scott McCloud (1993), in his book *Understanding Comics,* defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial" elements and other images that occur in a planned sequence and are designed to transmit information or elicit an aesthetic response from the viewer (p. 9). R.C. Harvey (2005) states that "comics consist of pictorial narratives or expositions in which words (sometimes lettered into the picture area under speech balloons) typically contribute to the meaning of the pictures and vice versa" (p. 20). Harvey's definition disregards the existence of wordless comics. There is also a historical definition of

comics that is based on 20th-century conventions. For instance, most comics employ cartooning, recognizable imagery, and strong black lines (Kuttner, Sousanis, & Weaver-Hightower, 2018). Regarding the power of comics to engage viewers, W.W.D. Sones (1944) introduces comics as a more effective and entertaining medium for conveying complicated concepts and stories compared to writing. Such a broad definition of comics leaves considerable room for experimentation. However, these definitions may not accurately reflect what most people mean when they refer to comics. Kuttner, Sousanis and Weaver-Hightower (2018) state that it is surprisingly difficult to give a specific explanation of comics.

Comics possess characteristics that distinguish the medium from other forms of visual art. In comics, most of the visuals are "framed" within panels with borders, and there are "gutters" between frames. Moreover, characters' speech and thoughts are typically depicted using "speech bubbles" and "thinking bubbles," respectively (McCloud, 1993; Varnum & Gibbons, 2001). Kuttner, Sousanis, and Weaver-Hightower (2018) insist that none of these elements alone constitute a definition of comics. They claim that if a certain number of these characteristics are absent, then the genre of the object under consideration may be unclear. However, referring to master comic artist William Erwin Eisner (1996), I argue that solid sequential art can still be considered comics. While creating my autobiographical comic, I discovered that sometimes the visual alone is more than sufficient and vice versa. Sometimes words can completely convey my intended meaning.

Moreover, comics also have the potential to be used as a means to "collect, analyze, and/or disseminate scholarly research" (Kuttner et al, 2018, p. 397). Comic making is an analytical technique that Weaver-Hightower (2013, slide 37) describes as a "multimodal manner

of scaffolding the analyst's cognition" (as cited in Kuttner et.al, 2018, p. 397). They can also be an essential part of the data collection process. Furthermore, comics can provide researchers with a captivating, flexible platform for communicating their ideas and reaching a broader audience (Kuttner et al, 2018).

## Autobiographic Comics

Autobiography studies and comic studies are two fields that inform the study of autobiographical comics. The core of comics studies is the medium, a communication technique that includes a variety of styles and genres. Autobiography studies focuses on genre rather than specific formats, even though traditionally, most scholarly work has focused on prose (Kunka, 2018). However, given the significance of the concept of memory in my project, I felt it was necessary to include a discussion on autobiographical memory in this chapter.

## Autobiography

Autobiographies are narrative accounts of the life of the author (Angrosino, 1989). In his book *On Autobiography* (2018), Philip Lejeune defines autobiography as a "[r]etrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own experience, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (p. 4). The "autobiographical pact," according to Lejeune, is the reader's acceptance that the author, narrator, and protagonist of an autobiography are all the same person (p. 22). In keeping with this agreement, the reader acknowledges that an autobiographical work connects to a verifiable external world. This gives autobiographies a testimonial quality where the author appears to be "on trial" regarding the veracity of their account. In this study, I am the subject and the author of my own experiences. I only discuss things that I have directly experienced.

**Autobiographical memory**

Although the public views autobiographical memory as a collection of prior experiences that can be remembered with varying degrees of accuracy depending on the individual, it is actually more constructive and flexible in nature ( McGarr et al, 2020). According to Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000), one's autobiographical memories serve as the database of the self because these autobiographical memories are filled with the incidents and memories that provide continuity and significance to one's life. In this sense, both one's current identity and prior experiences are reflected in what one remembers about one's own history. They put forth the idea of the functioning self, which is made up of a hierarchy of ongoing objectives that serve as a conduit for encoding and retrieving memories related to the present. As a result, the memory construction process heavily depends on the goal hierarchy of the working self ( McGarr et al, 2020).

**Autobiographical Comics**

Justin Green's comic *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972) is regarded by academics and historians as a foundational work in the genre of autobiographical comics. Joseph Witek (2011) states that it is rare for a single work to have such a clear and direct influence on an art medium. Witek also emphasizes the revolutionary significance of this comic (p. 227). In fact, Binky Brown is the progenitor of most late 20th-century autobiographical comics.

Art Spiegelman, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Robert Crumb, and Phoebe Gloeckner are just a few of the authors of autobiographical comics who have cited Green's work as a major inspiration.

What are autobiographical comics? The term "autobiographical comics" is defined by El Refaie (2012) as "a loose category of life writing through the use of sequential images and

(usually) words" (p. 48). Andrew J. Kunka (2017) states that autobiographical comics combine the traditional meanings of the terms "autobiography" as "life writing" and "comics" as both a series of sequential images and a collection of words and pictures (p. 11). According to Kunka:

- A work is autobiographical if it makes it clear in some way that it is. To put it another way, the text provides hints—either directly within the text itself or through some kind of paratext—that make it clear that it is an autobiographical text.

- The book may include a subtitle that reads "A Memoir" or "A True Story" on the cover or title page; the publisher may classify the book as an autobiography, and a blurb may declare the book to be autobiographical.

- Paratexts are texts related to the book but not actually a part of the narrative itself; paratexts include such elements as title and publication pages, back cover summaries, author information, acknowledgments, and review blurbs.

- The similarity of the author's name with the main character may also serve to indicate the autobiographical nature of the text. The reader may also consider both textual and paratextual information: The author's picture on the back cover can serve as a visual representation of the main character (Kunka, 2018, pp. 11–12).

However, Kunka clarified that this categorization should not be seen as a restriction, as many autobiographical comics challenge this assumption and push the boundaries of the medium.

There are many examples of autobiographical comics, such as Craig Thompson's *Blankets* (2015), Chester Brown's *The Playboy* (1992) and *Paying for It* (2013), Seth's *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken* (2011), Phoebe Gloeckner's *Diary of a Teenage Girl* (2002), Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2007), and Eddie Campbell's *The Fate of the Artist* (2006). However, my research focuses more on autobiographical comics written by immigrants.

According to Harvey Pekar, who wrote his own autobiographical comic, comics are composed of words and images. He stresses that anything is possible when using words and images (Pekar, 2009, p. 30). According to Serrano, the editor of *Immigration and Comics: Graphic Spaces of Remembrance, Transaction and Mimes*, many comic book creators and authors are immigrants who identify as outsiders living in unfamiliar environments. She agrees that immigrants' stories frequently fall into the category of autobiography (2021, p. 15).

Studying autobiographical comics, particularly comics written by immigrants about their own experiences, confirms what many readers already know and informs many others about the global socio-economic system that is tearing families apart and rend most severely our global social tissue. Serrano believes that genres of comics, which she calls a "dirty dark side to immigration—and immigration and comics" (2021, p. xvi), inform us about

> [a] world where predatory governments, corporations, and criminal gangs rule supreme and with total impunity over whole populations, forcing on them exploitive and oppressive working conditions (where there is work) and thereby forcing the displacement of millions of people. Where predatory border patrollers, police, and human traffickers rape and murder with not the slightest risk of punishment. Where those forced from homelands arrive in increasingly nationalist, neo-fascist xenophobic "host" countries. (Serrano N. L., 2021, p. xvi)

**Chapter 3 Methodology and Methods**

I adopted an arts-based approach and research-creation that addressed both research-for-creation and research-from-creation. That is, my methodology is informed by qualitative methods, such as illustration, memory writing, memo writing, and audio recording. Additionally,

I combined memory writing with imagery. Therefore, I created a story using comic book illustrations.

To create an autobiographical narrative of my lived experiences and connect with a broader audience, I used the techniques described above. I also adapted my writing into a graphic novel by employing drawing and digital art methods. The connections between our individual lives and the greater context in which we live were what I was looking for, which according to Leavy (2018), I could both explore and describe by utilizing an arts-based approach and qualitative techniques.

My study had no participants. Beginning with my experiences and memories, I investigated my own stories. I employed a variety of methods and viewpoints to probe my research questions. Nevertheless, I consistently reported on my opinions and life experiences openly and honestly, particularly my autobiography, as the sources of information or data for my research. As my research project developed, I divided my methodology into the following categories.

**Arts-Based Research**

When I started this project, I understood that combining strategies and incorporating textual and visual resources was the optimal method for successfully communicating my experiences and providing answers to my research questions. All art, including literary, performative, visual, audiovisual, multimedia, and multimethod art, can be incorporated into arts-based practises (Leavy, 2018). For this project, making a graphic novel that incorporated many

forms of visual art, including photography, drawings, and paintings, enabled me to better portray my written account, and these techniques helped me to explore, describe, and explain the relationship between my personal life and the greater context in which I live (Leavy, 2018).

Scholars involved in arts-based research assert that the creative process can create fresh perspectives and increase awareness (Leavy, 2017; Barone & Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2015; Barrett, 2010). According to Leavy (2017), McNiff (2014), and Jónsdóttir and MacDonald (2018), researchers use the act of creating art as a method of knowing; additionally, they can also use art as a thinking process and as a technique for making their thinking accessible to others by merging academic research and creative activities (Jónsdóttir & MacDonald, 2018). I sought to visually communicate my personal memories and stories of immigration to audiences outside of my thesis by creating a graphic novel and investigating how to create a visual narrative of my memories through comics.

In studies involving identity work, arts-based research is frequently employed, as it allows for the presentation of diverse interpretations (Leavy, 2017; Barrett, 2010). This is significant because arts-based research enables the investigation of connections between people's personal lives and the greater socio-economic context (Leavy, 2017, p. 8). In my thesis, although I reflect on my personal memories, I also try to understand my place both in the past and now, and I seek to connect with other people by sharing my memoir in the form of a graphic novel.

Additionally, given that visual depictions of data have the power to connect with wider audiences, arts-based research is an effort to reach beyond the limited restrictions of "discursive communication in order to articulate notions that otherwise would be ineffable," as stated by Barone and Eisner (2011, p. 1). Arts-based research enables scholars to disseminate their work in

new ways to a wide range of people, freeing them from the limitations of scholarly writing

(Leavy, 2017, p. 8).

My project is visual; therefore, I believe its combination with creativity makes it more

approachable and more interesting to a broader audience outside of academia and the field of art

education. This was confirmed by Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk (2012), who stated, "A

research project that creates creative outcomes and/or employs creative processes has access to a

broad range of potential audiences and contexts of dissemination" (p. 10).

**Research-Creation**

The Pedagogical Impulses website describes research-creation as an "experimental

practice that cannot be predicted or determined in advance" (Research-Creation, n.d.). Chapman

and Sawchuk, scholars in the Department of Communication Studies at Concordia University,

wrote about this methodological approach in their 2012 article titled "Research-Creation:

Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances'." They state, "Research-creation projects

typically integrate a creative process, experimental aesthetic component, or an artistic work as an

integral part of the study" (p. 1). Since my thesis combines artistic practices and research, the

results are unpredictable. Therefore, I also use research-creation as my methodology. In this

research, my graphic novel constitutes an artistic practice.

According to Chapman and Sawchuk (2012), research-creation is a "mode of knowing."

This is another central point that I intend to explore in this study. They classified research-

creation as "research-for-creation," "research-from-creation," "creative presentations of

research," and "creation-as-research" (p. 5).

"Research-for-creation" and "research-from-creation" are both applicable to my project.

According to Chapman and Sawchuk, literature studies, gathering data to inspire creative ideas,

the expression of a group of concepts, and inventive experimentation are all a part of research-for-creation (p. 16). Their explanation helped me conduct research for my project; I surveyed autobiographical graphic novels and immigration-themed comics to learn more about the history of Iran and the era of the Islamic Revolution. Moreover, to create my autobiographical graphic novel, I reviewed family records and experimented with a new artistic medium.

Experimental creativity is another component of research-creation (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012). I have never worked with graphic novels before, so learning how to create one was a process of trial and error. Previously, I was a digital painter; I possess years of experience in the animation and VFX industries. I had initially planned to make a digital 2-D animation for my thesis. However, my committee members, Dr. Lorrie Blur and Dr. David Pariser, encouraged me to explore a different medium. They suggested that I create an autobiographical graphic novel in order to tell my life story.

In contrast, research-from-creation emphasizes the information discovered throughout the creative process. I had never thought about or perceived my life through juxtaposed frames. I was unaware that I could travel back through time and recall distant memories while creating and writing my stories. Additionally, I was unaware of the unlimited similarities between autobiographical stories.

The methodology used in my thesis involved capturing the memories of my lived/living experiences and sketching them as a reflection through an autobiographic lens. In creating my graphic novel, I chose to create a digital notebook; I used my iPad, Procreate, and - a drawing application- to create the digital notebook. I let the ideas generated naturally on the digital surface. For some ideas, I created very rough sketches and refined them to match my desired composition and shapes. On other occasions, I crafted the images faster, as the practice was

going further. For some frames, to make sure that I was going in the right direction, I studied

photos that my parents had sent me electronically. For some frames related to history or

geography, I used Google engine. These processes enabled me to study and reflect on the comic

that I had crafted.

Spending many hours writing my memoirs while probing my memory and sketching and

refining my autobiographical graphic novel led me to consider the importance of choosing the

appropriate method for presenting stories that were only familiar to me to reach audiences. I

asked myself, "How can I portray my reality to others in a way that is meaningful?" (Shaffer,

2020, p. 13). My primary concern was to make the graphic novel worthy of others people's time

and attention, as I myself had been in the position of the viewer for years. I was hoping to draw

the intention of people and thoughts that sharing knowledge of the people (me) and places (my

country) with total strangers.

In my arts-based approach, autobiographical drawing served as a mode of understanding.

The form of my comics followed my old method of illustrations—that is, doodling in black and

white in digital format. The way I imagined every story of Iranian immigrants who, like me,

lived through the war period and witnessed how Iran changed to the Islamic Republic after the

revolution, and at the end of the day they found themselves somewhere else.

This arts-based research approach helped me to explore, learn about, and introduce

immigrant trauma through the personal stories as Farha Abbasi (2020), the assistant professor of

the psychiatry department at Michigan State University, says:

> In many respects, immigration is trauma. It is a complete loss of identity and
>
> familiarity, and immigrants are often left without the proper tools or resources to help

them cope in a new environment. That transition in itself, even if it ends well, can

leave deep scars. (Abbasi, 2020)

**Data Collection Methods**

In order to proceed with my studio thesis, I changed direction to focus on illuminating my

stories. I did this by gathering data, compiling old images that my parents shared with me online,

reviewing the notes about the recollections that I had made daily in my digital notebook, and

listening to audio recordings, which were more convenient than taking written notes

(Spiegelman, 1991). My initial goal was to use my prior professional experience in the animation

and visual effects industries to produce a 2-D digital animation. However, after considering the

course and development of the work related to my topic, I decided to create a graphic novel with

the help of my lecturers.

Although this artistic approach was new to me, I found it to be ideal for my work.

Because comics involve the blending of words and visuals and enable the artist to create a sense

of movement, they are ideal for conveying lived experiences and narratives. This topic was

crucial to me because I strive for straightforward, long-lasting expression in the majority of my

artworks.

