

THE LIMBLESS OCTOPUS - EIN COMIC BOOK

***Anti-heldinnen in Comics und Graphic Novels - Der Einfluss von
Geschlechterrollen und paternalistischen Machtstrukturen***

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Abstract

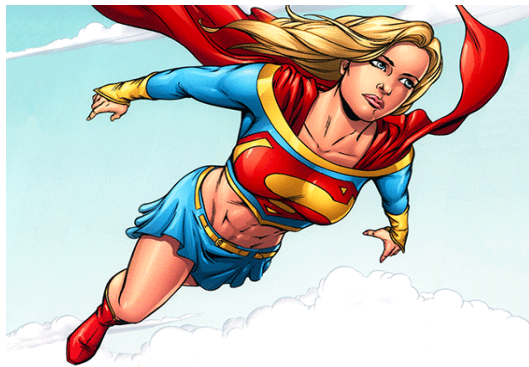
We all like superheroes. We wish we could be them. Perfect characters who fight for peace and take care of their societies and its shortcomings. They are the best version of us. And superheroines, what a beautiful dream they represent in a patriarchal society. Pretty, powerful, sexy and attractive. They don't go beyond the image that we have of a woman. They are exactly what we want a woman to be. Maybe just a bit more powerful and a little bit better. as superheroines, they should embody the values of the society they are protecting, that means they embody the status quo and confirm its stereotypes.

They are being seen through the lens of paternalism. They're being depicted how the patriarchy wants to see them. It's made sure that they're brave but kind, brave but maternal, brave but slim, brave but gorgeous.

I would like to take a closer look at the concept of superheroines and Anti-Heroines. How seeing them through the lens of patriarchy could change their roles and characteristics and how it is to be a Superhero in a different culture with a different status quo.

Superheroines in the western pop culture

There are lots of female characters in American comic's pop culture. *Supergirl* from DC comics. Who is the cousin of Superman. She's confident and physically very powerful. *Invisible woman*, Marvel's first super heroine who is not only a super powerful character, but also a mother. And apparently motherhood is one of her most crucial aspects of her character. *Storm*, another Marvel's superheroine who is also a person of color. And of course *Wonder woman*. the best known of them.



Who is Wonder woman?

Wonder Woman is a super heroine in a series of comics in the American history. She was created by the American psychologist and writer *William Moulton Marston* and his wife *Elizabeth Holloway Marston*, the first time in 1941 during the second world war and other versions of her have appeared in various comic series until now. The newest version of the character was published in 2011 by Brian Azzarello and Cliff Chiang.

In the beginning, her origin story was that she was sculpted out of clay by her mother and was given life as an Amazon. The *Amazons* of DC Comics are a race of warrior women who exist as part of Greek mythology. They live on Paradise Island, later known as *Themyscira*, an isolated location in the middle of the ocean where they are hidden from Man's World. In the 2011 version, she's not out of clay but the daughter of *Zeus*. which was criticized by many feminists around the world, because of the change of events and because: “ *the Amazons, who are supposed to represent the best of their gender, now changed into man-hating mass murderers.*”

The character is an iconic character and has been adopted in many forms. She is a powerful, strong and a masterful athlete. She is immortal and invulnerable, beautiful, young, attractive, and smart. She has everything a woman would want. Or as said before, what men would want a woman to be.

Being an Anti-hero

The antihero challenges the concept of “hero” because he is a hero that should not be one or cannot be one: his world does not allow it. They're wholly separated from their society. Their society should not be saved or protected but challenged, transformed, even destroyed. A superhero can exist only in a essentially “good” society, that can be protected and restored and not questioned.

Superhero's function to protect and restore an essential “good” society while

antiheroes do not reaffirm the status quo's values; instead, they challenge them. They bring a fracture with a negative reality.

Inside a society that should be destroyed and not protected, the protagonist cannot be a hero.

While the superhero, at the end of his story, resolves a conflict, the antihero is always a paradoxical figure. He embodies a question without an answer.

Anti-heroines in classic literature

In the western literature, some very famous heroines have all the same characteristics. *Anna Karenina*, *Madame Bovary*, *Scarlette O'hara* in *Gone With The Wind*. they are all women in disgrace in the end. They can't stand the pre-set role the society determines. Getting married, having children after another, being a good, beautiful wife, acting nice and gentle in front of other men. None of these characters want these. They're passionate, they're aware of their attractiveness and they show it and they enjoy it.

how anti-heroines become super-heroines in a patriarchal world/society

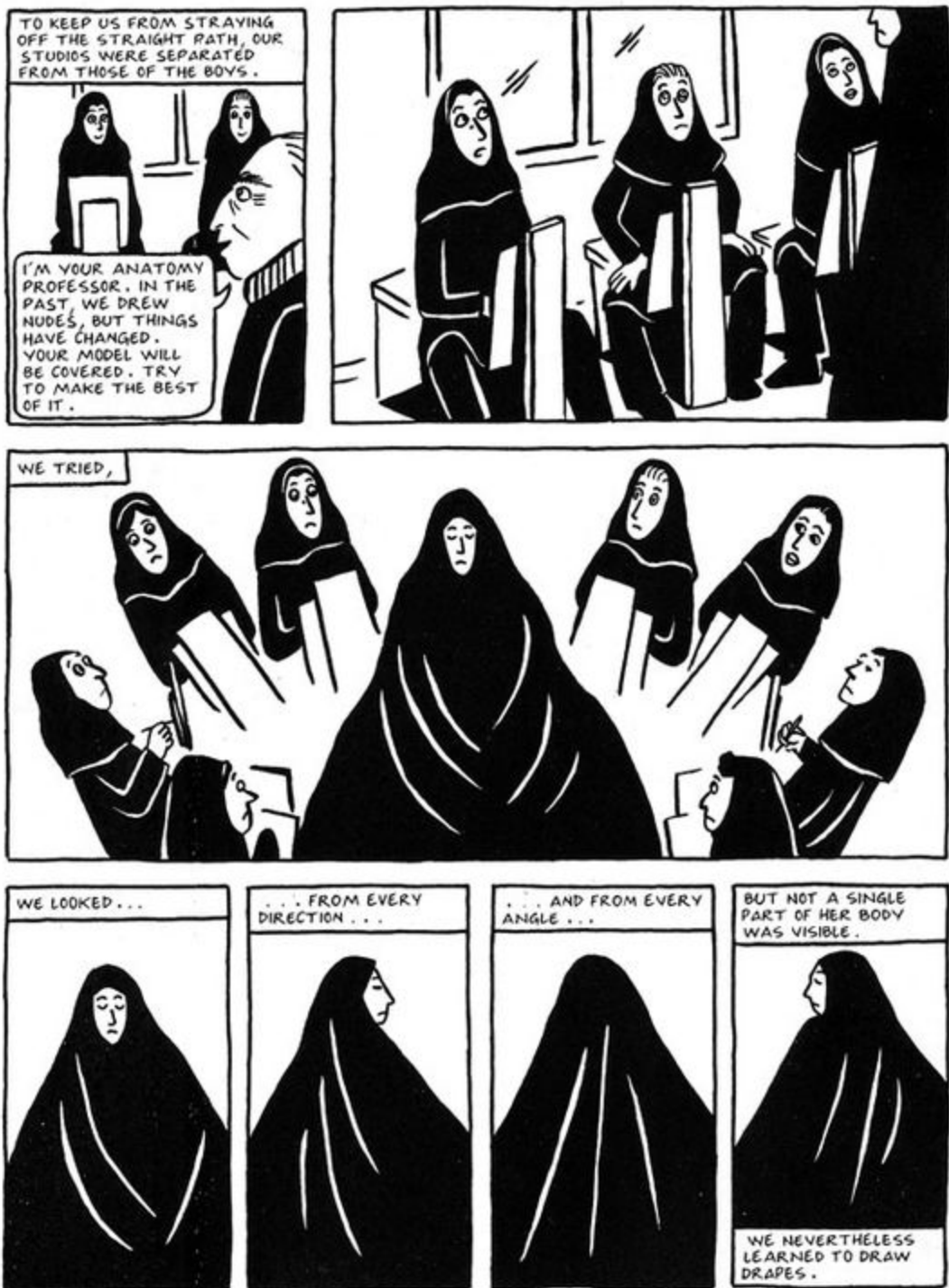
in the following pages, I will take a look at three comic books which are all written by women from the Middle east and are published within twenty years from 2000 until now.

