
Author Teodor Georgiev

Title of thesis *A Suitcase Concretely*: Exploration of the Balkan Immigrants’ In-Between Belonging Through the Lens of Comics

Department Department of Media

Degree programme Visual Communication Design, Visual Narrative

Year 2022

Number of pages 206

Language English

Abstract

Migration from peripheral European territories such as the Balkans is rarely represented and discussed in popular visual culture, despite its proliferation and impact on the economy and labour markets; there is also an overall lack of representation of Eastern European immigration in comics. The following thesis tackles one aspect of migration from the Balkans by exploring the notions of belonging within the immigrant communities. It addresses the question: what are ways in comics for depicting notions of belonging within Balkan immigrant communities? Together with the theoretical component, the thesis also contains a practical part: the comics collection of short stories *A Suitcase Concretely*.

The theoretical framework of the thesis engages with three vectors of research – comics studies, migration studies, and Balkan studies – connected conceptually by the theme of belonging. It contextualises the project within the subgenre of migration comics, and overviews main tendencies of comics development in the Balkans. The framework continues by providing a historical background to key Western attitudes towards the Balkans region. Finally, it highlights main theoretical discourses related to belonging, including Etienne Wenger’s modes of belonging which have been employed as an analytical reference for the analysis.

In terms of research methodology, the thesis includes case studies of *Fatherland* by Nina Bunjevac (2014), *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* by Nora Krug (2018), and *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan* by Mattias Elftorp (2014). These comic works are discussed against Wenger’s modes of belonging, proving the applicability of his framework as a means of analysing affiliation sentiments within sequential art. After validating Wenger’s framework in the context of comics, the text analyses the practical component of the thesis *A Suitcase Concretely* against that same framework, thus involving further aspects of Balkan migration experiences.

In conclusion, the thesis summarises examples of expressions of belonging conveyed through comics artform. It highlights angles that refer particularly to the notions relating to Balkan migrant communities. The expressions of belonging featured in the thesis are language, cultural participation, performance of labour, the everyday referral to objects which symbolise affiliations, notions and stereotypes, and interactions with institutions.

Keywords comics, sequential art, migration, belonging, Balkans, Eastern Europe

A Suitcase Concretely:
Exploration of
Balkan Immigrants'
In-Between
Belonging Through
the Lens of Comics

Teo Georgiev

Supervisor: Arja Karhumaa

Advisor: Matti Hagelberg

Master of Arts Thesis

Visual Narrative

Visual Communication Design

School of Design, Arts and Architecture

Aalto University 2022

Table of Contents

Preface	6	4. Practice-Based Research and Analysis	120
Abstract	7	4.1. Process	120
I. A Suitcase Concretely: Practical Thesis Component	9	4.2. <i>A Suitcase Concretely</i> . Plot Overview	127
Super Supermarket	11	4.2.1. <i>Super Supermarket</i>	127
What Language?	23	4.2.2. <i>What Language?</i>	129
Terminal	24	4.2.3. <i>Terminal</i>	129
A Perfect Migrant	35	4.2.4. <i>A Perfect Migrant</i>	131
Stuck	36	4.2.5. <i>Stuck</i>	132
Pickers & Choosers	49	4.2.6. <i>Pickers & Choosers</i>	132
II. A Suitcase Concretely: Theoretical Thesis Component	61	4.3. Expressions of the Engagement Mode in <i>A Suitcase Concretely</i>	133
1. Introduction	62	4.4. Expressions of the Imagination Mode in <i>A Suitcase Concretely</i>	145
1.1. Motivations	62	4.5. Expressions of the Alignment Mode in <i>A Suitcase Concretely</i>	153
1.2. Goals and Scope	64	5. Conclusion	156
2. Theoretical Framework	66	5.1. Summary	156
2.1. Literature Review of Comics	66	5.2. Potential for Future Research & Practical Developments	157
2.1.1. Migration comics	66	Bibliography	159
2.1.2. Comics and the Balkans	69	List of Images	165
2.2. The Balkans: A Region In-Between	77	Appendix 1	169
2.2.1. Terminology and Historical Background	78	Appendix 2	194
2.2.2. The Balkans in Western Imagination	81		
2.3. Belonging	82		
2.3.1. Identity vs. Belonging	83		
2.3.2. Modes of Belonging	84		
3. Case Studies	89		
3.1. <i>Fatherland</i> (2014) by Nina Bunjevac	89		
3.2. <i>Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home</i> (2018) by Nora Krug	100		
3.3. <i>Me & My Daddy & Zlatan</i> (2014) by Mattias Elftorp	112		