Designing my autobiographical memory began at the same moment that I started paying

more attention to my earlier artworks. Upon closer inspection, I discovered that I had always

been drawn to narratives with multiple dominants on a single page. Creating comics was similar

to creating the artworks that I had made as a part of my daily activities; the only difference was

that with comics, several frames are merged onto one page. However, one of the final pieces of

work I produced during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which time I was also working on my

thesis, was highly reminiscent of comic books. By sewing medical masks, I used before, I created a piece of art. Each mask featured an illustration that I had created to describe an incident inside of it, and the masks looked like frames from a comic. The representation of the emergence of the illness, as well as its presence and influence on the environment around me, were the subjects of these illustrations (Figure 1).

 I discovered that in most of my works, I had included an image of a woman or young girl who is watching what is going on. My impression is that I have been continuously using these female characters as a third eye to observe more while maintaining my own perspective. This may be a result of my attempts during childhood to understand the world around me, other people's emotions, and especially, other people's suffering. Hence, I decided to continue including this element in my comics.
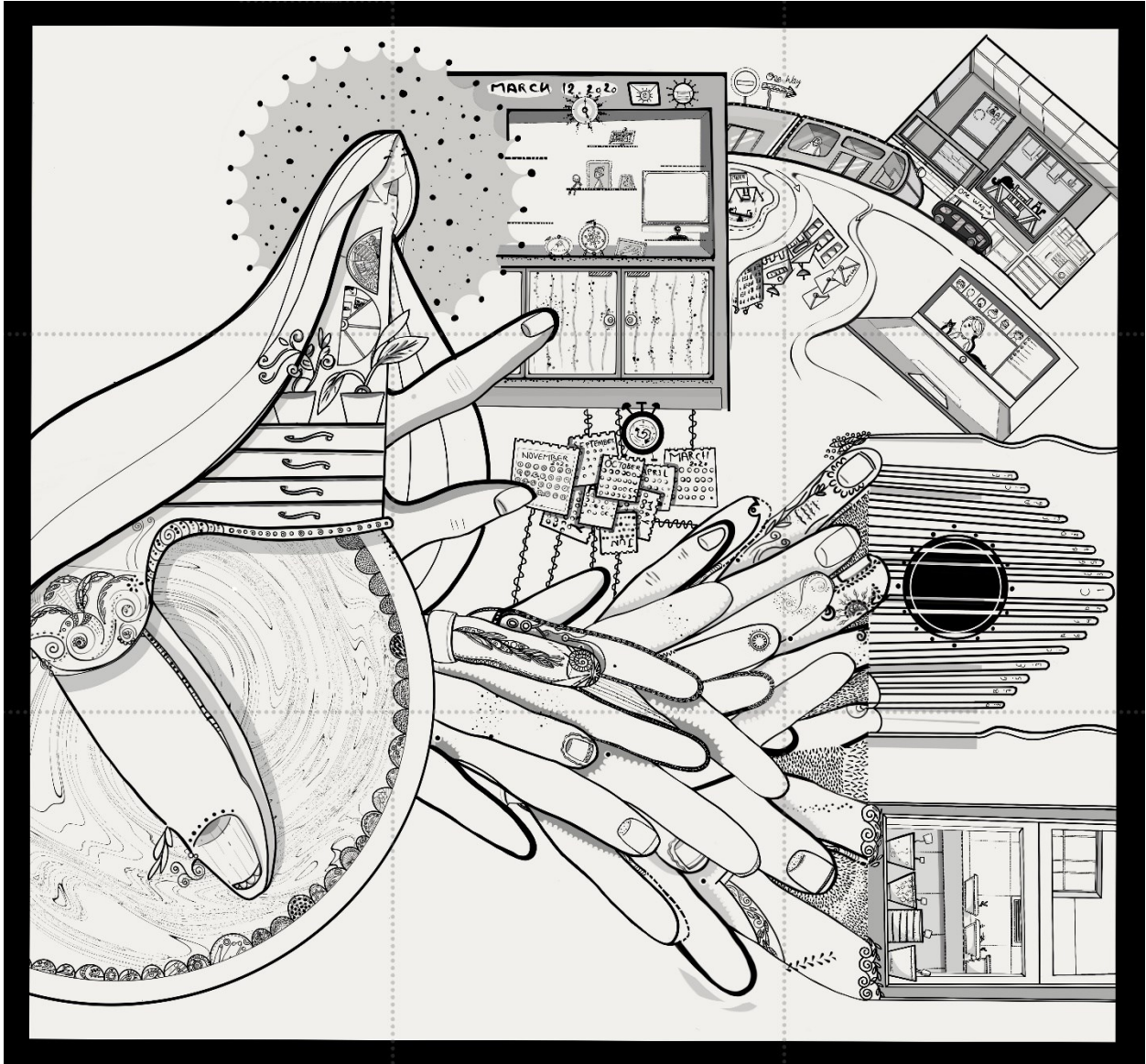
*Figure 1*

My extensive background in animation and visual effects, along with my natural passion for this genre and its setting, led me to the world of comics. I must admit that at first, I was both excited and nervous because if I possessed comparable experiences in the past, everything would have been done subconsciously; however, this time, I wanted to know more and execute it correctly. Although I have always found acquiring new skills and techniques interesting, this

process is always accompanied by anxiety and a fear of destroying my work. Therefore, I chose to develop my digital art experience using comics, which is a new medium for me.

Additionally, I discovered that my interest in storytelling is not limited to stories about my individual experiences; rather, I am keen to use this interest to communicate my thoughts and responses to social contexts and the factors that shape my thoughts. However, for various reasons, most of these problems are specifically tied to my country of origin. Water, earth, and air, in my opinion, are what make me who I am and are the reason for my existence.

As a result, I started to read about Iran's history, particularly Iran's contemporary history, including the revolution and the Iran–Iraq War. What I learned compelled me to leave my country. Reading the autobiographies of authors, particularly Iranian authors who wrote about their firsthand experiences and who were compelled to leave Iran, helped me better understand the problems. Two works that spoke to me at this time were *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi and *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi.

**Reading Lolita in Tehran**

In this book, a successful university professor has her life turned upside down by the Islamic Revolution, and she is compelled to quit jer job and finally leave her native country because of her position. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* describes the lived experiences and memories of a woman who overcame the disruption of the revolution. A teacher who, years later, when she published his book, out of care for her pupils, even altered their identities so that those living in Iran would not be place in danger or have problems.

***Persepolis*: The Story of a Childhood**

*Persepolis* is an autobiographical comic created by an Iranian artist Marjaneh Satrapi (2003), who grew up in a Marxist family that protested the Shah of Iran. She visualizes her pride

for her uncle, who was a political prisoner at the time. However, in the end, she is forced to leave the country, which highlights the consequences of the revolution.

My understanding of this study may differ from those of others who have conducted similar research. Reading these works inspired the first part of my study. Subsequently, I continued to develop my interest. A way to share my experiences and share my hidden and behind-the-scenes experiences visually.

After deciding to use digital art for the project due to my experience in this area, I created all of the sketches and images for my graphic novel using the Procreate application on my iPad. This way, I was able to quickly return to any frame and make necessary adjustments. Furthermore, working digitally made it easier for me to recall each step so that I could later review each revision. Procreate includes all the tools necessary to "[c]reate expressive sketches, rich paintings, gorgeous illustrations and beautiful animations" (Procreate, 2021). It is unquestionably the best drawing app for the iPad and one of the most efficient drawing, painting, and illustration applications available for the iPad; it was made for experts and functions wonderfully with the Apple Pencil (Chan, 2021).

While writing down my memories, I also worked on developing my creative process. I started with writing because I hoped that the process would inspire me and help me draw on past memories, in turn making it easier to make the comic. After writing 12 pages, I found it easier to recall memories. The memories came to me one by one, so I stopped writing. I was content just to take notes. I added memos directly onto the comic page as a separate layer, and I hid this layer when I did not need the notes. However, near the end of my project, I found that I needed to also add written information to my illustrations so that the audience would be able to easily

understand my story. Otherwise, I would have needed to create many illustrations in order to give my comic the necessary detail. Thus, I rewrote all of my memories.

Even though I presented my memories in chronological order within the comic, beginning with my youth and ending with adulthood, I did not initially create them in order. I created each page whenever I remembered an interesting subject. In this case, I avoided the loss of information that I intended to share.

I separated my comics into two sections: (1) my childhood before attending university and (2) the period of graduating as an undergraduate from university. This periodization enabled me to squeeze the length of my story and focus on my experience of immigration. I continued my story to include the time that I had to migrate for the second time, just before arriving in Canada.

My desire to express myself increased as I recorded more of my life history. Visual language, however, has always been my preferred method of communication. Indeed, I am not a particularly strong writer.

**Chapter 4 Analysis**

My sources of information include my autobiographical graphic novel, my written memoir, self-recorded audio, memos, family photos, self-portraits, and Google. I analyzed and decoded my visual reflections and texts to generate new ways of learning. I began with a written diary and memories as old as I could recall from the first day of my life. These texts were intertwined and nonlinear (Creswell, 2013). The starting point for this research was writing a work of reflection and sharing my feelings about the concept of New Year's Eve to explain what it means to me as an immigrant. As an immigrant, I have had the experience of living in multiple

countries and celebrating New Year's Eve with people of different nationalities in different time zones. Additionally, as an Iranian, the concept of a "new year" is totally different to me. For me, the new year is the reminder of the first day of Spring, when nature shakes the snow off and wakes up from its long winter sleep.

The emergence of my data sources was a continuous process, and it felt like a ball that kept bouncing in unpredictable directions while still following the same center. As Creswell (2013) states, "To analyze qualitative data, the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach" (p. 182)

I am aware of my roles as both the subject of the study and as a researcher presenting my identity. Creswell (2013) emphasizes the notion of bias and "the concept of reflexivity in which the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study" (p. 216). I contributed my personal ideas and firsthand experiences to this study by sharing my understanding of the everyday realities of living as an immigrant.

I have been compelled to tell my story because, compared to other types of descriptions, "[s]tories can frequently convey a significantly better knowledge of the human condition" (Sandercock, 2003, p. 12). I wrote about my own experiences as a young child growing up in Iran amidst war and Islamic repression, which twice drove me to migrate. And who knows how many more times I might migrate in the future. As El Tannir (2022) writes, "The encounters I described in my writing, along with my emotions and concerns, served as the basis for the graphic novel" (p. 81).

To identify codes, categories, themes, and dimensions, I applied the procedures outlined by Creswell (2013), which involves conducting an inductive analysis of the qualitative data and moving from specifics to broader viewpoints. Then, using deductive reasoning, I sought to

identify proof regarding the themes and my interpretations. I started with raw data and then formed larger and broader categories as I progressed through various levels of abstraction. Next, I "layered the analysis into increasing levels of abstractions from codes to themes, to the interrelationship of themes, to larger conceptual models (p. 93). Finally, I examined the results by contrasting my results with my personal beliefs and the body of existing research (Creswell, 2013).

I reviewed transcripts and colour-coded the major themes that I identified. I classified my mentions of these topics into several categories, made notes regarding how frequently I did so, and regularly compared and contrasted the results. I will discuss the recurring themes, descriptions, and specific categories I found in the remainder of this chapter.

## War and Revolution

I was born in Iran in 1984. I started my life under the rain of rockets and the sound of warning sirens telling people to take shelter underground. I can recall the thick wide tape on the windows to protect us in case the glass broke from a bomb blast.

Every war has the same bitterness and suffering. Everyone finds war terrifying and frightful. Death is meaningless to a young child who has not yet grasped the significance of birth. When someone dies, children expect that they will eventually return. People born around the same time as me share the memory of spending every weekend, New Year's Eve, birthday, and holiday in a cemetery. War entails observation. It denotes actual history. And this bitterness will never cease if, as happened in my country, a revolution occurs after the war, and religious people seize control. Iran has been wrecked by the Islamic government; indeed, it has done even more damage than the eight years of war.

They brainwashed people and declared that happiness of any kind went against the will of God; therefore, happy people are seen as defying the law. Without any real justification, the Islamic Republic regime began to kill and imprison people. The Iranian people's culture and morals were destroyed by the Islamic Republic, which used a well-thought-out strategy. Islamic practices were frequently taught on radio and television. Most films that were shown focused on the suffering of agnostics; for instance, people who did not pray and women who laughed while wearing makeup were portrayed negatively. Conversely, people who prayed regularly and fasted on regular days were portrayed as excellent people.

The Islamic government has always been against women. They believe that men are the owners of women, and they have said that a woman is worth half the value of a man. As owners of women, men are exempt from harsh punishment and are permitted to beat, torment, rape, and even kill their wives, daughters, and sisters. My life and the lives of thousands like me were destroyed for many years by the Islamic Revolution, which began just a few years before my birth.

There were years when the only colours I could wear outside the house were black, grey, brown, and navy. During the years that I fought for this basic right, I got into arguments with people around me, and I did not care what was said behind my back. For years, I took different routes to school, my workplace, and other places out of fear of being arrested by the so-called "morality police" on the streets just so that I could dress in a way that brought me joy.

Although years passed, I was still unable to forget the images of people being executed that had been streamed on TV and printed in newspapers.

**Identity**

I grew up in a family where everyone loved each other and lived their own lives; however, even my family was not spared the pain of war. Witnessing the cries of grieving mothers and fathers who have lost a child made me careful not to do anything to upset anyone and not to cause pain to others.

Whenever I fell down, I was conscious that if my mother noticed that I was in pain, she would feel very sad. So, whenever I fell over, I always stood up laughing. I used to look into the eyes of people on the street so that when I smiled, it might make them feel good momentarily.

Like any other child, I loved to dance and be happy, and this caused me to be rejected by the society that the Islamic government had constructed.

However, I learned from the beginning that I must be resilient; I should try and fight for everything that I want, even if it is simple. Many times, fatigue and despair made me weak. However, I managed to rebuild myself, and I continued.

Everyone around me, whether I know them or not, is important to me. This is because I have learned to assume other people's perspectives so that I can feel their pain and enjoy their happiness. I have been ridiculed by others on many occasions; however, I learned that being indifferent is the most dangerous act. Being indifferent to the suffering of others, regardless of how far away they may be, is inhumane and will have very negative effects on the globe.

While conducting this project, I realized that I am afraid of unpredictable things and changes; this fear causes me to constantly postpone tasks. However, once I start, I do not stop

until I do the task to the best of my ability. My life was filled with patience, and it taught me that being afraid and getting tired is the easiest thing to do, and therefore, I should avoid it.

**Migration**

It is said that few things in the world are as painful as the death of a loved one. However, divorce and migration can be similarly painful.

In my opinion, the reason why one migrates is much more important than the act of migrating itself. Leaving one's country because of intolerable conditions cannot be compared to visiting new places. When you have to leave your home and family, it feels like dying. It becomes worse when you have to witness what your family, friends, and fellow citizens are going through in your country.

For me, migration was a period of questioning situations, even despite the positive changes that it brings. When I got a job offer in Malaysia, I kept asking myself, "What if they actually offered me this salary by mistake?" If my work was so good that the company was willing to give me such a generous income, then why was I unable to earn even a third of this amount in my own country? About a month after starting my job, while I was waiting for the bus to go to work, some questions came to my mind, and even after six years, I still do not know the answer to these questions. I asked myself, "Was life supposed to be this simple from the beginning? Why have we never experienced this in Iran? Why should someone experience a very simple life in a place other than their own country?"