Persepolis

By Marjane Satrapi

2000





Persepolis is the story of an Iranian girl, born and raised in Tehran, in a politically active family. She leaves the country and goes to Austria when she's 15 years old due to the aftermath of the Islamic revolution in Iran.

After facing so many problems in Europe she decides to go back to Iran, in the beginning of her youth. Everything's changed but she enters the University to study Painting. One of the best and most memorable moments of the book is where at the anatomy drawing class, all the women with veil, are looking at a model sitting in the middle of them with a veil. And they're trying to draw her. It's a brilliant scene which explains the absurdity of the situation very well.

Marjane, the main character, can't be considered as a superhero and she doesn't have conventional super powers. But she gets separated from her family at the age of fifteen. She goes to another country in another continent where she doesn't know anyone and she can't speak their language and therefore can't understand them. Her romantic relationship doesn't work there. She is absolutely alone. Her superpower is to overcome the feeling of loneliness and her financial difficulties. She has to fight for having a normal life and that's what makes her a superheroine. At some point of her journey she can't take it anymore. Everything's pressuring her. She doesn't have any money anymore. She calls her family and says : *"I wanna come back but only if you promise not asking anything."* She goes back. And now she has to fight against a bigger enemy. A regime that takes the possibility of having a normal life from her and all the other women around her. Now living, how "they" don't want you to, is a super power. Becoming a painter, in the situation that they want you to stay home and not be seen.

Escape from Syria

By Samya Kullab

2017



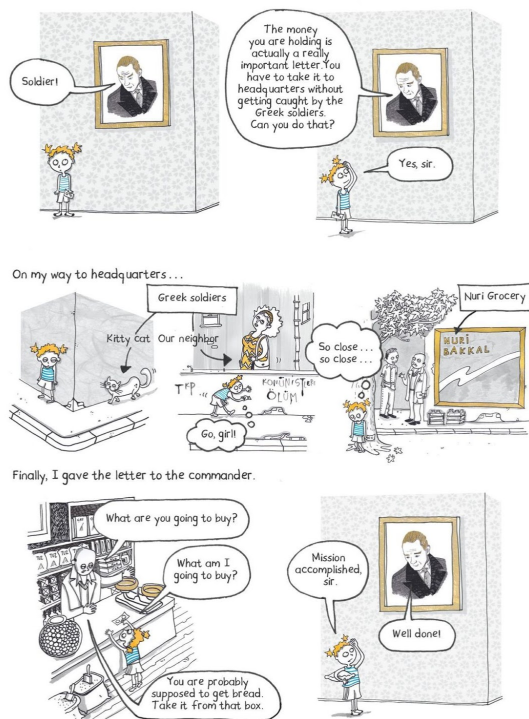


This book is about a Syrian family who goes to Lebanon after the beginning of the civil war in Syria in 2011, and starts living in the refugee camps in a very difficult situation. The main character is the daughter of this four persons family, Amina. She is a smart, hardworking and curious girl. She loves the collective life of her big family and enjoys being and living with them in the four storeys apartment in Aleppo before the war starts. She is sensitive about the political and social changes of her country. A society which probably expects her to play her mothers role in the future and expects her to become her mother at some point. A woman who as Amina describes “is always concerned about what we eat and what if we’re hungry.” a woman who all by herself takes care of the housework and children and organizes the household. Like all other women in the middle east. Amina wants to study and goes to school in Lebanon. However, studying in another language is not easy for a girl at her age. But she tries and does it with all the difficulties. She also “escorts” her father on his trips from the camp to the city, to the hospital, to the pharmacy, to the mafia’s place for borrowing some money. Because if a girl companies a man, the chance that he gets arrested by the Lebanoes police is lower. She is her bodyguard.