Preface

This thesis took me longer than it should and consists of less than it could, but looking back at the work, I realise it was one of the most joyous experiences to explore the unknown. I wanted to be an expert in the field after I graduate, which was incredibly naïve and foolish of me as an ambition. In the end, I still do not know almost everything, and that is so much more satisfying and motivating than what I imagined at the beginning of the Master's programme.

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Matti Hagelberg, whose teaching and guidance opened my eyes to the wide incredible world of comics. I would further like to thank my thesis supervisor Arja Karhumaa, who pushed me to think more critically not only about my topic, but about my overall practice. Also, I would love to mention Zach Dodson – even though he taught me for only a short time in Aalto, his influence on my perception of stories has left a deep and long-lasting mark.

Special thanks to my Aalto thesis support sushi friends Cheong Un Lee, Hanna Thenór Årström, Isra Rab, Kevan Murtagh, Laura Horton, Milla Määttä, and Thu Nguyen for patiently listening to my ramblings and giving me support and advice. And that together we managed to share the anxieties and stresses that the pandemic brought into the world.

I am grateful to my parents and my family for telling me the stories of their own relatives and reminding me to finish this thesis and to stop faffing around.

Mostly, I would like to thank my partner Karoliina Sipovaara, who during the whole time of this thesis development listened, advised, supported, proofread, commented, and helped in ways that were absolutely invaluable. And for sticking around with me when I was experiencing anxieties and turbulences of life. Genuinely, I would not have been able to complete this without her.

Abstract

Migration from peripheral European territories such as the Balkans is rarely represented and discussed in popular visual culture, despite its proliferation and impact on the economy and labour markets; there is also an overall lack of representation of Eastern European immigration in comics. The following thesis tackles one aspect of migration from the Balkans by exploring the notions of belonging within the immigrant communities. It addresses the question: what are ways in comics for depicting notions of belonging within Balkan immigrant communities? Together with the theoretical component, the thesis also contains a practical part: the comics collection of short stories *A Suitcase Concretely*.

The theoretical framework of the thesis engages with three vectors of research – comics studies, migration studies, and Balkan studies – connected conceptually by the theme of belonging. It contextualises the project within the subgenre of migration comics, and overviews main tendencies of comics development in the Balkans. The framework continues by providing a historical background to key Western attitudes towards the Balkans region. Finally, it highlights main theoretical discourses related to belonging, including Etienne Wenger's modes of belonging which have been employed as an analytical reference for the analysis.

In terms of research methodology, the thesis includes case studies of *Fatherland* by Nina Bunjevac (2014), *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* by Nora Krug (2018), and *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan* by Mattias Elftorp (2014). These comic works are discussed against Wenger's modes of belonging, proving the applicability of his framework as a means of analysing affiliation sentiments within sequential art. After validating Wenger's framework in the context of comics, the text analyses the practical component of the thesis *A Suitcase Concretely* against that same framework, thus involving further aspects of Balkan migration experiences.

In conclusion, the thesis summarises examples of expressions of belonging conveyed through comics artform. It highlights angles that refer particularly to the notions relating to Balkan migrant communities. The expressions of belonging featured in the thesis are language, cultural participation, performance of labour, the everyday referral to objects which symbolise affiliations, notions and stereotypes, and interactions with institutions.

Keywords: comics, sequential art, migration, belonging, Balkans, Eastern Europe

A Suitcase Concretely

Practical Thesis Component

Teo Georgiev
Supervisor: Arja Karhumaa
Advisor: Matti Hagelberg

Master of Arts Thesis
Visual Narrative
Visual Communication Design
School of Design, Arts and Architecture
Aalto University 2022

SUPER, SUPERMARKET

ANYTHING ON
OFFER TODAY?

NOPE, NOT REALLY.
STILL ONLY THE CHEAP
PIZZA FROM LAST WEEK.