Additionally, I experienced of considering myself as all, instead feeling of being a foreigner in another country. Meeting people from all around the world allows one to establish connections that can only be experienced by living far from home. That is when I realized that all people, regardless of nationality, are important to me. Moreover, it does not matter if I have lived

in these territories. I feel a connection because they are my friends. I felt this exact feeling on New Year's Eve in 2022. I said,

> "When you migrate, all of a sudden, you see a lot has changed in yourself. You may not notice the changes right away. You will find yourself celebrating a new year more than once in a single year. When you migrate, based on the countries you have lived in, you stare at the clock to say a happy new year to those countries when it is midnight their time. When you emigrate, the number of joys and sorrows increases drastically. You rejoice in the celebrations and joys of the countries that host you. When you immigrate, the size of the world changes according to the number of people of different nationalities you meet. You will shed tears for the calamities of your country. You will find yourself heartbroken about the misfortunes of other countries. This is all because you have friends whose lives are rooted in other countries. When you emigrate, you look for any excuses to introduce your country and your people, as well as your people's concerns, pain, and joy. You will also seek to share your history in any possible way, regardless of language. When you emigrate, the history of other countries and the happiness of those people becomes a living condition for you." (Figure 29)

While I was working on my comic illustrations and recalling memories related to my immigration experience, I realized that I had undergone a fundamental change. Over time, I gained the self-confidence necessary to present my art, speak out, share my ideas, and more. I was unable to feel such confidence before leaving my country. Comics became a way for me to revisit my personal experience of migration; this time, however, I revisited this history from a wider, outside perspective.

In addition to all the emotions, I also cannot ignore the sense of self-satisfaction I experienced. Moreover, despite the unpleasant treatment I have received because of my nationality, I am proud to be an Iranian, and I am glad that I was able to experience being an immigrant, even if I will never be able to return to my country.

## Limitations

During the research process, I experienced several limitations. For example, I had difficulty deciding how to improve each page. What kind of information should I include in each frame? Which frame should be larger, and which frame should be smaller? How can I make sure the composition is diverse and avoids duplication? However, by approaching the artistic process in a lighthearted manner, I was able to decrease the initial rigours, allowing for speedier decision-making, better design, and, ultimately, the successful implementation of each proposal. Additionally, because I was working with the iPad and digital pen, I frequently needed to stop working to recharge these devices.

## Benefits

The step-by-step progression of creating comics was very beneficial and motivating for people with an idealistic mindset like myself. Having only a few frames and little formatting on each page greatly aided in raising my focus and forcing me to be more explicit about how and when I tell my stories to avoid losing my concentration.

**Chapter 5 Graphic Novels**

In the previous chapter, I presented the main themes that I extracted from the data. This chapter utilizes a graphic novel to present my personal story, including my childhood, adolescence, and immigration journey up until my arrival in Canada. It consists of different events that happened to me and made me an immigrant. That is, it contains the events that shaped my identity. This graphic novel was created using a digital pen on my iPad and the Procreate software. The graphic novel is 28 pages long, and it presents the three main themes of my project: (1) war and revolution, (2) identity, and (3) migration.

I hope that readers will be able to relate to the graphic novel, learn from it, and obtain additional knowledge regarding the untold history of immigration.

On July 25, 1984, my mother, Tooba, who was accompanied by my father, Sirous, gave birth to me in Tehran, Iran (Figure 2). My father first chose my name when he was a teenager. Shaghayegh means "poppy flower." Additionally, "Shaghayegh" is the name of an old popular song related to my father's adolescence. In my country, shaghayegh is a symbol of love, nostalgia, empathy, and sorrow. Shaghayegh is an ear to open hearts. Anyone who wants to talk about their strange pain or homelessness calls my name. The lyrics state, "Shaghayegh, here I'm very much a stranger." I have heard these lyrics since I was a child, and they have attached themselves to my soul. (https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Dariush/Shaghayegh/translation/english).

I used to be called "Shaghayegh always grins" by everyone in both a loving and playful manner. However, they had a point. Since I can remember, I have always worn a smile when connecting with others, even during challenging circumstances (Figure 2).

Growing up amidst the ongoing Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988), my life was filled with the sound of sirens, noisy TV programs, and adhesive tape on windows in case they shattered. For years, I assumed that all windows had a similar tape design on them everywhere in the world. At the age of three, I lost my only uncle; he was on my mother's side. I still remember my love for him during the war (Figure 3).

During the years after that tragedy, our holidays, vacations, and gatherings were all spent in the cemetery and next to the grave of Uncle Saeed. Cries of grief from broken-hearted mothers increased in number every day (Figure 4).

I turned six.

In those days, there was little entertainment for children. This was particularly true for me, a lone girl in a country that had recently undergone an Islamic revolution. Our neighbour was a Quran tutor; I joined her class alongside some other girls my age. I was learning to pray, perform ablutions, and recite the Qur'an. Television taught prayers, ablution, and the Qur'an. Most of these programs were planned by the Islamic regime to be broadcasted in the middle of children's programs. Thus, I inadvertently memorized parts of the Qur'an (Figure 6).

When I entered school, I was reciting the Qur'an aloud during daily morning programs. I participated in competitions and won prizes.

I was seven years old when I first became acquainted with the fantastic world of VHS players. A video set with a TV show shook my world (Figure 7). I did not know where they came from; all I knew was that owning a VHS was considered illegal by the Islamic Republic. So, if anyone had reported us to the Intelligence Department of the Islamic Republic, my parents would have been imprisoned or flogged.

On the show on the VHS tape, I saw a woman singing, and she was not wearing a *hijab*. She was dancing and laughing freely, and magnificently, she was Iranian and singing fluently in my mother tongue (Figures 7 & 8).

"I'm leaving here," I told my mother. "You'll watch me on TV one day," I continued. She laughed and did not believe me (Figures 7 & 8).

Executions were frequently shown on television and in movies. These scenes were so common that we got used to them. Now, many years later, I am thinking about how deft and clever the Islamic Republic was to train people to accept such dreadful violence. Scenes of executions in movies were accompanied by a clever and straightforward expression: "The

innocent head goes to the gallows, but it does not go above the gallows." People subconsciously believed this line to the point that if they saw someone being executed, they would automatically conclude that the person was guilty and deserved death. Indeed, if the person was not guilty, their life would have been spared at the last minute (Figure 9).

When I was learning how to read and write, I looked through the pages of the newspaper for events (Figure 9). The black and white newspaper photos depicted scenes of people hanged without any pretext. News programs on TV constantly talked about the execution of people whom the Islamic regime referred to as "villains" (Figure 9).

All of this fed my nightmares. As a child, I would sit in a corner, practicing not breathing to see how long I could survive without oxygen. I was testing exactly how I would suffer if the Islamic Republic executed me for violating Islamic law one day. Another subject in the newspapers and on the radio and TV was news about children who had lost their arms, legs, or eyes. I passed my pencil from my right foot to my left foot, and then I grabbed the pencil with my toes using both feet and practiced writing so that if I lost my arms, I would not fall behind. I would close my eyes and walk to practice for possibly becoming blind (Figure 9).

At school, I learned that if I did not wear the hijab, I would be hanged by my hair in the other world. So, I pulled my hair to determine if a strand of my hair could carry my weight (Figure 10).

Because of my father's job, we frequently moved from one place to another. When I was in third grade, we relocated from a large, somewhat open city to a small, intensely religious city. The municipal laws mandated that all women wear a veil. When I was a young girl, donning a hijab represented how I envisioned myself as an adult (Figure 11).

My mother spent several days sewing a white veil with blue lace flowers for me to wear to the celebration of JashneTaklif. Girls' schools hold a ceremony called the Jashne Taklif for nine-year-old girls. At the ceremony, they talked to us about prayer and its benefits. They also stated that failing to follow the religious rules of prayer would result in agonizing punishment, such as burning in hell. They discussed the requirement to wear a full hijab starting at age nine, as well as the harsh penalties in hell for non-observers. Of course, there is a similar ceremony for boys; however, they become responsible at the age of fifteen, the speaker said (Figure 11).

One day my attention was drawn to a music video on YouTube called "It Aint Me" (Figure 12). The song was about the Vietnam War. The music transported me back to a time many, many years ago. If I am not mistaken, I was 12 or 13. Our house was located on the upper floor of my grandparents' house. My grandfather, Babaei, was an educated man, and he had a bachelor's degree in French. He was always reading when he was at home. In the basement, there was a wooden shelf where my grandfather kept his books. It was an old and dilapidated shelf that had two completely separated parts. The lower part had a wooden door, and the upper part had glass doors that were always open. Babaei had very special books that were certainly banned. My mother, who had noticed my interest in reading, insisted that I not touch Babaei's books. Of course, this made me more curious; I wanted to know why I could not read those books (Figure 12).

Finally, one day I snuck over to my grandpa's library. I found a book of poems by Forough Farrokhzad. She was an author who wrote wonderful poems during the Shah's time; however, because she discussed emotional issues and her relationship with her lover, her books were removed from the shelves of bookstores after the revolution (Figure 13). There were two other books in the library that had simple cardboard covers. One of them had a yellow cover.

After Forough, my attention was drawn to this book with the yellow cover. Reading this book secretly and out of sight of my family left a huge impact on my mind. I still feel fear and anxiety when I think about reading these books (Figure 13). It was a small book about the Vietnam War and the calamities that befell the Vietnamese people. I read the book in awe of what terrible things had happened. Because I was a girl, I read the book looking to learn about the problems that women had to deal with. I read that they were kept in cages without any washrooms. The book also claimed that the bottle of soft drink were using as torture equipment. The book also stated that during the period of bleeding, nothing was provided to them. It was also written that... Unfortunately, I cannot remember everything I read. I realized that remembering these things made me feel heavy... Now, when I have my period, bleed, and feel a lot of pain, I think of the text of this book, and my subconscious mind is seized by fear (Figure 13).

My two cousins and I were preparing to start high school. We had a close relationship, and we were close friends. We went to the store with our elders to buy school supplies and clothes. While browsing, we all decided to buy the same pair of shoes that had caught our attention. It was a white shoe with navy braided lines. We each returned home with a pair. We were all living in different cities.

We were very pleased with our choice. The first day of school came (Figure 14). I used to love going to school, and I always missed school during the summer holidays. After putting on my new shoes, I headed to school with gusto. However, when I arrived at the entrance, several people stopped me and would not let me enter the yard (Figure 14). They informed me that the school officials were required to check everything, and if they found something against the school's rules and regulations, they would quickly report it to the administration and record the name of the offending student and their offence. The student would also have to promise not to

repeat the mistake again. It was my new white shoes that got me in trouble. On the very first day

of high school, right when I was about to enter school, a group kept me in a corner and explained

to me that "neither white shoes nor white socks are allowed to be worn" (Figure 14).

Consequently, my new shoes stayed inside for many years because, apart from school, I

did not go anywhere. That is, I had nowhere to go. I was a girl, and it was unacceptable, and even

immoral, for a girl to take a walk on the street (Figure 14).

During high school, my passion for vibrant and cheery colours resulted in minor

arguments with my family. Indeed, Iran was a country where everyone, especially women, must

wear black and sombre clothing (Figure 15). My classmates and I were forbidden from wearing

particular styles and colours of clothing, and for parents like mine, who had grown up in an era

of prosperity and freedom of expression in Iran, this seemed quite natural. The first time that I

went to buy a Mantoux, I was 15 or 16 years old, and I was physically small. It goes without

saying that all girls entering school at age 7 need to wear a Mantoux (Figure 15). My parents

accompanied me. I looked for a Mantoux in my favourite colour that would fit me, and I was

unaware that Islamic society had denied me the option of choosing what I wanted. In the end, my

parents picked out a Mantoux for me that was several sizes too large. They said it was

appropriate; however, even several years later, I still hate that outfit (Figure 15).

One day, when I was a sophomore in high school, a female student approached me and

stated that she wanted to nominate me for the school elections. At first, I thought she was making

a joke, but then I noticed that my classmates were encouraging me (Figure 16). I had no doubt

that I would not be elected. I actually did not think there was any cause to be (Figure 16). The

day of the election passed with jokes and laughing. However, when the results were announced,

something unexpected occurred. "Our next president will be Miss Shaghayegh Darabi!" It was

unbelievable. I was shocked. I was also thrilled by the number of friends who knew me and supported me (Figure 16).

Subsequently, we held meetings nearly every day to make the school more upbeat for students, and I did my best. School management and I even discussed student uniforms in hopes that I could bring about some improvements (Figure 17). One day, I arrived at school but was unable to locate the other members of the group. When I was asking around, I was informed that I was not sent to a camp with the other members since I never wore a complete hijab (Figure 17).

The university admission exam was scheduled to be taken after high school. After a year of study, I placed 301 out of 25,000 applicants. I was quite disappointed with the outcome because I was confident that I could have achieved a better ranking. In any case, I was still able to apply for several fields that I wanted (Figure 18).

I applied to the theatre department and was granted admission. However, right before classes were to begin, my admission was cancelled. I was shocked and kept asking questions regarding the reason. They responded that they had investigated me and had discovered that I did not completely cover my hair. In this way, I was prevented from studying in my preferred field (Figure 18).

A few months later, after having to deal with these difficulties, I was granted admission to a fashion design Bachelors of Arts program. Over the course of the next four years, I gradually developed a passion for fashion design. However, after finishing my studies, my career abruptly shifted once again due to my inability to obtain employment and my lack of funds to launch my own company.

I enrolled in animation courses, and I began working in the animation industry. However, my salary was insufficient to cover my living expenditures.

**The Second Phase**

When I first met Alireza, I was 28 years old. We discussed our intentions and objectives in the very early days. We were drawn to each other by the fact that we were both seeking to immigrate. Alireza informed me that he was seeking a committed partner and advised that if I felt the same, it would be wise to develop a clear strategy for the future (Figure 19). It was impossible for us to meet very frequently because we were not in a good financial position, and we lived in different cities. We decided to try and meet once or twice a month.

However, we communicated online constantly (Figure 19). We decided early on in our relationship to emphasize our careers, strengthen our portfolios, and send them to employers outside of Iran. Until we both got job offers, we planned to stay with our families. Even though we both had jobs in Iran, our income as artists was insufficient for us to support ourselves on our own. In fact, the Islamic regime has never given art or artists any support. The artists who supported the regime, of course, were exempt from this ban and were able to easily support themselves financially (Figure 19).

We started our search. I was in charge of looking for prospects and contacting overseas businesses to give them our applications (Figure 20). I kept trying day and night. Due to the time difference, I sent emails all throughout the day, and I would frequently stay up late at night in hopes of receiving a response.

However, completing these applications took a lot of effort and energy. We received no news for six months. All of our friends agreed that receiving a job offer from another country is

difficult or nearly impossible for Iranians. We frequently quarrelled and grew increasingly exhausted as the days went by; however, we were forced to keep going. We kept submitting our applications and waiting (Figure 20). Two years passed. They were two long years filled with ups and downs. Even though we were frequently disappointed and occasionally exhausted, we did not give up (Figure 21).

Alireza had his first interview on February 24, 2016. Even though he ended up not getting the job, getting an interview after two years of waiting was incredibly exciting. Over the new two months, he received multiple interview requests.

We had few expectations for how these interviews would turn out, and after over a month had passed since the last interview, we lost some of our enthusiasm. However, slowly but surely, we continued looking and applying for jobs at other companies. This time, however, was different than the previous ones. One morning, I was so exhausted that I did not even check my email after waking up. I spoke with Alireza on the phone. As usual, our chat dragged on for a while. I hung up the phone in frustration and checked my email out of habit. Something immediately startled me. There was an email with the subject line "job offer." No, I must be dreaming! An animation studio in Malaysia had offered Alireza a job, and they expected him to start in June 2016, which was a month away (Figure 21).