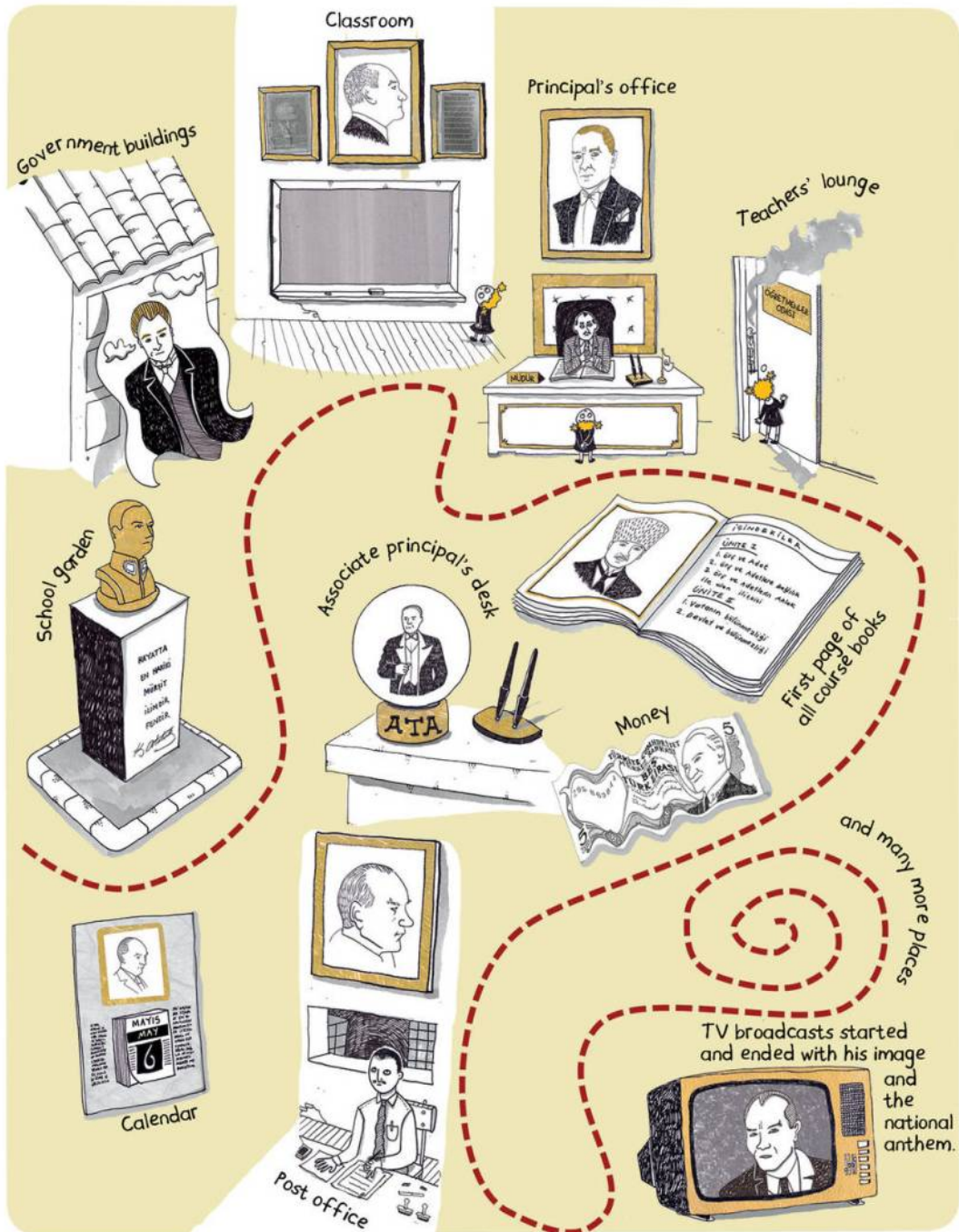
After her father’s plan for going illegally to Turkey and then from there to Germany fails, her mother comes to her and says that their last chance to get out of the situation is that she gets married to a lebanoes man. She is shocked. Her mother adds that they try to find her a decent man from a decent family. This is her reality now. This is lots of middle eastern women reality. She has to take care of herself. She tries to ask for help from the UN refugee agency and in the end, because of her, the whole family gets accepted for the asylum in Canada. She is the super hero of this endless war. And no one’s hearing from her.

Dare to Disappoint

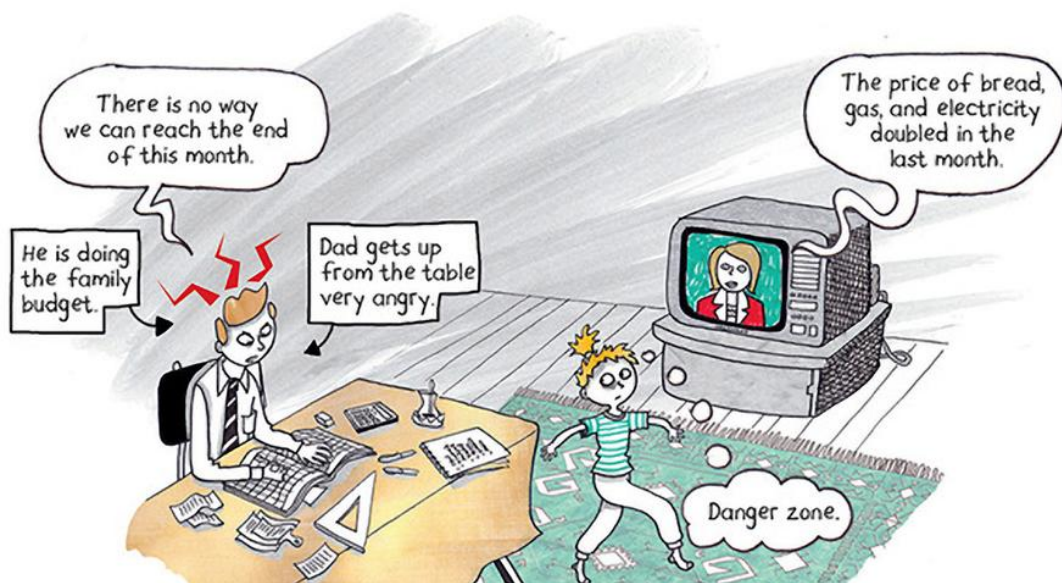
By Özge Samancı
2015



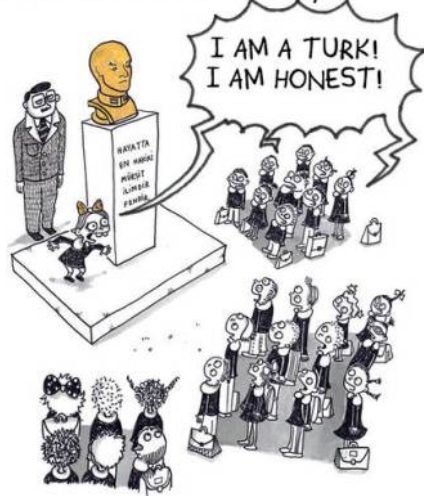
I suddenly understood why I saw Atatürk's image everywhere.