BUT THEY'VE RAISED
THE PRICE OF THE INSTANT
NOODLES— USED TO BE
11p., NOW IT'S 16!

SO?

IT'S ALMOST
A 50% INCREASE!

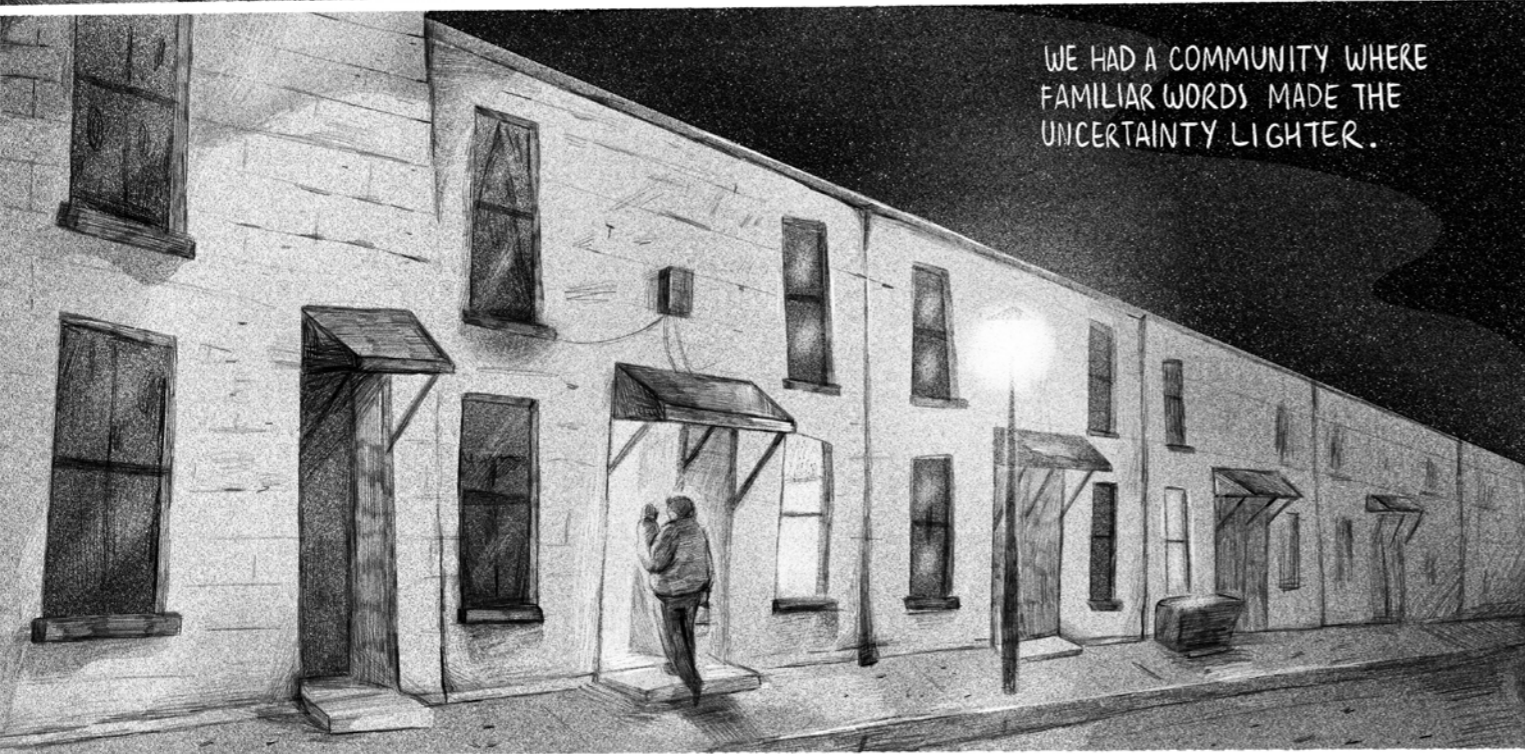
WELL...

EXTRA SPENDINGS
ADD UP EVENTUALLY!