I called him back (Figure 21).

- "Hello! Alireza! Check your email. I'm holding the phone. Check now. Com' on!"

    It was ten in the morning, and we were both surprised and thrilled.

- "Is it a joke? Should we wait a little while to make sure this email is authentic? But that is all we have—a month! How are we supposed to wait?" (Figure 21)

Because Alireza and I were only friends, I was not allowed to accompany him to Malaysia. Our only choice was to get married. My family was completely unaware of my relationship with Alireza. Moreover, marriage in Iran has its own customs and protocols. Before we could get married, we first needed to introduce our families to each other. Additionally, there was a lot of translation and paperwork to be done, and it had to be finished in one month (Figure 22). We could not share this information with our families for an entire week since we were afraid the job offer could be withdrawn. However, after a week of battling, we explained the situation to our families. Both of our families were stressed and in disbelief, not only because their children were leaving Iran but also because they were getting married to a person they knew very little about. However, we had made up our minds. We had been working hard for two years, and nothing could have deterred us during that period. Naturally, our families supported us wholeheartedly so that we could move to Malaysia (Figure 22).

One day, my older brother came and told me, "Shaghayegh, you are leaving, and I hope and am sure that you will succeed. But don't doubt that at any moment if you feel like coming back, this is always your home, and we are always by your side." Hearing these words, I let go of all my anxiety and fear. Even after six years, I still remember his words fondly. And with that, we continued on with our plans. We had a modest wedding party and got our paperwork completed. Soon after, our departure date arrived (Figure 22).

Everyone was doing something to help us. However, deep down, none of us were happy. Saying goodbye is the hardest thing in the world. According to Marjane Satrapi (2003), it is like dying. That day, my aunt, my cousin, my grandmothers, my grandfather, and my father's aunt were at our house. I took my last photo with my cousin in my room (Figure 23) and left with my

luggage. I stowed away my love for that house and its inhabitants in the corner of my heart and left. I hugged my Mamani, who I loved to the moon and back, and said goodbye (Figure 23).

Mom, Dad, and Peyman, my younger brother, accompanied me to the airport. Peyman kept saying that he wished he had not come, as he could not bear to see me leave (Figure 23). Many of our loved ones met us at the airport to bid us farewell. It was difficult not to cry (Figure 24). It was challenging because nobody would leave my country if it were a good place to live. It was challenging because everyone kept wondering what would have happened if Iran had returned to the way things were 40 years ago and if there had been no revolution.

Following our farewell, we headed to the inspection station. The Islamic government's laws continued to be enforced even when we were leaving. They commented on my scarf, and they asked why I did not wear the hijab fully. "We won't let you board the airline if you don't maintain your hijab properly," they said, threatening me. They even made me change my Mantoux (Figure 24). This reminded me why I was leaving this country and this region. A government that restricts its citizens' freedom of dress is certainly restricting all of their other liberties as well. I could finally get rid of them, and I left the room. From behind the windows, I could see my parents' and brothers' anxious eyes. I wish the glass wall was gone so I could give them another embrace. However, I was not able to (Figure 24).

On the way to Malaysia, Alireza and I experienced varied emotions. Although we were relieved to take a big step forward on our life journey, we were also concerned and frightened about the future. When we arrived in Malaysia, we did not know where to go. We did not even have the experience of using Uber because Uber does not exist in Iran (Figure 25).

We immediately bought a SIM card at the airport, messaged our families that we had arrived safely, and took a taxi to the hotel. The hotel we booked was in a big shopping mall. When we arrived, to change our mood, we bought a bottle of wine and went back to our room. However, we ended up drinking while crying. It did not work; we did not feel better. Instead, our sorrows and worries turned to tears. We stayed in the hotel for a week. During this one week, Alireza woke up every night in the middle of the night and said, "What happened? Where are we?" I had to explain to him every time that "there is nothing special going on... We are sleeping at a hotel" (Figure 25).

After a week, we rented a small studio. Alireza worked from morning to afternoon, and I was alone all the time. This loneliness was very difficult for me, as I came from a large family, and it made me depressed (Figure 25). In the past, both of us would talk to our parents every day without exception. Six years later, we are still living like this.

However, our new situation and loneliness caused us to repeatedly have arguments, and there were many times when I wanted to go back to Iran. Of course, we also had happy moments. For example, a few days before my birthday, Alireza surprised me and invited his Iranian friends and colleagues whom he had met at the company. These gatherings and social events helped us feel better (Figure 25).

Having an Iranian passport also made things rather uncomfortable in Malaysia. Alireza received a letter from his office inviting him to visit a bank and open an account as a foreigner. They initially welcomed us inside and treated us with great respect. With the letter in hand, Alireza stated that he had come to open an account. "Yes, sure. We appreciate you choosing our bank." They replied.

- Would you kindly hand over your passport?
- Yes, of course.
- Umm... Are you Iranian?
- Yes!
- I'm sorry, but due to your nationality, you are not permitted to establish an account in Malaysia... (Figure 26)

It took more than a month for Alireza to finish this process.

As we intended to continue living in Malaysia, we attempted not to become overwhelmed by anything despite all the mental challenges. Alireza encouraged me to work on my portfolio, as I had been applying for jobs on Alireza's behalf nonstop for the previous two years (Figure 26). Now my turn had come. I created new artwork, updated my portfolio, and began applying for jobs around the clock. This time, it took two months. Although I had an interview and was offered a job, it was in China (Figure 26)!

Obviously, moving again after only two months of residing in Malaysia was not very rational. I was lucky, however, because the art director and the recruitment team loved my artwork, and they recommended that I join their team in Kuala Lumpur (Figure 27).

I started working three months after we had moved to Malaysia, and my wage was significantly higher than average. My salary was 75,000 Ringgit; this amount of money transformed our lives (Figure 27). Despite my high salary, I was also unable to open a bank account, and the same incident occurred (Figure 27).

During the first seven months, I was on the road for more than four hours every day, and I also had to work half days on Saturdays. Nevertheless, I was satisfied. Now that Alireza and I both were working and had enough income, we were able to think about our next steps in life. We were aware that no foreigner is ever granted residency in Malaysia. We also knew that if a

foreigner loses their job, by law, they only have one month to leave the country. Because of this, and because the Malaysian government does not treat Iranians well (Figure 27), we decided to start planning to move to our next destination.

We were required to carry our passports and work visas everywhere we went (Figure 27). On time, we were stopped by the cops directly in front of our residence. We were with a friend at the time who was new to Malaysia and had forgotten to carry his passport with him when we were out walking. The cops mistreated us and threatened to imprison us if we did not have our passports with us. They said, "This is not Iran where you may go wherever you want easily" (Figure 27).

The issues we had there were on one side, and the events that were happening every day in Iran were on the other (Figure 28). We could never be indifferent towards our country and the pains its people are suffering. I could never say that my life is more important than those of others or that I only live once, so I want to enjoy it. Thus, in addition to all our efforts and the pressures that we were facing in foreign countries, the news of Iran constantly affected us (Figure 28).

It was January 2018. We used to watch the New Year's Eve fireworks from the window of our house. The sound of the celebration and the stomping was coming from everywhere. However, on the other side of the world, the Islamic Republic was busy killing protesters on the streets of Iran. Therefore, how could we be so indifferent to our people's pain and enjoy the New Year's Eve ceremony (Figure 28)?

Still, life continues, and we continued our efforts. We kept researching where we should go after Malaysia, checking all the countries that had good reputations in our fields of animation

and VFX industry. We needed to devise another plan. In the meantime, I started applying to Canadian universities while working full-time. My daily schedule involved working from 9 am to 7 pm during the day and preparing for the IELTS exam at night from 8 am to 2 am (Figure 28).

We faced another shock.

After working for 15 months, my company told me that they planned to dissolve the department that I was working in. I was told that I only had two weeks to leave Malaysia. This reinforced our belief that Malaysia was not a long-term option for us (Figure 28).

However, due to Alireza's job, I was able to stay in Malaysia. I was accepted to Concordia University, and at the same time, we started the process of getting permanent residency in Canada. I had to defer my education for a year to focus on our residency applications. I applied as a self-employed artist (Figure 28).

In truth, the three years we spent in Malaysia and the two years prior to that were spent trying and running to reach a point that may be the simplest and most superficial point in any person's life.

Skipping the process of my self-employed application, the last day in Malaysia arrived. My last memory as an Iranian citizen in Malaysia was the moment we left the country. The officer, who was a religious woman, asked me for my passport. I presented it with my usual smile, and suddenly she started to act as if she wanted to throw up. She held my passport with two fingers as if she was holding something dirty. At first, I did not understand what the problem was, and I thought that she might be sick. I asked her if she needed any help, and that is when I

understood that the problem was the nationality that my passport was showing. I took my

passport, and we left for Canada (Figure 28).

Figure 2
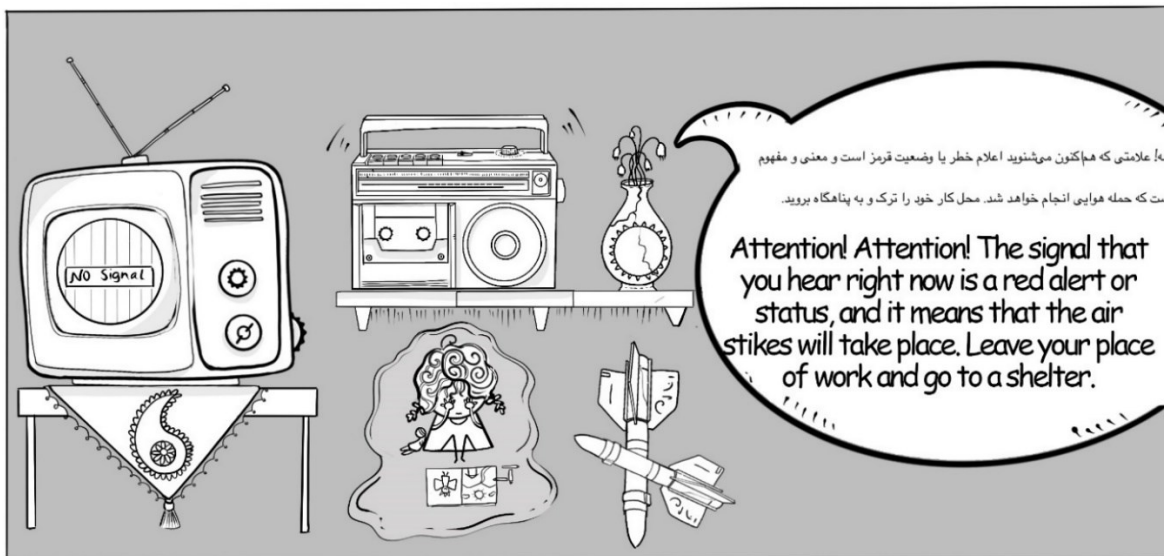
*Figure 3*
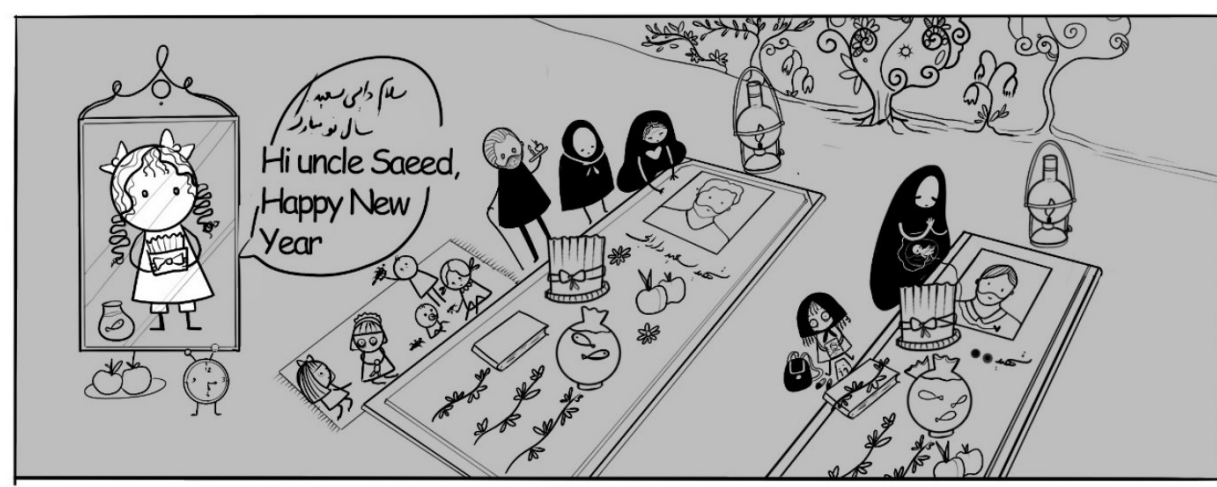
And here I am today, thirty years after those events. And here I am, sitting here thinking back on the events that shaped who I am today. And here I am, going over memories for which I have no pictures at all. And now, this is who I am. I'm here because I once read somewhere that the reader has a right to know the author. I regrettably can't recall who said it, but I wholeheartedly concur.