Some people became immensely rich very quickly, and others got poorer. Mom's and Dad's salaries were paid by the government. Even though prices were going up every month, they still earned the same amount of money.



Every morning a popular older student led the student oath ceremony.



STUDENT OATH

I am a Turk, I am honest, I am hardworking.
My principle is to protect the young,
to respect the elders,
to love my country and my nation
more than I love myself.

My ideal is to rise and progress.

May my existence be a gift
to the Turkish existence.

O GREAT ATATÜRK
who created our life of today!

I promise solemnly to walk
on the road you have opened,
toward the goal you have showed us
without stopping.

Happy is the one who says "I am a Turk."

When our teacher entered the classroom
we stood at attention.



Students repeat
this oath 800 times
before they graduate
from primary school.

We marched in physical education class.

STOMP STOMP

LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT

Our super-talented teacher
can walk backwards.

This is an autobiographical/memoir comic book and it's about a girl who's born and raised in Izmir, Turkey and the story starts with her early school

days of her life in the beginning of 1980s. She depicts her personal life and social/political changes of Turkey in a very funny and humorous way. She shows very delicately, how growing up in a patriarchal society as a girl looks like and how it can change your direction in life and your future.

She is a happy, loud and adventurous girl. She can't follow the "rules" of being a girl that her society dictates to her. She wants to have her own voice in life and follow her own path. But the whole time, along the story and her life, she tries to make her father happy and satisfied. A father who actually ticks all the boxes of being a patriarch. He is grumpy and strict and he knows it but he keeps behaving like that. And on the contrary, her mother is the one who takes care of the emotional part of the parenthood. She's kind and is connecting the two children to their father, because he is not able to. He is a man. The only thing that he wants from them is to fight for their future. Like their great father Ataturk. Whose picture is hanged everywhere to remind them that they have to fight for their nation and society. For the men to become stronger.

It takes her years and so much frustration until she realizes her most natural right. She should be happy for herself and she should do what SHE wants.

The female role in the middle east-how political can be personal

Carol Hanisch, a radical feminist and an important member of New York radical Women and Redstocking, in an 1970 essay that the term was used and got popular explains that women's personal problems at home are not really and actually because of their personal weaknesses and shortcomings but the result of a systematic problem and can't have any solution other than a systematic political and social solution.

***"The personal is political, also called the private is political,** political slogan expressing a common belief among feminists that the personal experiences of women are rooted in their political situation and gender inequality. Although the origin of the phrase "the personal is political" is uncertain, it became popular following the publication in 1970 of an essay of the same name by American feminist Carol Hanisch, who argued that many personal experiences (particularly those of women) can be traced to one's*

location within a system of power relationships. Hanisch's essay focused on men's power and women's oppression; for example, if a particular woman is being abused by a male partner, then societal oppression of women is an important factor in explaining this abuse. The statement sometimes is misinterpreted, however, as the opposite—that women's personal behaviour is of political significance." writes Christopher J. Kelly.

Also Paula Rust, an American socialist compiles a list of interpretations of the phrase within feminist movements including the following: "The personal reflects the political status quo (with the implication that the personal should be examined to provide insight into the political); the personal serves the political status quo; one can make personal choices in response to or protest against the political status quo; ... one's personal choices reveal or reflect one's personal politics; one should make personal choices that are consistent with one's personal politics; personal life and personal politics are indistinguishable."

My personal relation with this term is from my trip to Iran last year in November 2020, when after the announcement of the government that the price of Gasoline has increased three times, people from the Working class families went to the streets and started protesting. The regime shut the Internet down in the whole country. I was supposed to stay there for three weeks and this happened after the first week. None of my friends and my partner in Germany knew what had happened and had no clue that the internet could be completely shut down by a government. There were no ways that they could reach me. It was unbelievable what was happening. It was like being trapped in a dark room when nobody knows where you are and nobody can hear you. Meanwhile, killing the protesters on the streets was continued. I was helpless and sad and was looking for a way to reach my friends in Germany. What was happening was unfair and I couldn't believe that no one could change it.

One of those cold November days, when I was walking on a street in Tehran, I realized that my rage and anger is so big, that it could make me stay and not go back to Germany. I could totally see that if this "grape of wrath" stays in me, I could give up everything that I'd built there. As if my decision for

staying is the only tool that I have. Is a declaration of a war back. “Every single person counts.” I felt for the first time, how my personal life, which is different from how they want it to be could be political. A political act from someone who’s escaped from them. And actually, they wanted me to escape. They want all of us to run away. They don’t want anyone to stay.

In the Middle east like any other patriarchal societies, a woman who doesn’t accept her pre-set role is a disgrace. A woman who doesn’t accept having to do all the housework, not wanting to raise her children herself, is a woman without respect. In Islamic law, a married woman who does not fulfill her husband’s sexual desires , can be divorced immediately by him. A woman who doesn’t want to keep her scarf on publicly in Iran, can go to jail for years and months and be convicted as a political activist. A woman in Iran, should make a deal with her husband before the marriage for her legal right to be able to get divorce.

A woman in patriarchal society, only for being a woman, is a superhero.



A woman on one of the busiest streets in Tehran , protesting the compulsory hijab. Her act started a movement and the protestors are called “daughters of revolution”.

The Limbless Octopus

The limbless octopus is a semi-autobiographical graphic novel, about an Iranian girl who's studying in Germany and falling in love with one of her boyfriend's friends. The story begins from the point where their attempt to having a polyamorous relationship has already failed and her boyfriend has broken up with her. The separation brings a lot of troubles and difficulties for her. Not only emotional problems but some that are caused by social/political circumstances and power imbalances. The young woman, at the end of her studies and jobless, has to move out from their apartment, feeling abandoned by their group of friends, needs to start everything over while dealing with a new problematic relationship. Meanwhile, in the middle of her misery, her parents tell her that they want to come to Germany to visit their future groom (her ex-boyfriend). She has to tell them that they've broken up and that they can't come to visit her.

We follow her in her dark journey, we get to know about her past and her relationship with her parents through her therapy sessions. while she's trying to open up, growing, and getting out of her already cracked "bell jar".

What does the project mean to me

The Idea came to my mind when I was in a very deep depressive phase. I wasn't doing much and even getting out of bed was consuming a lot of energy. After a while I thought I have to somehow record this phase. I had lots of questions in mind. Why was I in that spot? Where had I made mistakes? How could it be done differently? How could I reach that point? Why do I feel so defeated? During that time I had also started my Therapy. It was winter, dark and cold and I was deeply in pain and feeling completely lonely. To be able to find an answer to those questions, I was thinking hours and hours about my past, my life in Iran and my family. At the same point, another big problem was there as well. Money. I knew that the person at the

cashier in the supermarket, doesn't accept my depression as a currency. I had to make money. I didn't want to ask my parents to send me money. Because first, It was almost impossible, second, they were struggling with the more or less new economic crisis that was happening in Iran due to the new sanctions against Iran. I didn't have the luxury to go to visit them and be back. They couldn't easily come either. My residency in Europe was about to end and I was not even sure whether I could stay in Europe or had to go back to Iran. Obviously, all these made me feel worse. There was the point where the power structures really gained my attention. It was very sadly interesting how significant the impact of it was on my personal life. At this point I started writing hopelessly. Every sentence was an achievement and motivating at the same time. And I went on and on. Long before that I had made my decision that I don't want to be in the Film industry "scene". I couldn't keep up with the networking and promoting games that you need to play in order to be seen. I wanted something small. A small project. I talked to my friend who was just back in Iran after studying Fashion design in Austria. I knew that she is passionate and motivated. She told me that she's willing to help me and draw the picture. And that's how the project started.

I was sending her the script and she was making sketches. Our taste was a bit different and the etudes were still very raw and also because the script was not written completely, deciding on a general tone was not easy. But we wanted to work parallel.

I had something "messy" in mind. Collages with sharp colors. Something that wouldn't be nice and pretty when you look at it. Her idea was more towards minimalistic pictures. Clean with the least amount of color. Which would be black and white. I had a guard against the black and white at first.

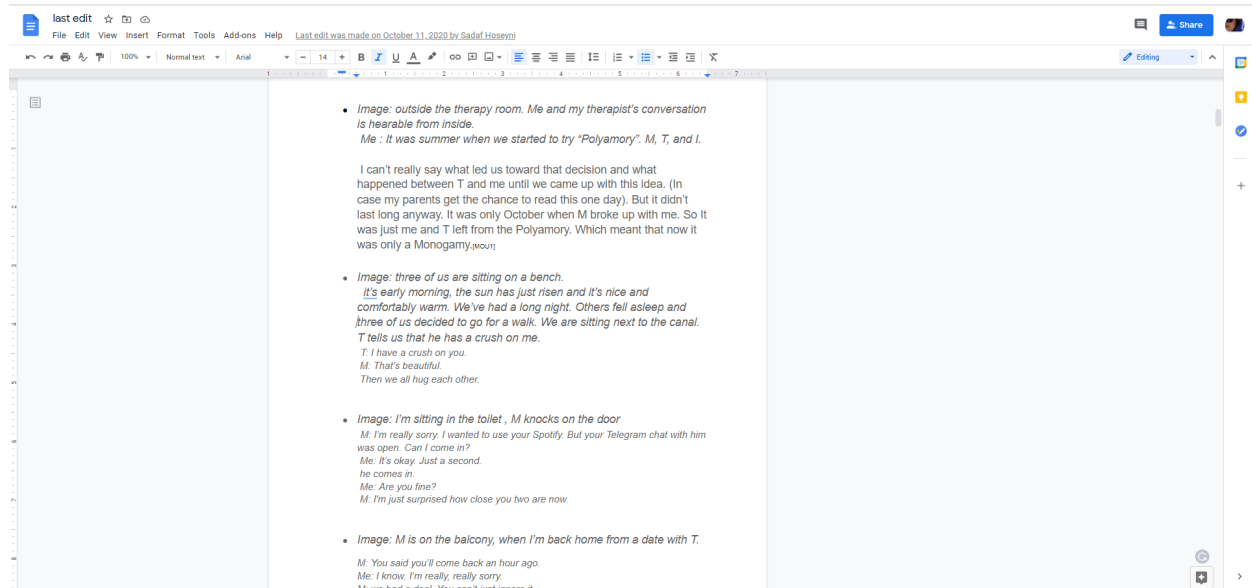
But since the story was developing every day, my point of view started to change. My own horizon in my real life was getting brighter and wider. With the help of the therapy and the time. When I was looking back, my life was black and white and I could feel the colors coming back to me.

I agreed with the black and white option. I wanted the audience to also feel that color is there, but the character is just not able to see them. That's where we came up with the idea of having some touches of yellow every now and then and also some moments of her life to be completely colorful. As if the

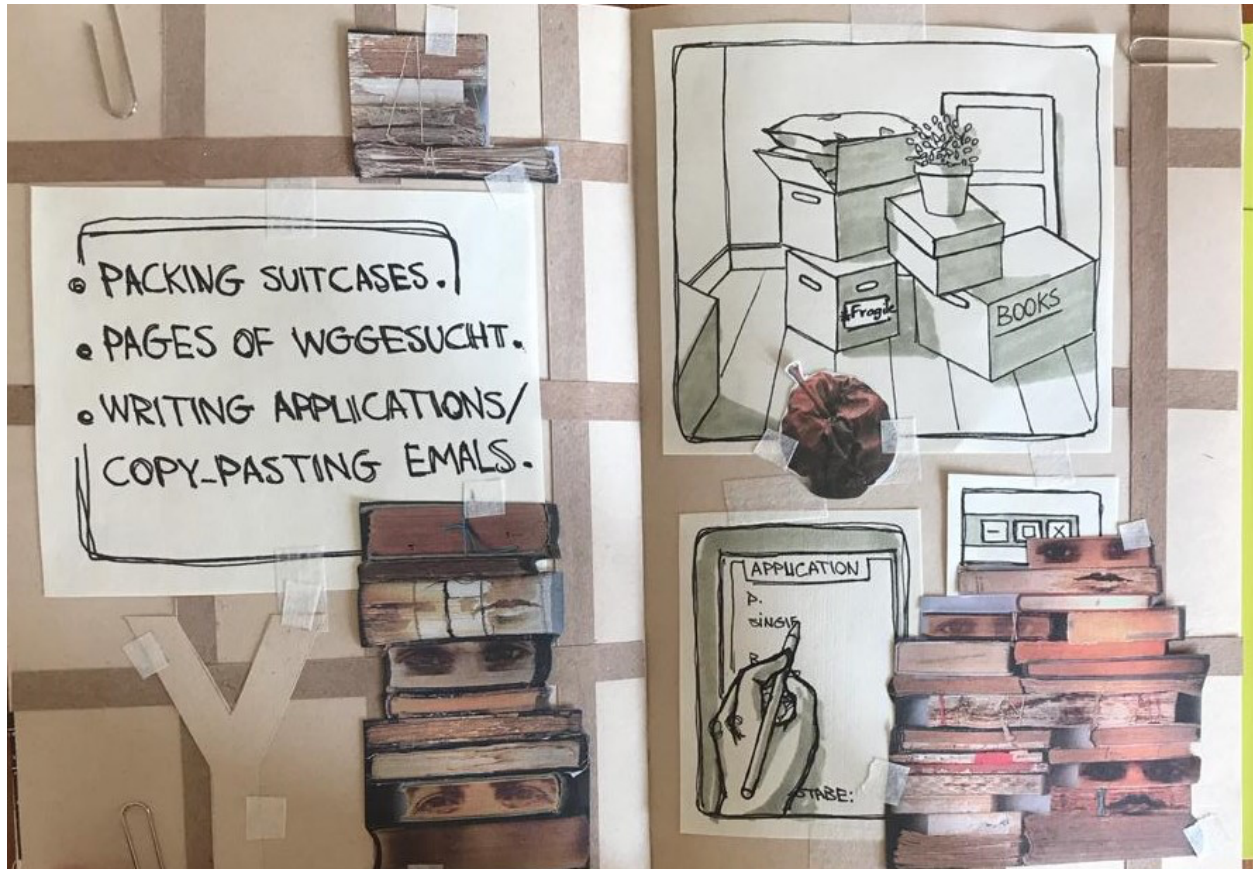
few moments that she can actually feel something with every detail, are colorful.