*Figure 4*

For several years, we spent every weekend at the cemetary. We travelled to Behesht Zahra every week with my aunts and cousins in buses that were also carrying families whose loved ones had perished in the war.
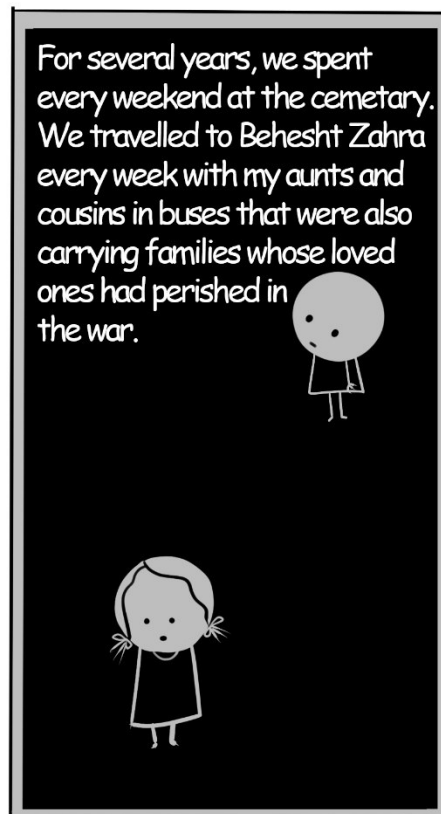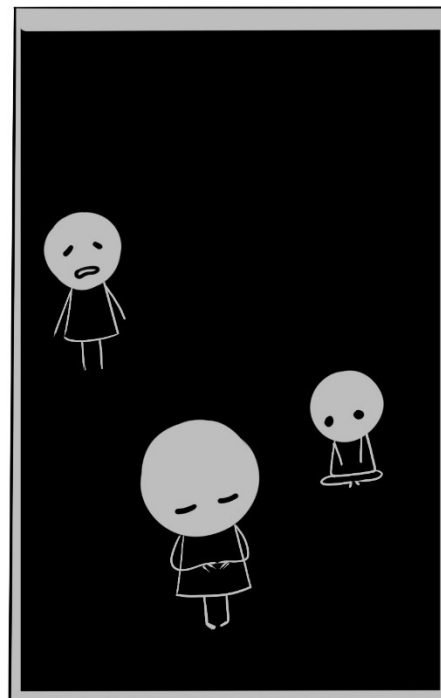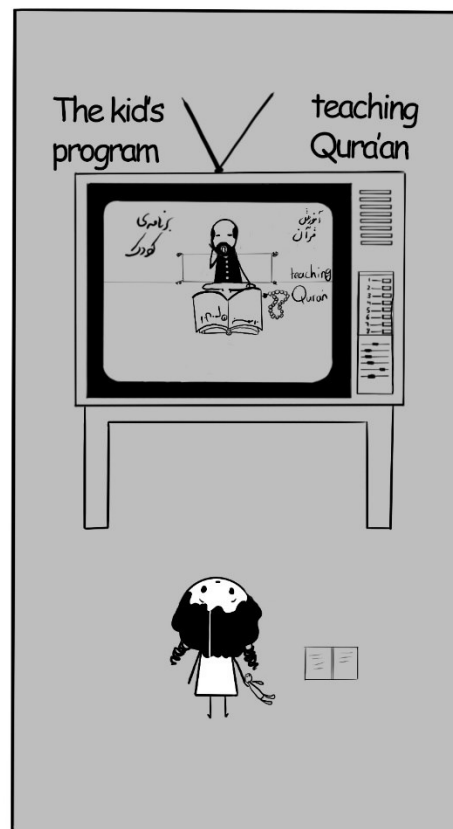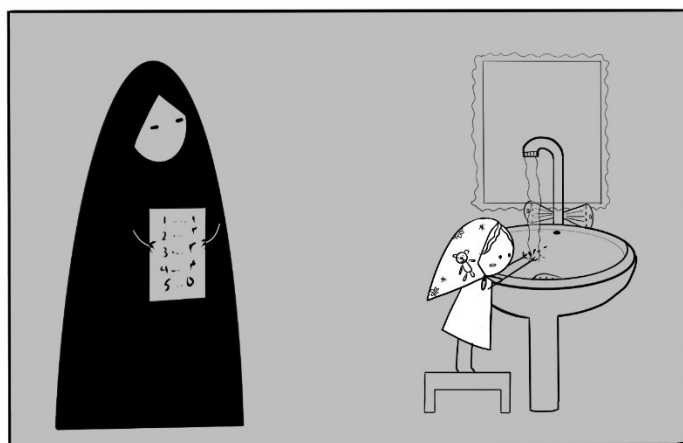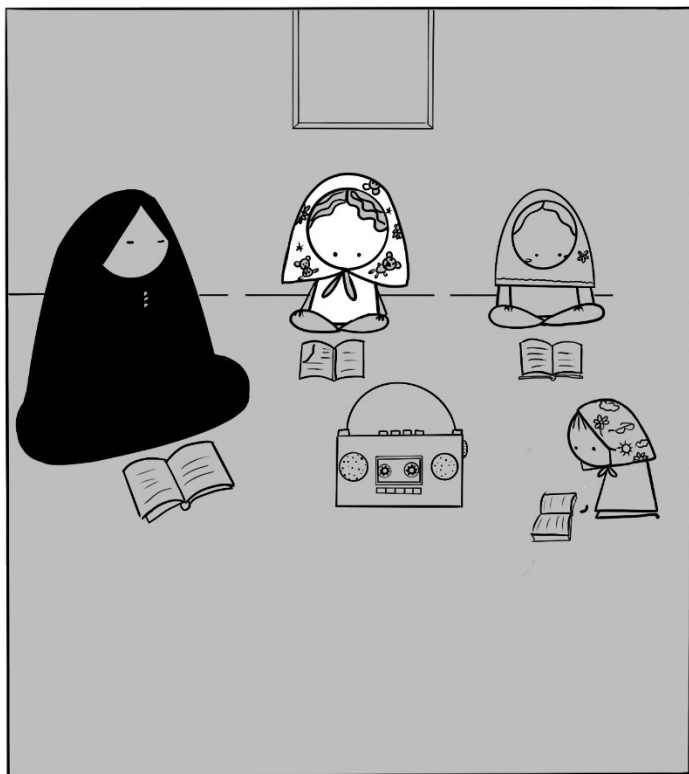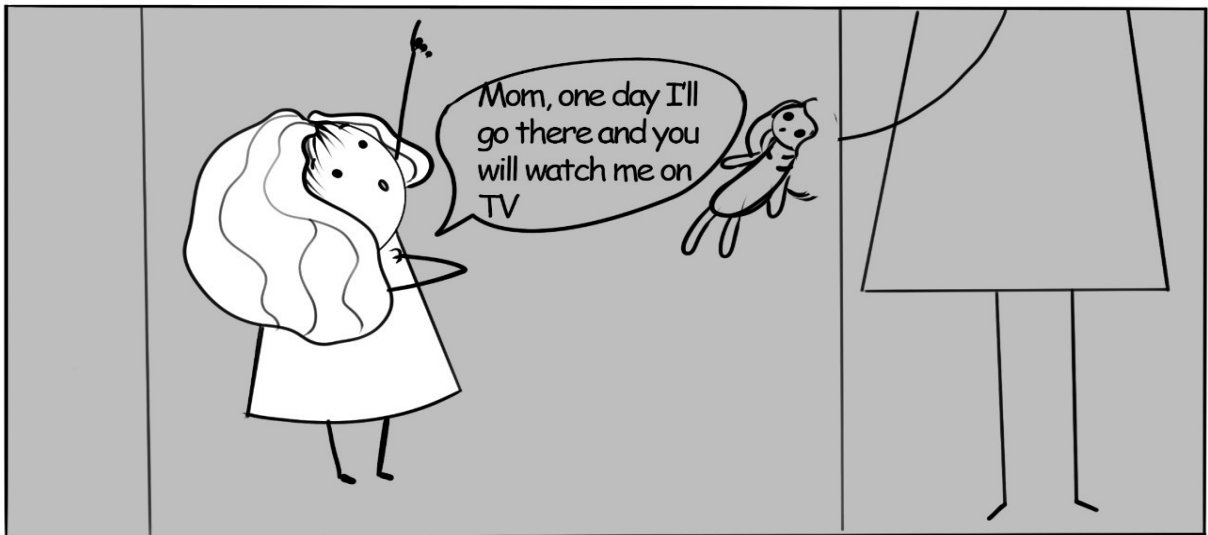
*Figure 5*

*Figure 6*

*Figure 7*
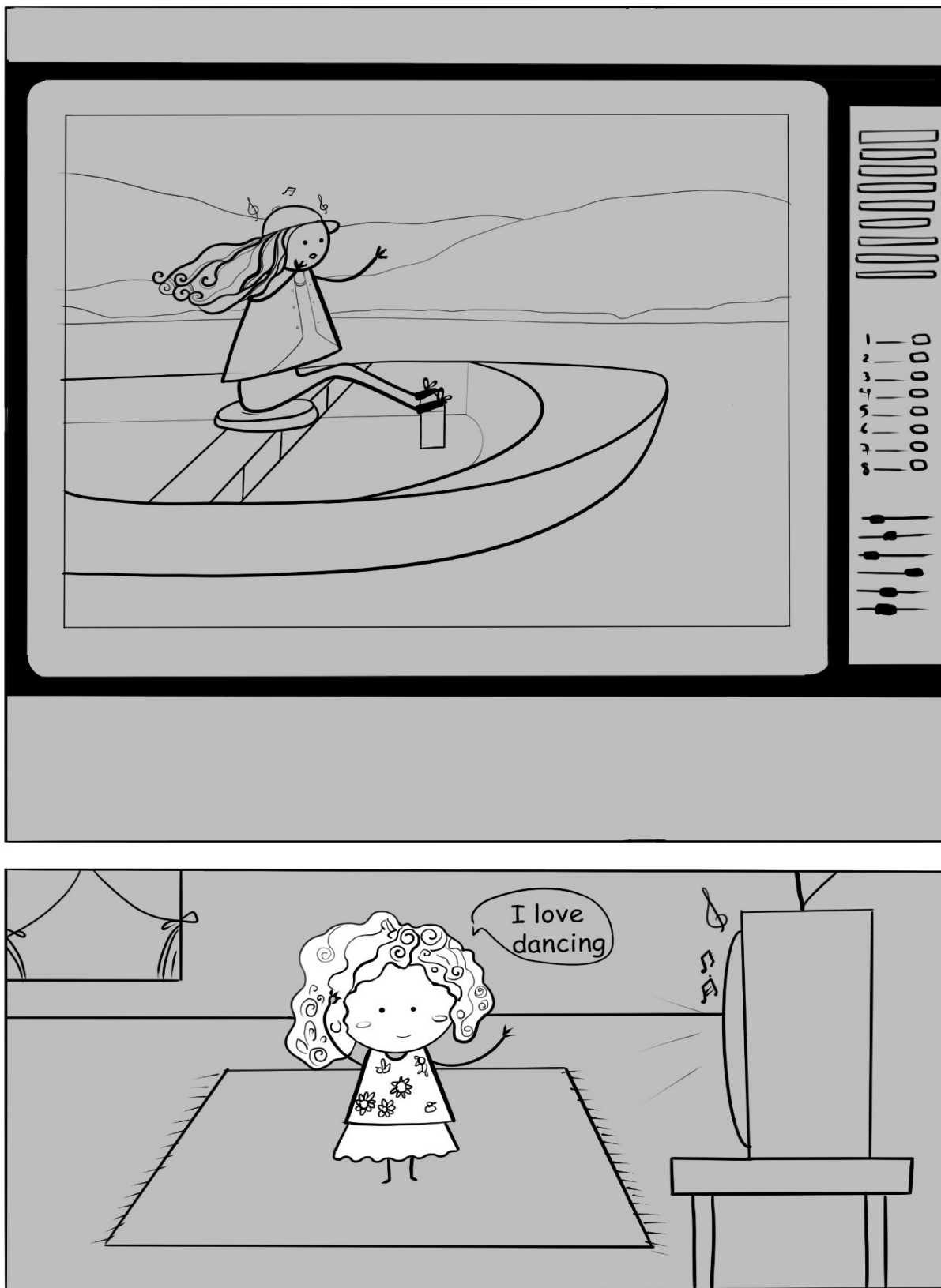
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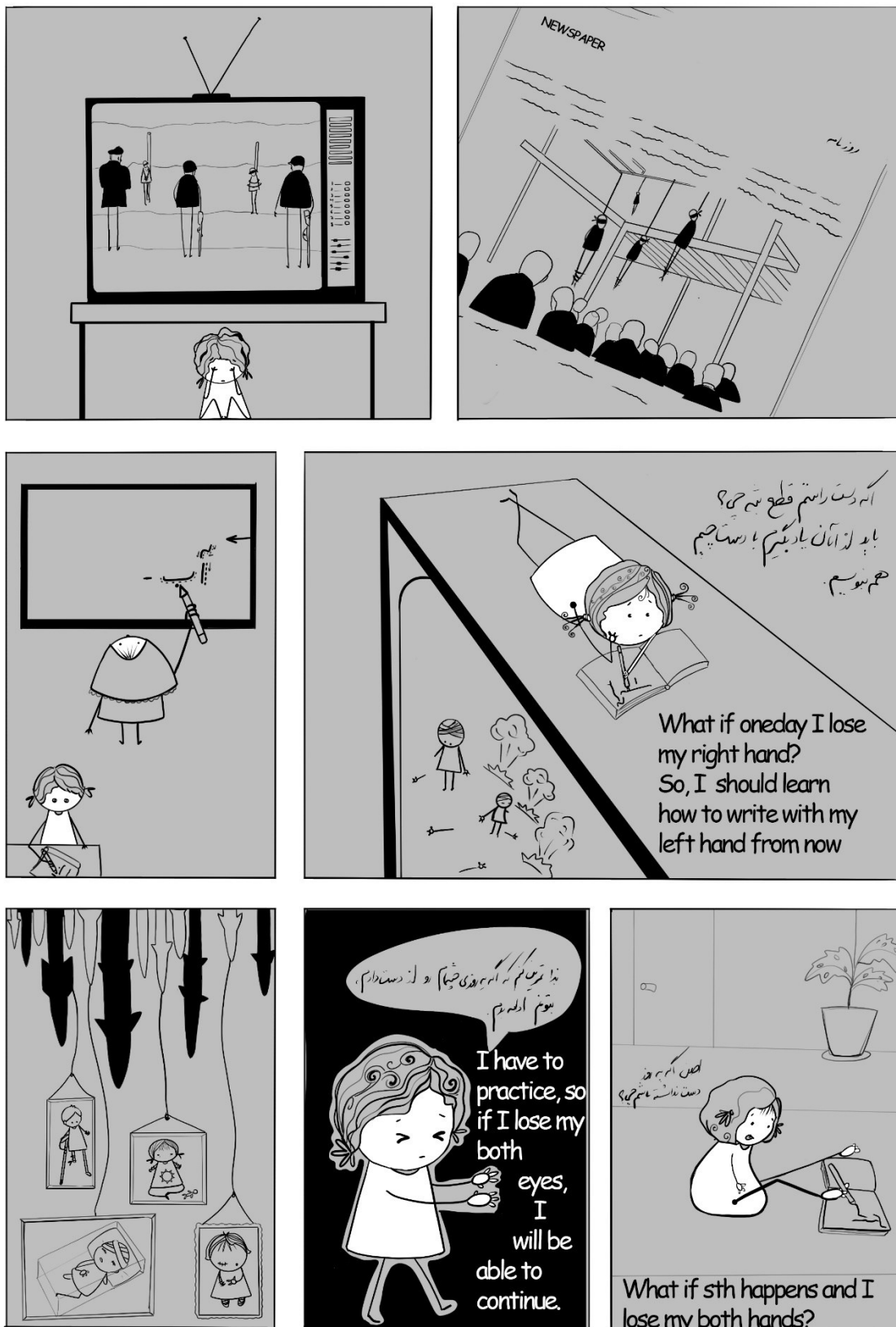
*Figure 9*
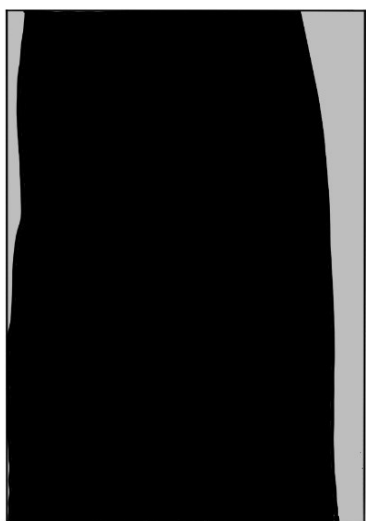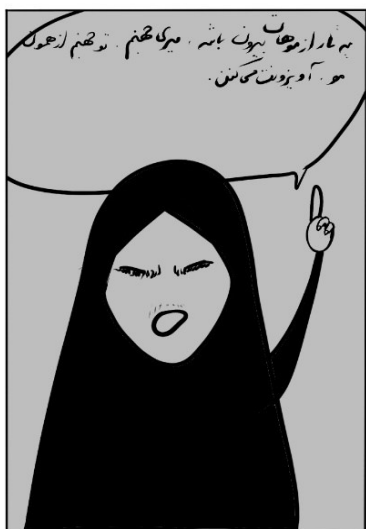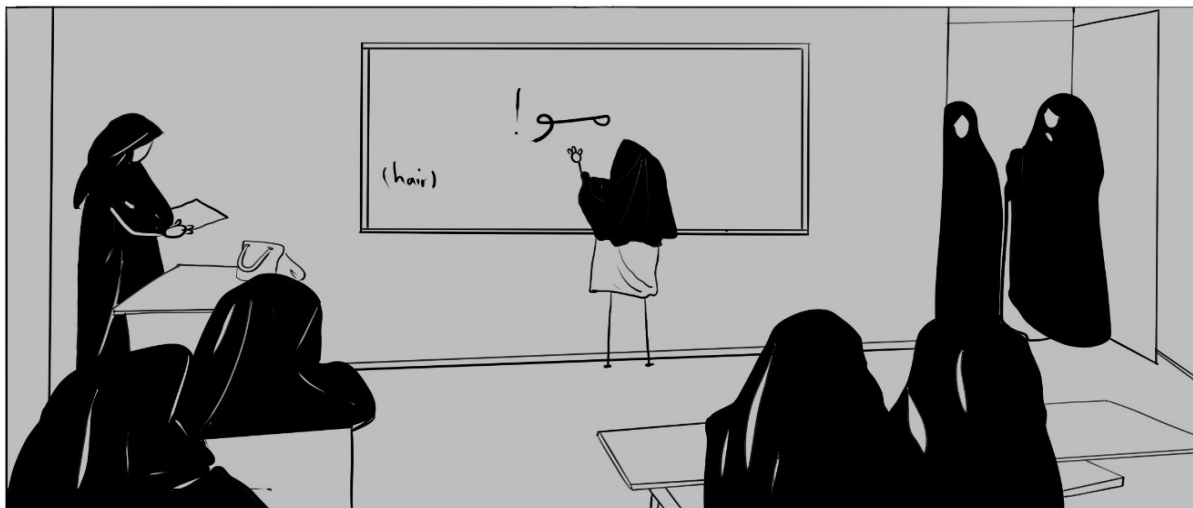
Figure 10