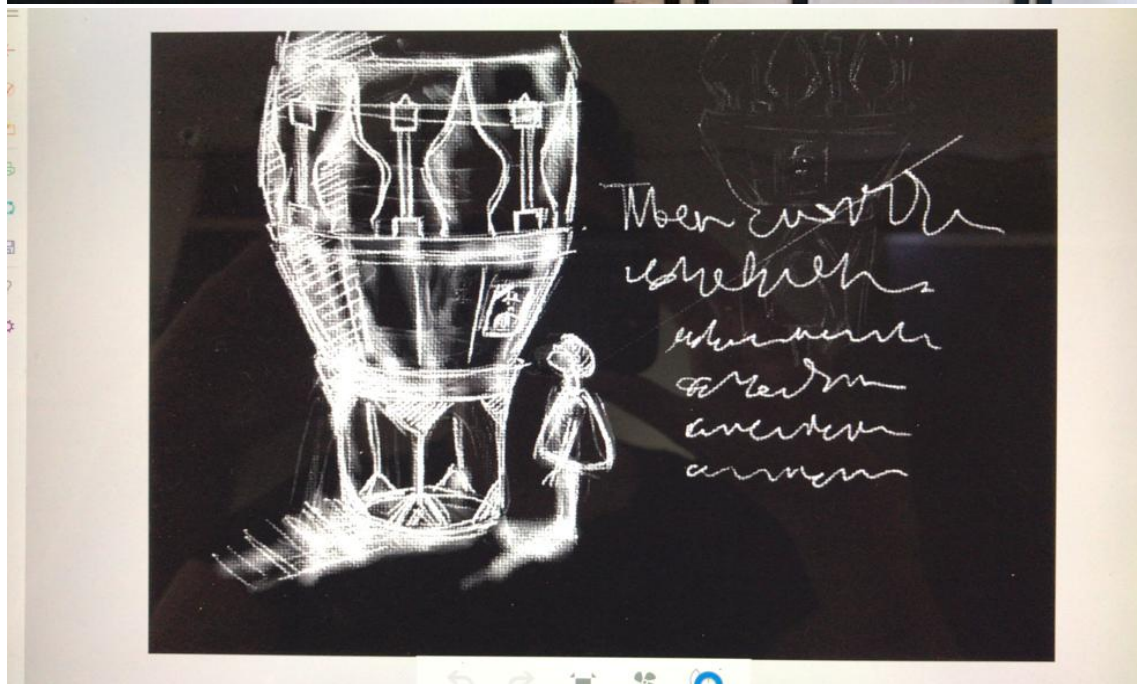
The most interesting aspect of the project for me was that it was so therapeutic. The storyline was changing and progressing with me progressing with my mental health. It helped me a lot finding answers to some of my questions while I was struggling with the storyline. It changed my perspective towards my parents and my friends in Germany.

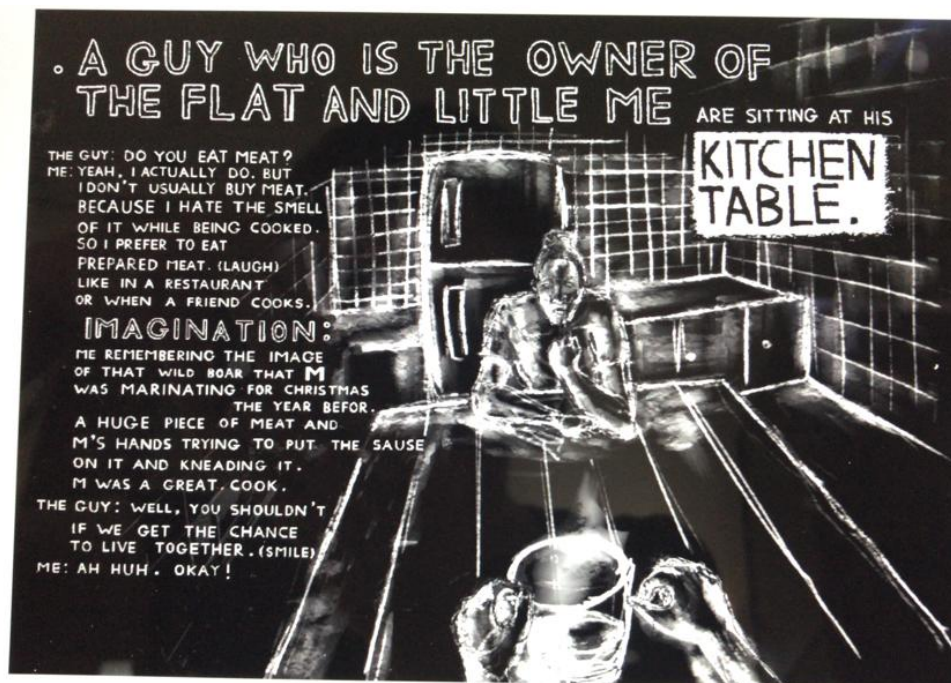
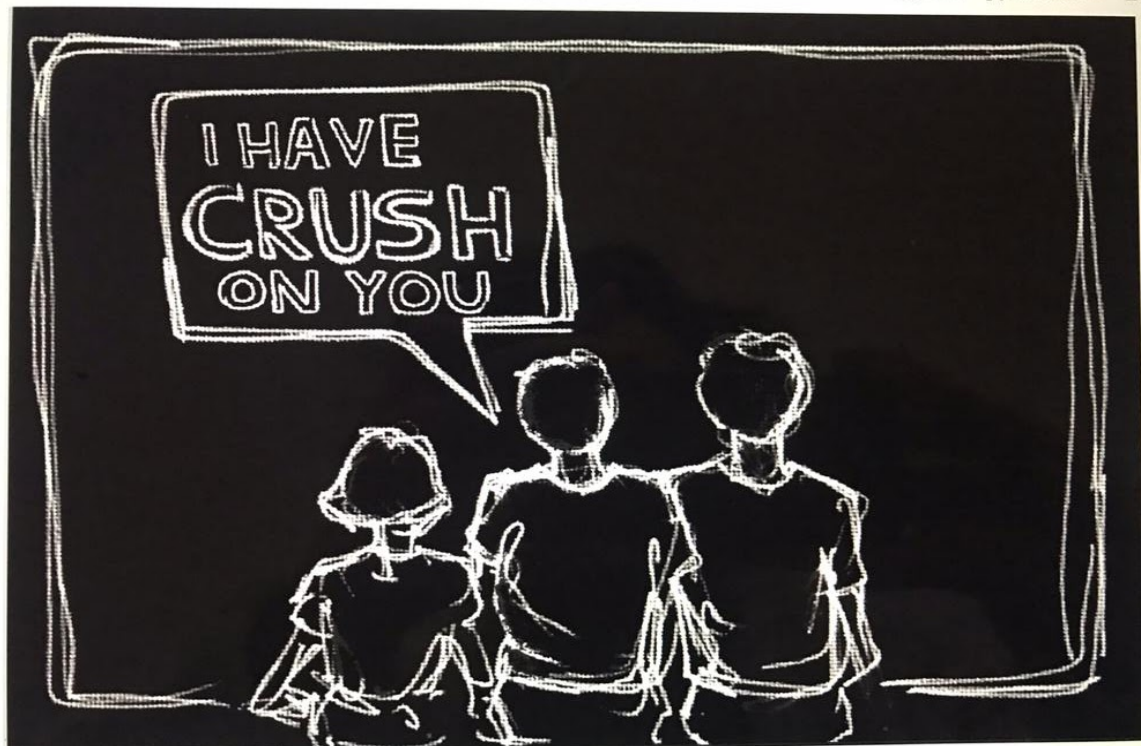
It was like a child who is helping their mother to grow. It was definitely an achievement. It was very encouraging to be more vulnerable and therefore, hopefully having a more intimate and engaging relationship with whoever reads it.