*Figure 11*

*Figure 12*

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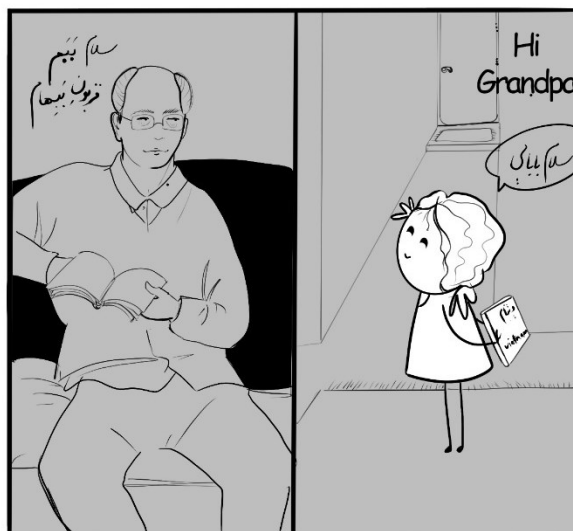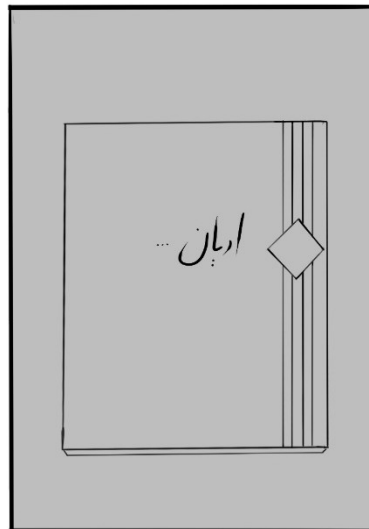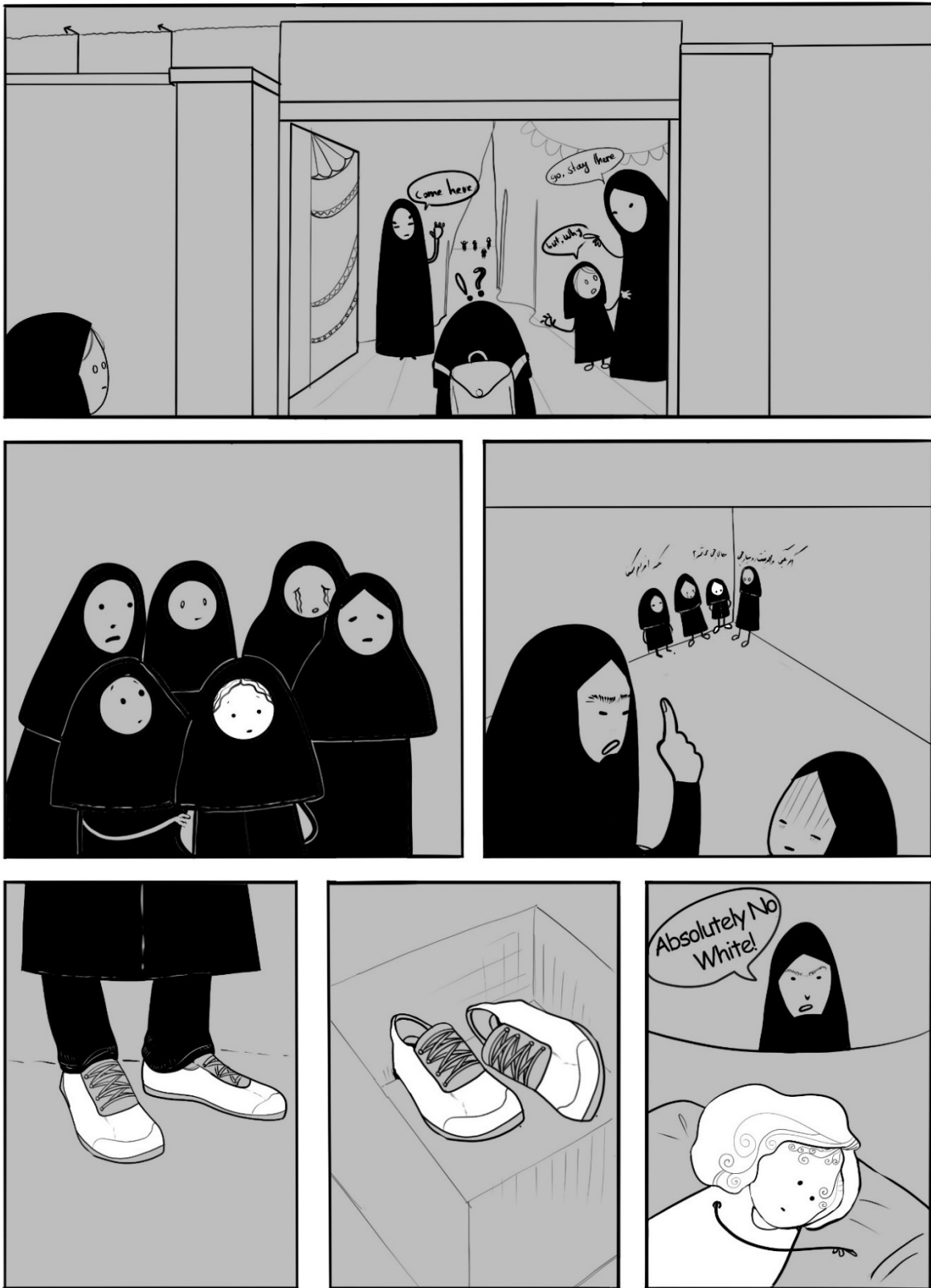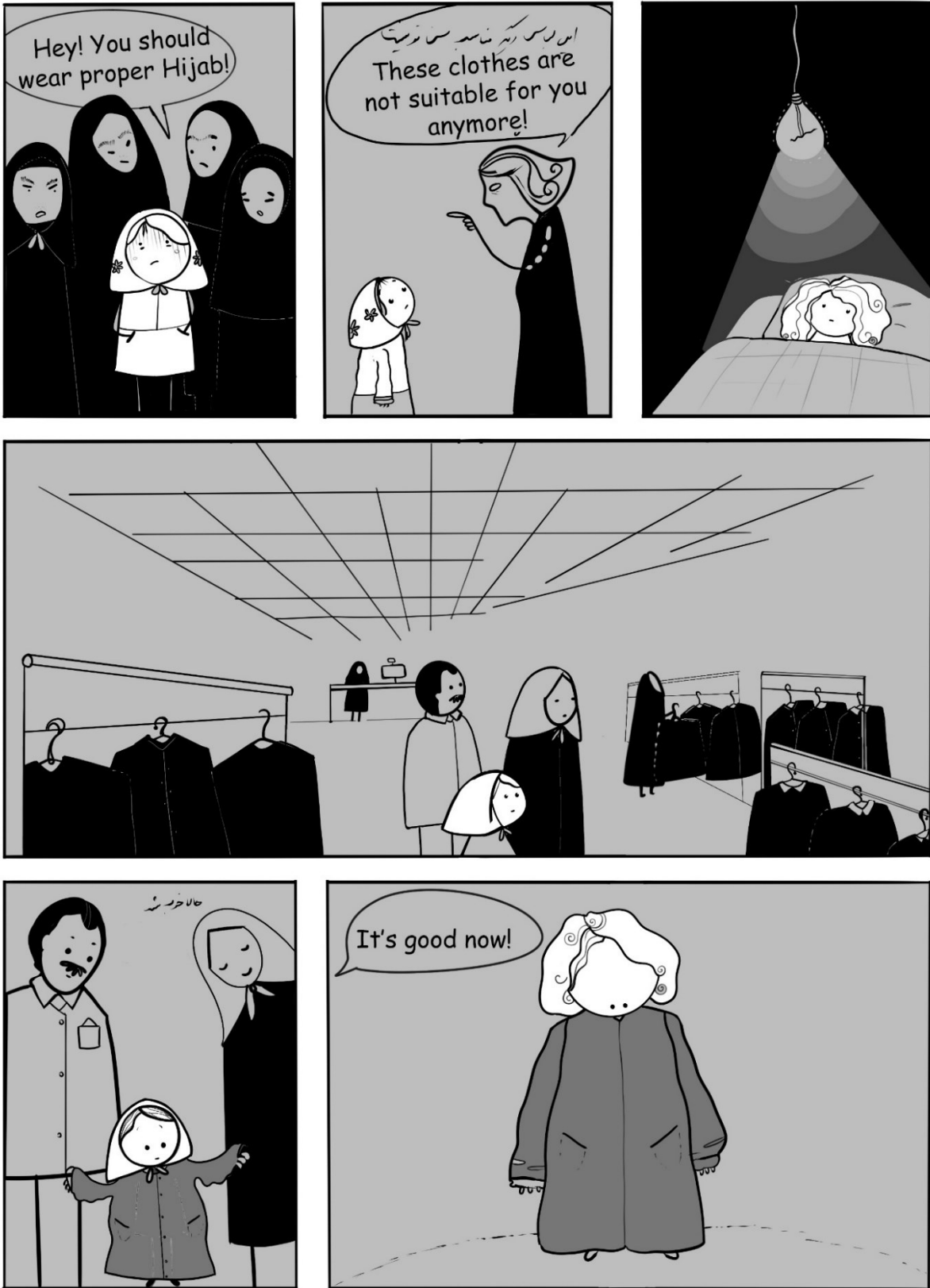


*Figure 13*

*Figure 14*

*Figure 15*

*Figure 16*
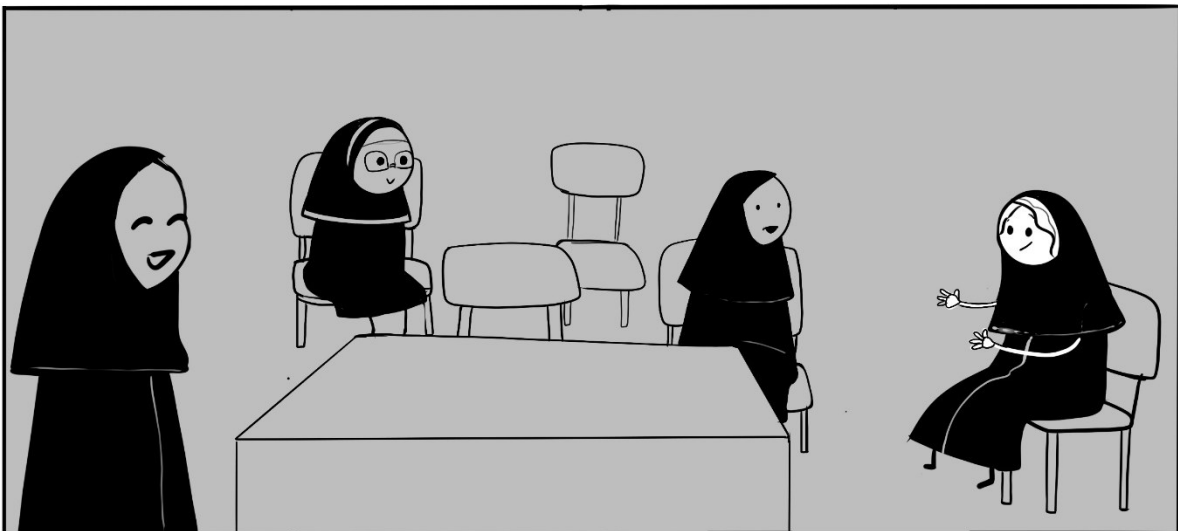
*Figure 17*

*Figure 18*

*Figure 19*

Now that I look back I feel satisfied with all we did.
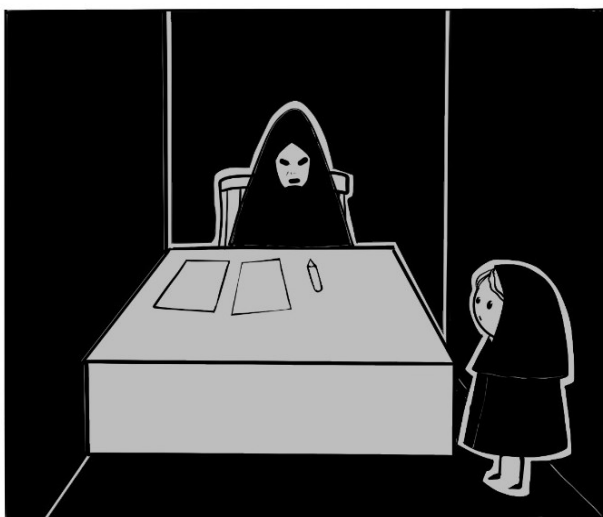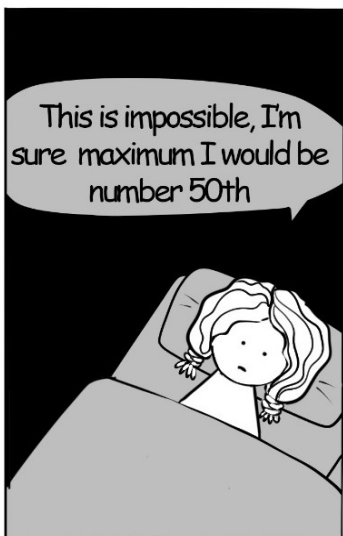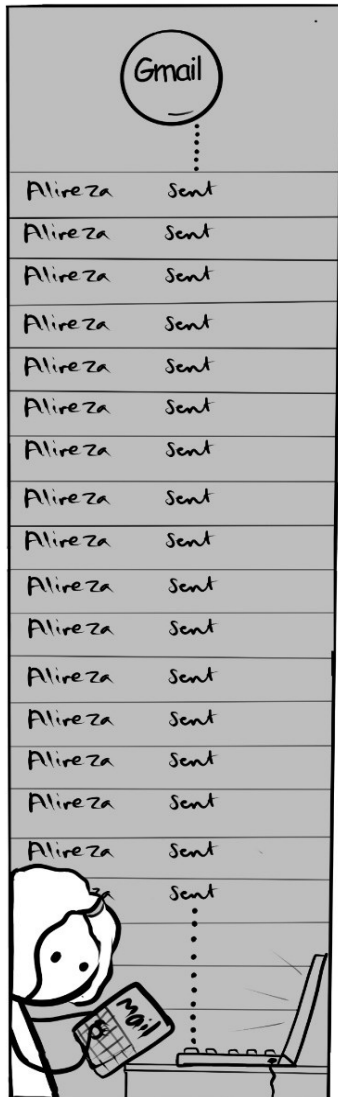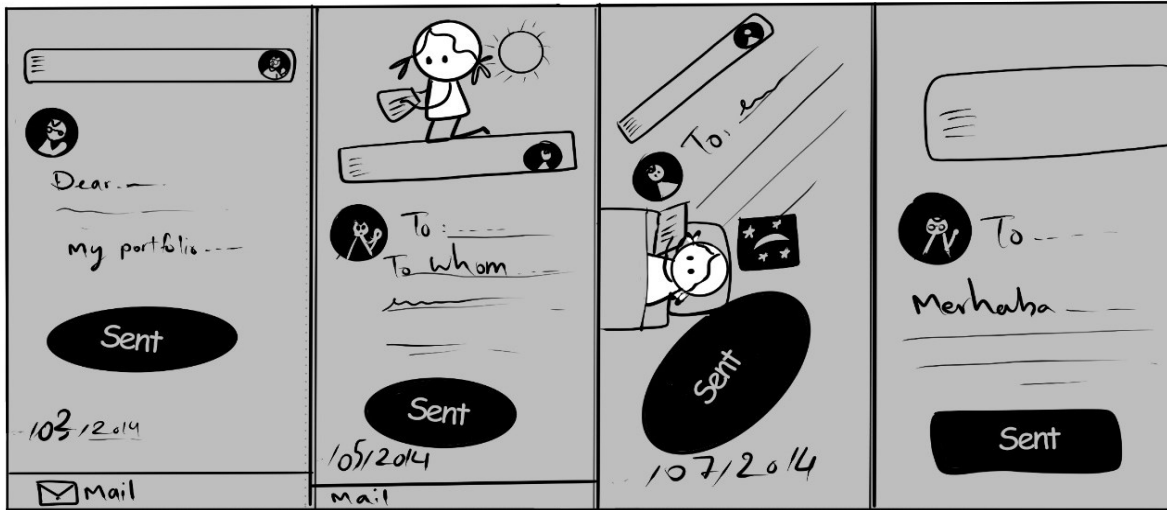
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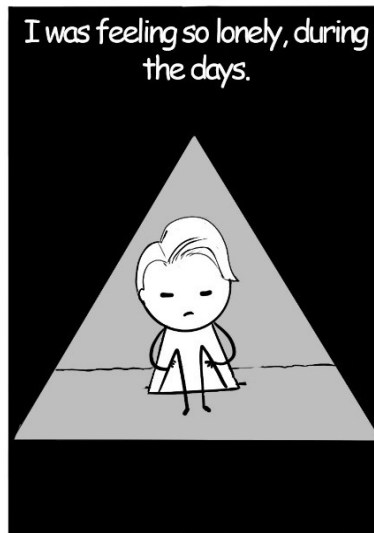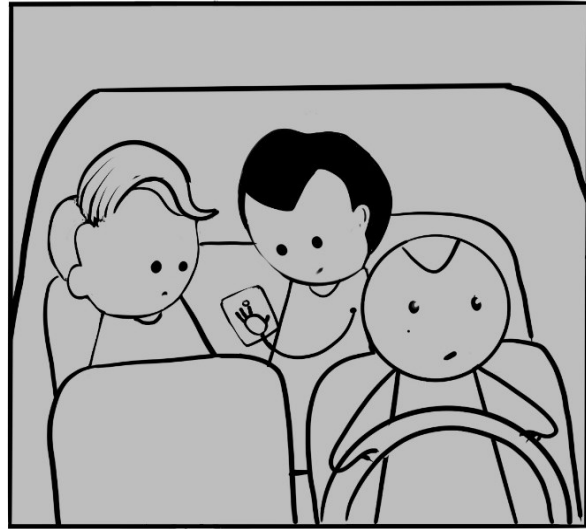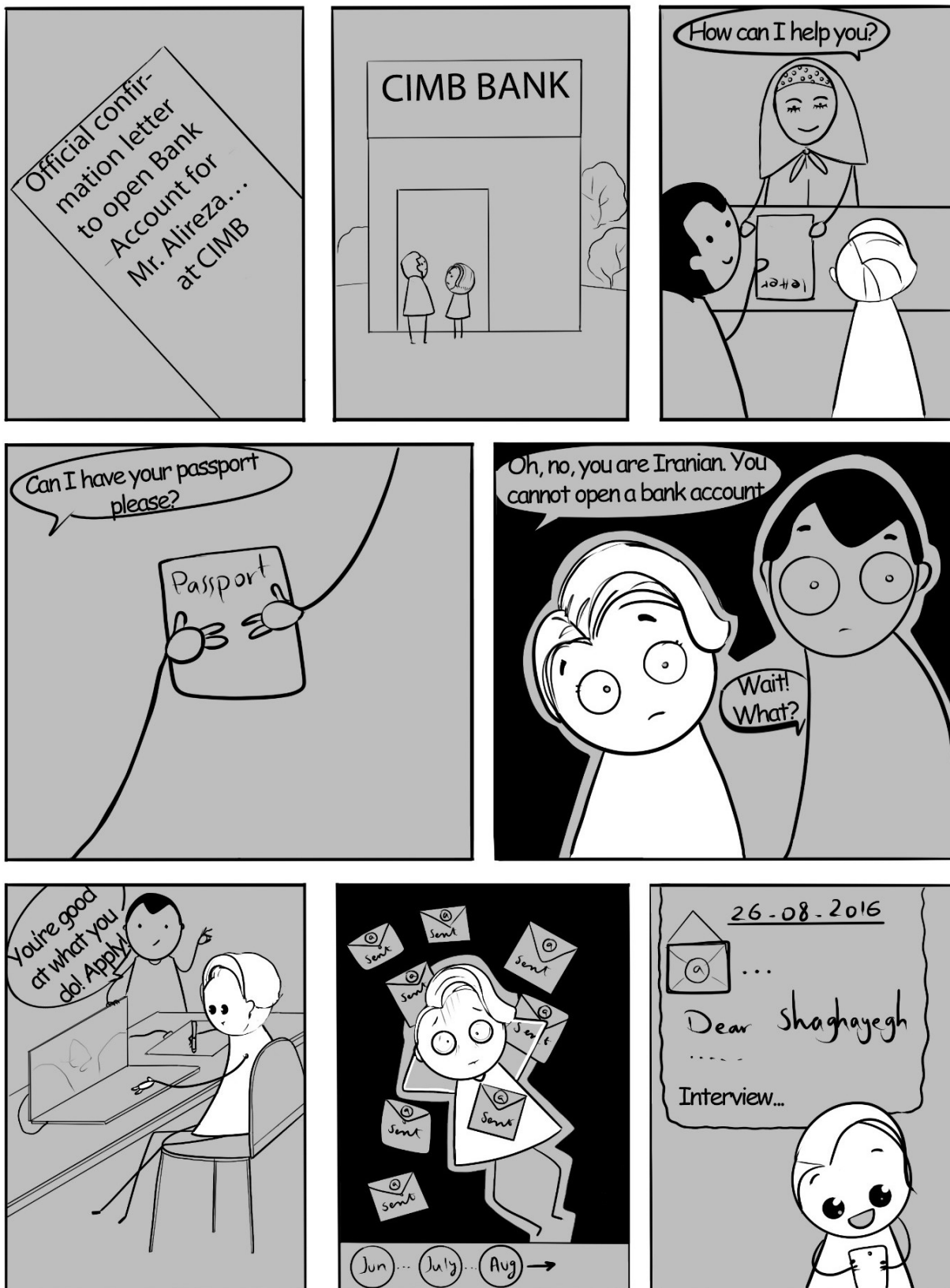
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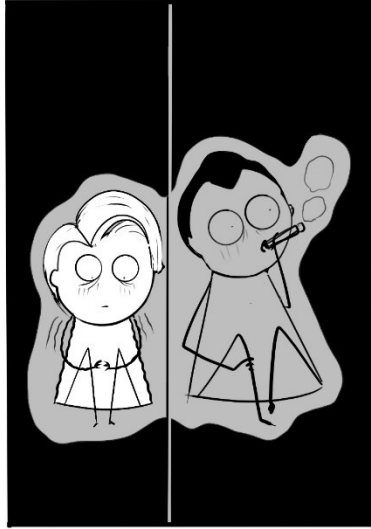
*Figure 22*
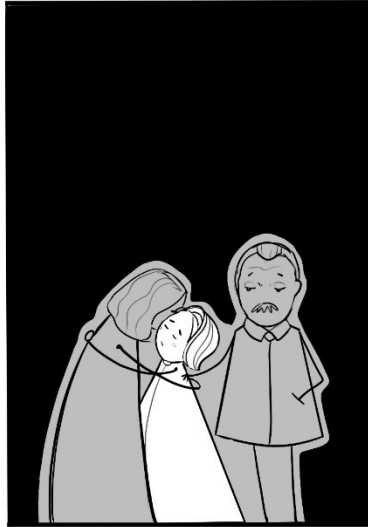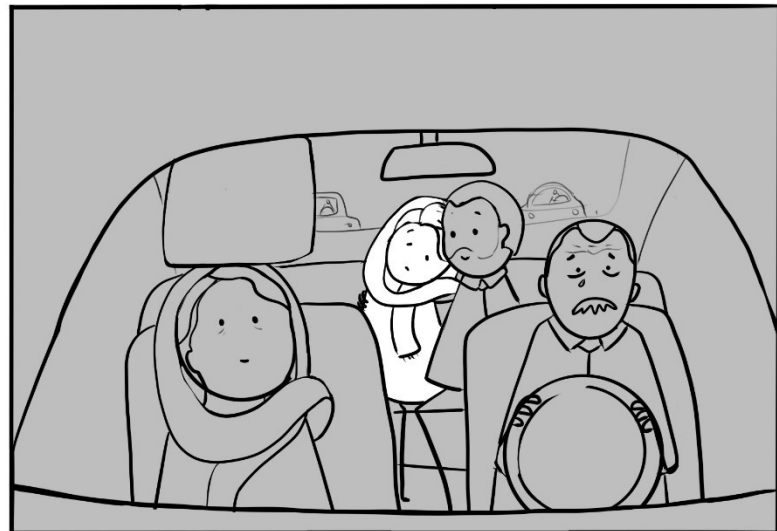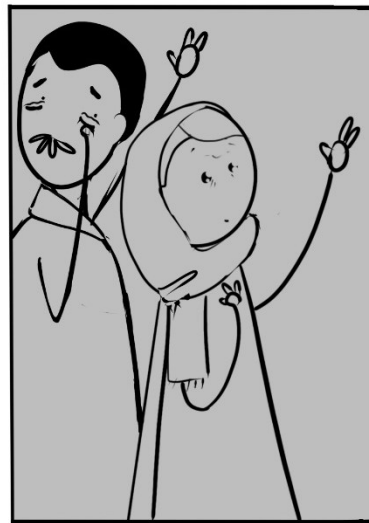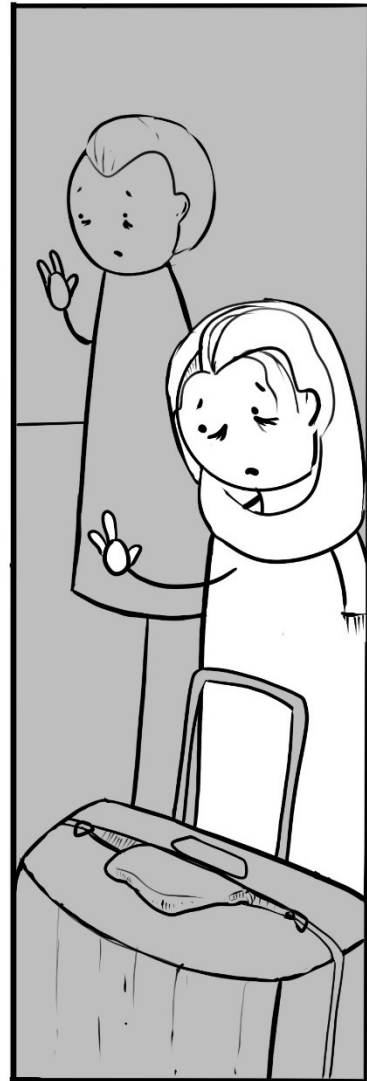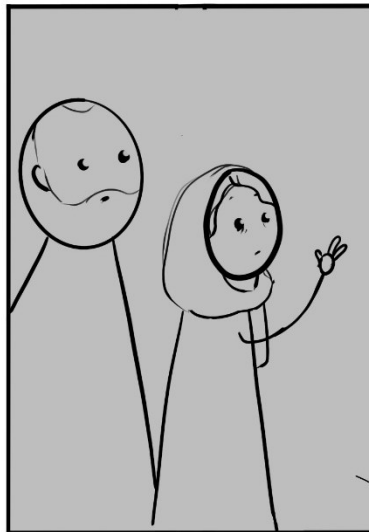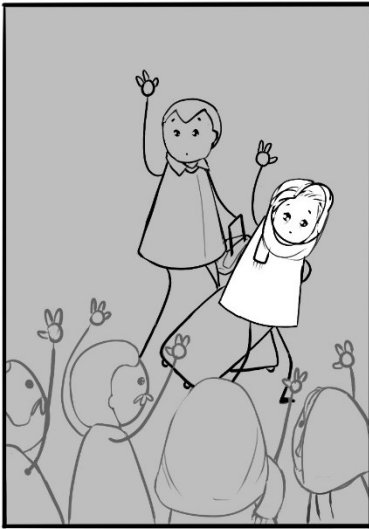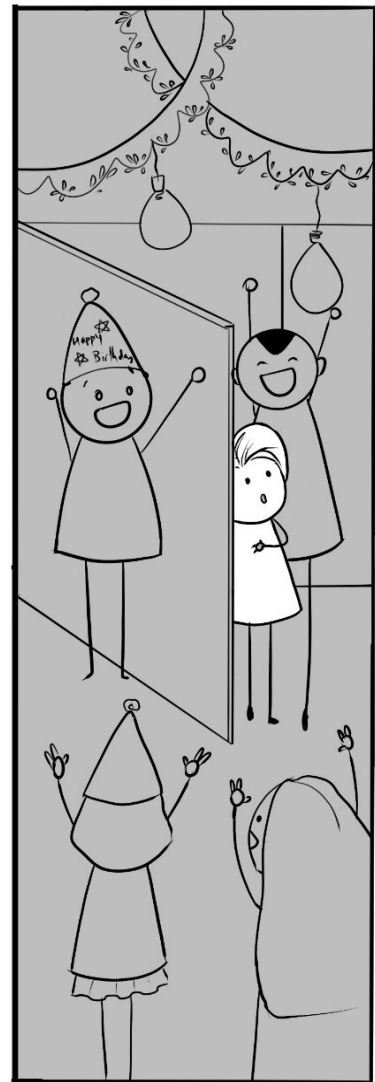
*Figure 23*