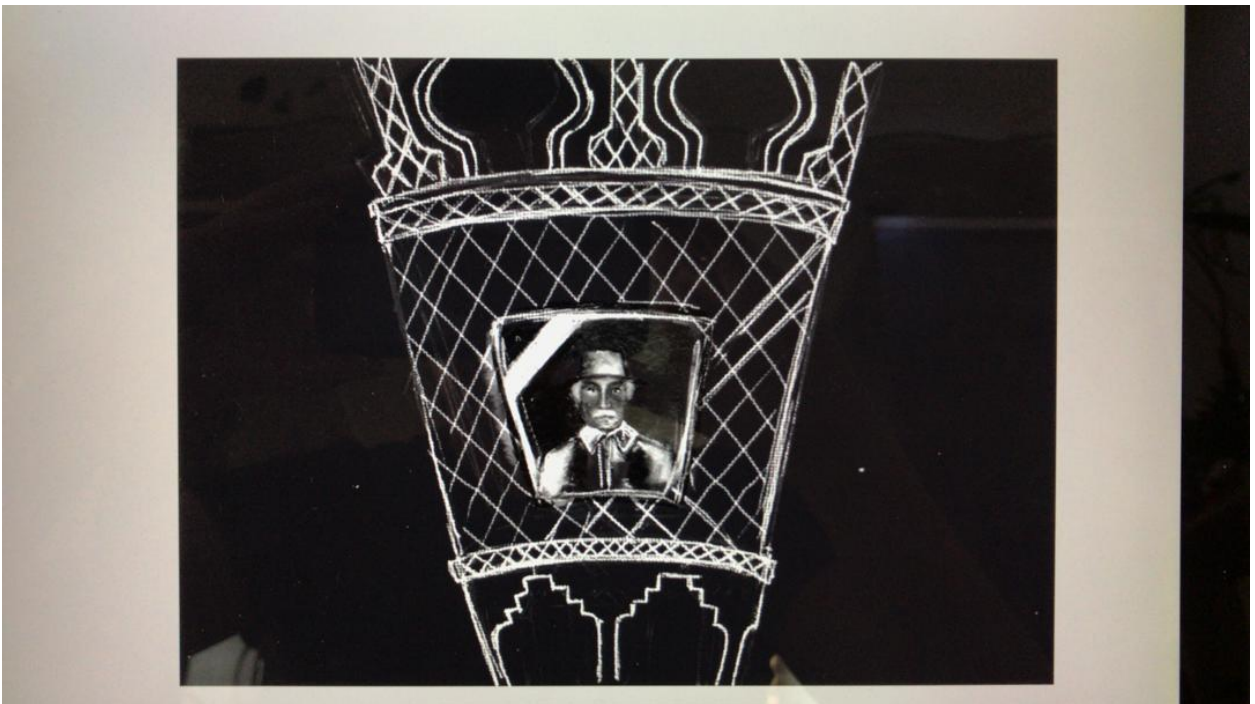


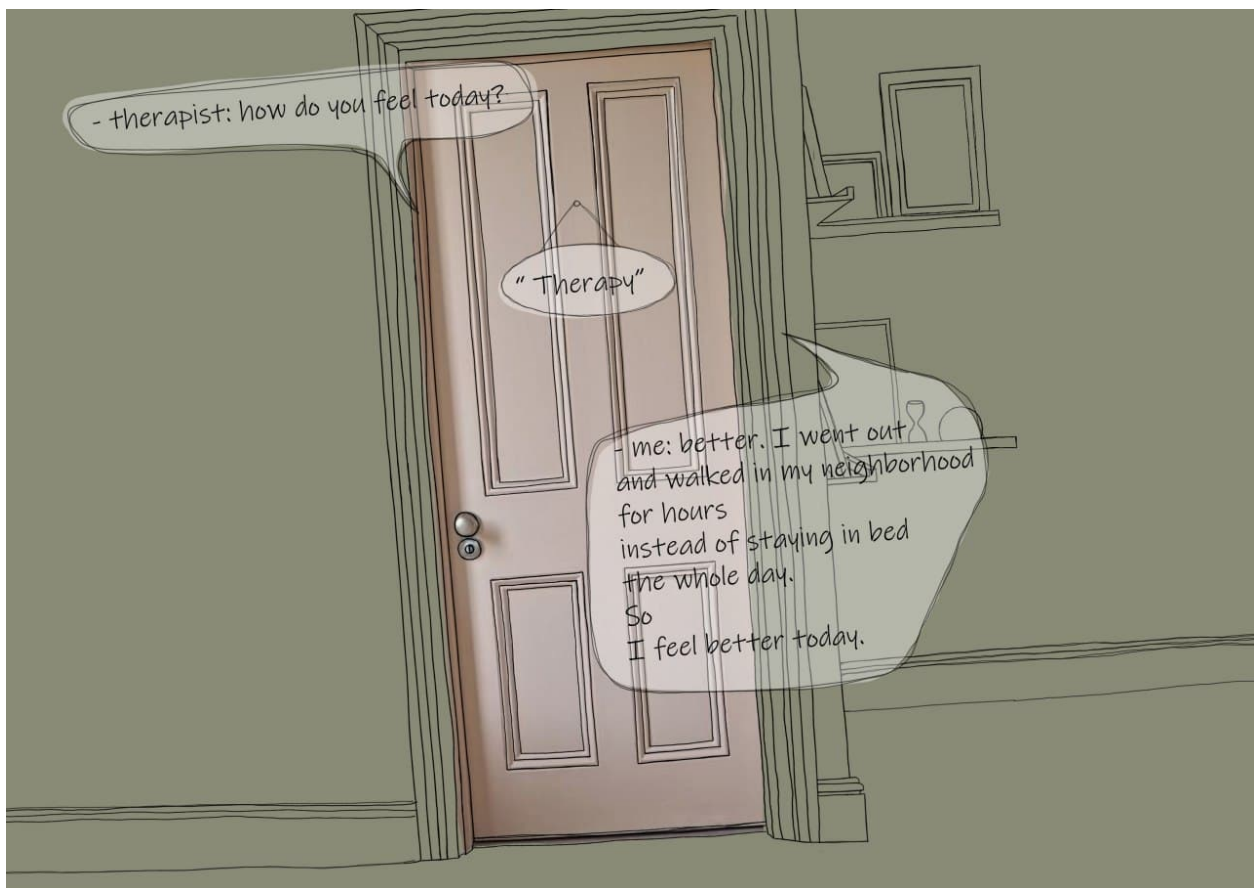
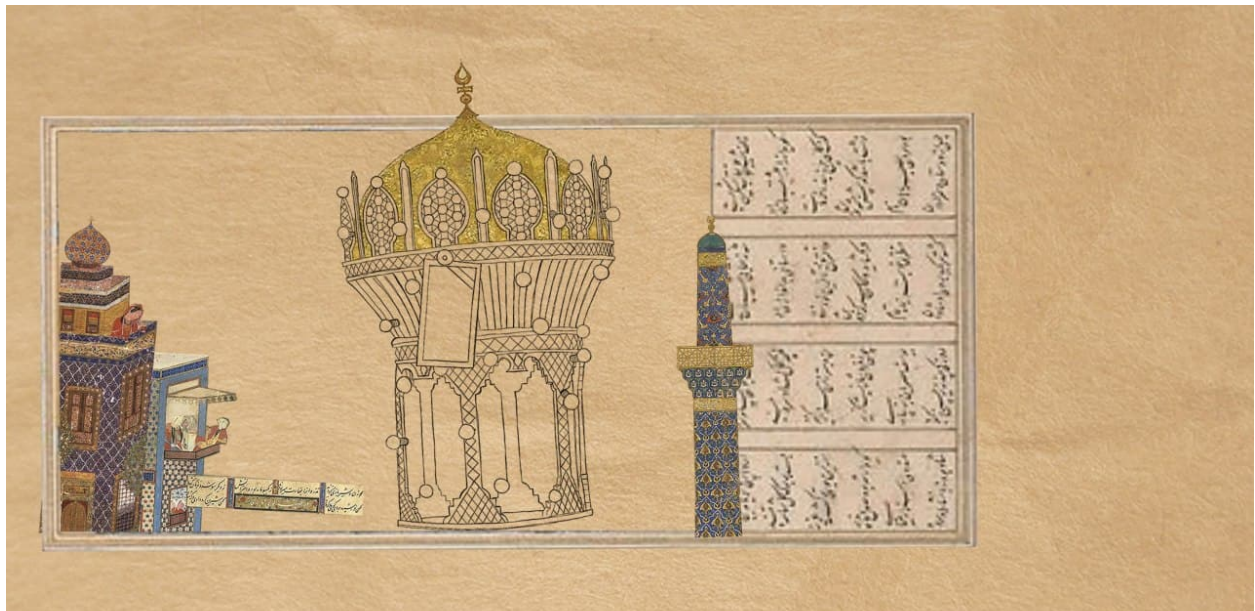
Development process











The Character

The main character, who we don't see except in the mirrors, doesn't have a name. We observe the world from her point of view. She's in her late 20s. She has to start over but she doesn't know how. She doesn't know how life is without having a partner, without having a man to do stuff for you. Now she has to know and understand why it is such a big deal for her. What is it that makes her feel so weak. She has to look back at her life. Her past, her family, country and culture. Why she hasn't learned to take care of herself? How patriarchy has affected her life and personality so deeply that she even doesn't know how it is to be independent? Why is going back to Iran like a failure for her? From what is she running away and so many other questions that she hasn't had to deal with because she was stuck in a bubble. Caused by depression, oppression and force. Of course answering all these big topics is not easy. I chose discovery on the character's personal life in order to pointing out these issues.

She doesn't seem like a superhero, she looks like a real loser. But she's not. Because she does learn in the end and she does start over. Surviving is her super power. She

Has to fight for a lot of basic things, but she makes it.

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