Figure 24

Figure 25

*Figure 26*
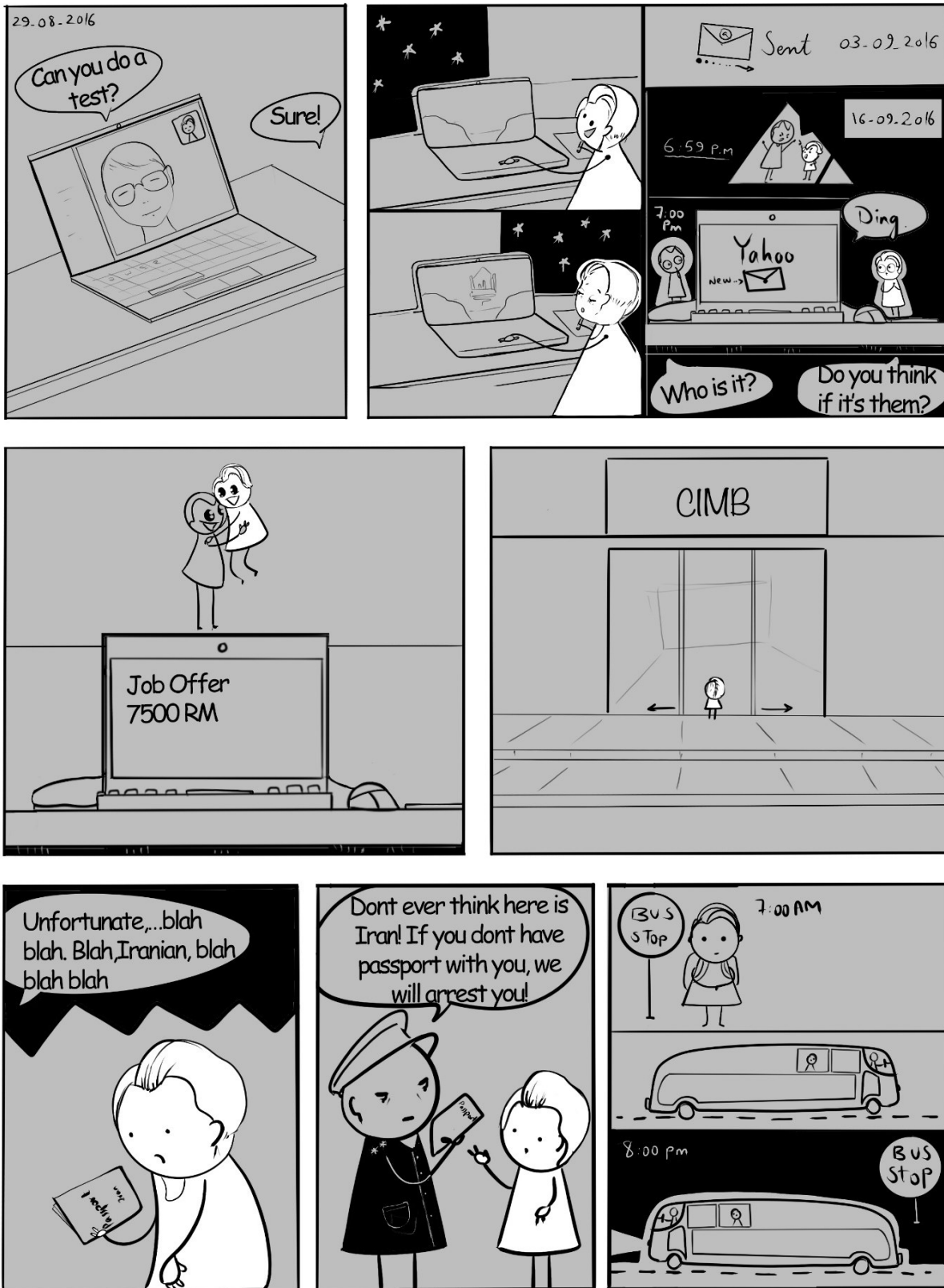
*Figure 27*

Figure 28

*Figure 29*

## Chapter 6 Significance of the Study

This study was not intended to draw broad conclusions about comics; rather, I sought to utilize an experimental lens to evaluate what can be learned, discovered, and taught by creating autobiographical comics about immigration. This study sought to develop various insights into the field of art education by analyzing autobiographical comics about immigration and sharing my lived experiences and memories of immigration.

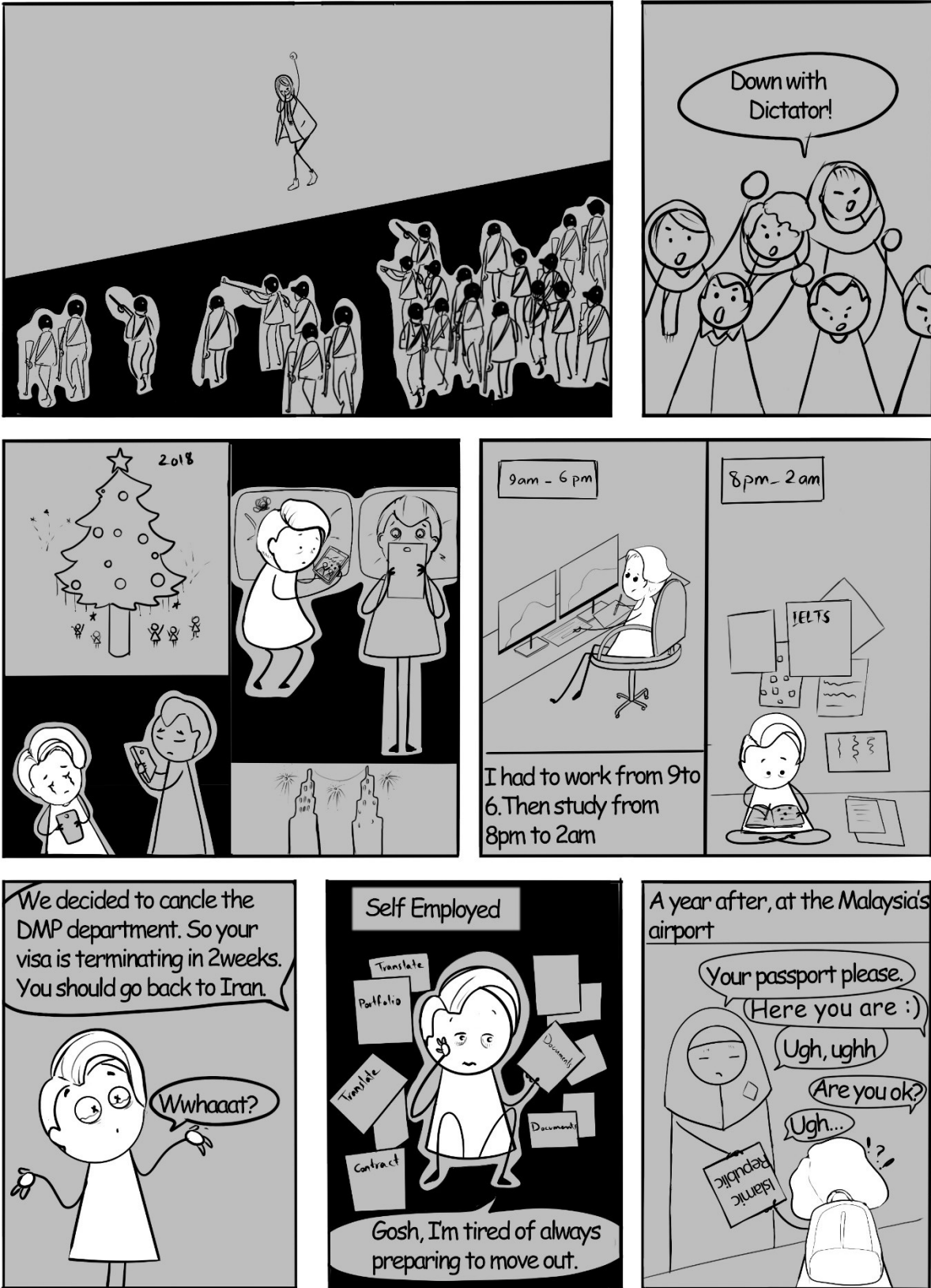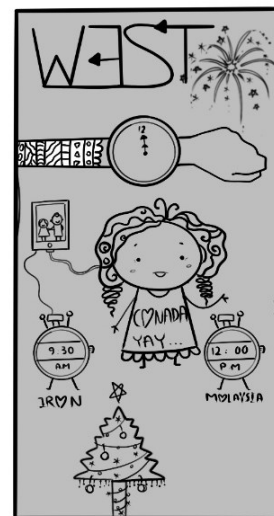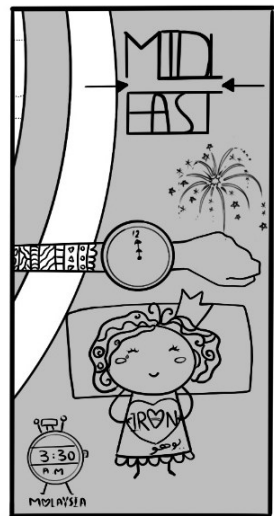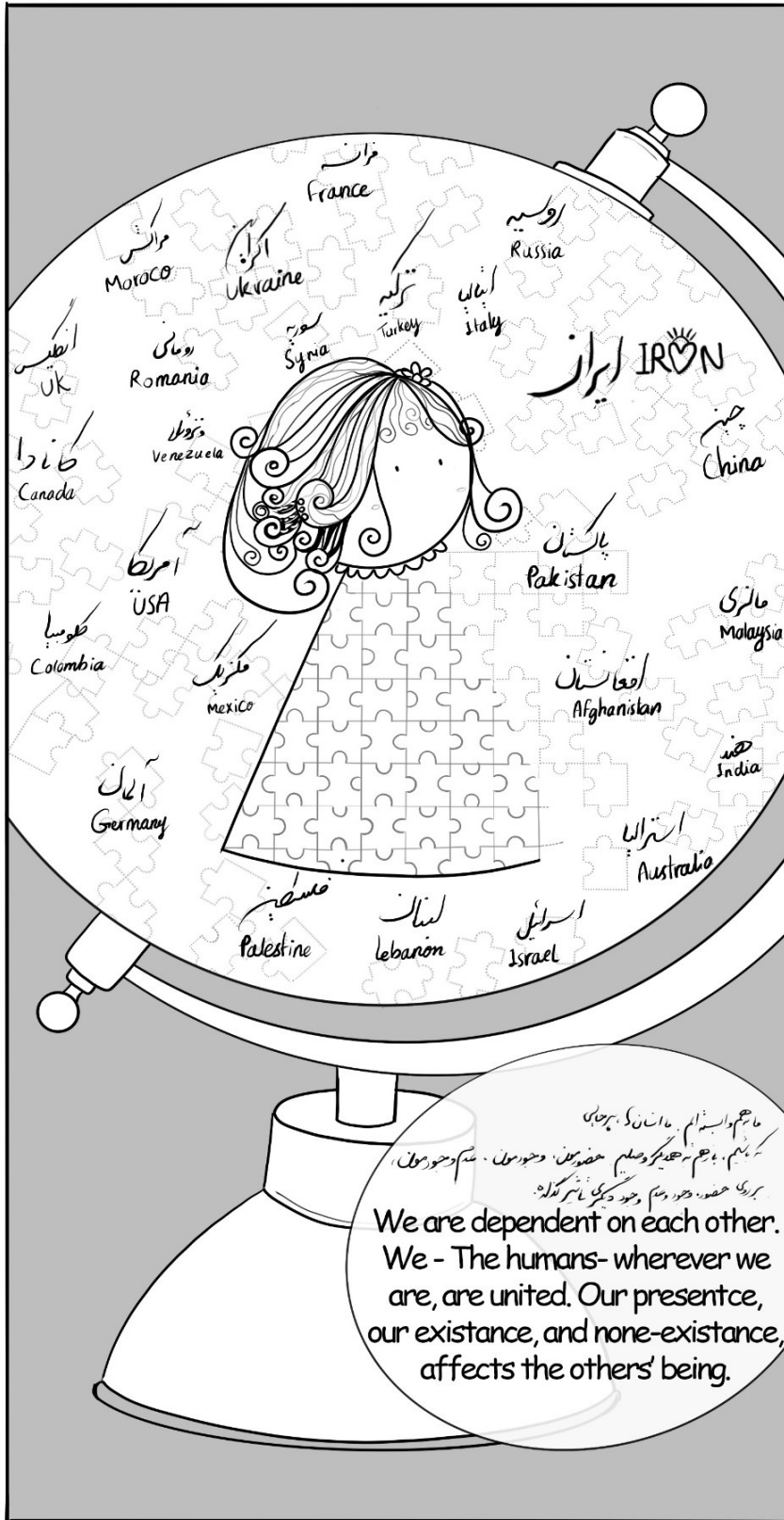Immigration occurs daily in the modern world, and it has become both a trend and a phenomenon. An increasing number of people from various places with different perspectives and experiences are immigrating from one place to another. Therefore, a sizable portion of teachers and art educators are also immigrants. In this regard, addressing this issue in art education is critical. Therefore, I addressed this issue and shared my personal experiences as an immigrant art teacher in an effort to provide a novel perspective on art education as a path to self-knowledge.

Additionally, while working on this project, I found that only the act of reliving and reflecting on my experiences through art making —in this case, from my perspective as a teacher, artist, and researcher—made me aware of things I had not previously known. In other words, I gained a new perspective and understanding of myself by analyzing situations from the standpoint of a research educator.

Additionally, this study was an attempt to comprehend the pedagogic turning points in the worth of graphic novels as well as an effort to determine how prior experiences serve as crucial

topics of investigation in art instruction. This chapter highlights the significance of immigration-themed stories as objects of research, and it emphasizes how art can teach us that places and people are not completely unfamiliar and spread knowledge about the world as well as the politics and people of lesser-known parts of the world. Additionally, this study demonstrated how telling these stories through the combination of images and words can cause audiences to reflect on their own experiences, memories, and emotions and cultivate a sense of empathy. Indeed, as Shaffer (2020) says,

> Persepolis was not just a story for me to absorb and move past as I did with many other books. It stuck with me, informed me of a world and politics I had no conception of otherwise, it made me empathize with someone I did not know in a way that left me in tears. (p. 2)

In conclusion, my graphic novel functioned as a powerful starting point for my research because, in the words of Leavy (2018), "Comics can provide a powerful means of representation for researchers—an effective, flexible form for communicating research findings and concepts to a wide audience" (p. 397). The process of drawing, pondering, and recalling experiences as I created the narrative of my graphic novel helped me better grasp who I am and how and why I became an "other." Therefore, creating a graphic novel served as a means of self-expression, and it enabled me to create my own "graphic memoir" (Gysin, 2020, p. 20).

Writing, reading, and simultaneously visualizing the factors that pushed me towards migrating made me examine more precisely my development as an Iranian immigrant. Most importantly, I became more resilient during this journey. According to Hosseini et al. (2017), most immigrants experience similar experiences that can "lead to hard times or trauma and

endanger their mental health" while also providing "opportunities for growth" (abstract). For me, this personal growth was the ability that I realized was getting stronger with the passage of time, and it eventually got to the point where I no longer felt held back as a migrant when faced with a new obstacle or problem. Instead, I felt encouraged to work harder to find a solution.

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