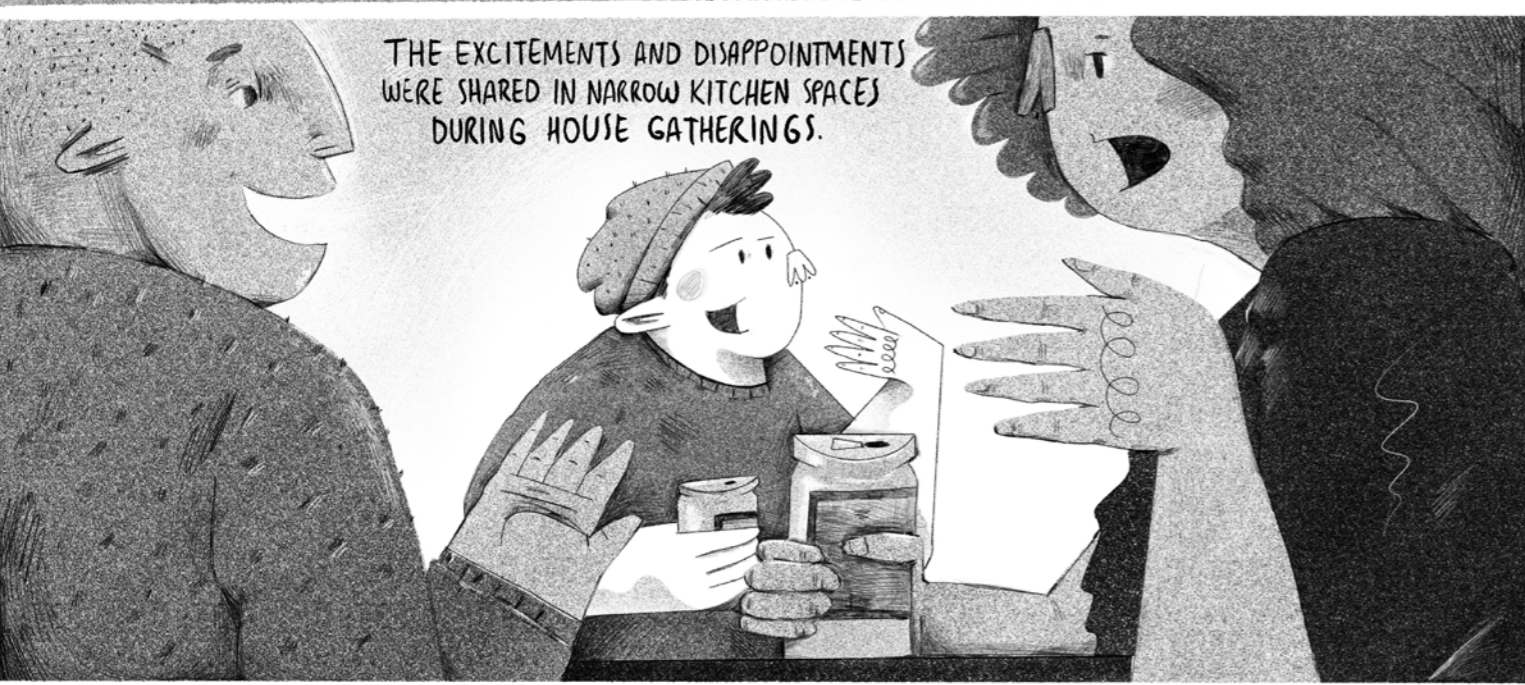




THERE WERE PLENTY OF OTHER BULGARIAN EXPATS IN COVENTRY WHO HAD ACCEPTED THE ENGLISH CITY AS A TYPE OF HOME.



WE HAD A COMMUNITY WHERE FAMILIAR WORDS MADE THE UNCERTAINTY LIGHTER.



THE EXCITEMENTS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS WERE SHARED IN NARROW KITCHEN SPACES DURING HOUSE GATHERINGS.



SPLIT BETWEEN DIFFERENT POINTS OF THE CITY, CONNECTED BY SHARED HISTORIES AND ROUTINES.

CANAL BASIN

CLOSEST CHEAP SUPERMARKET

HOME?

BUS STATION

SAINTSBURY'S (CHEAP BISCUITS)

COVENTRY CATHEDRAL

RING ROAD

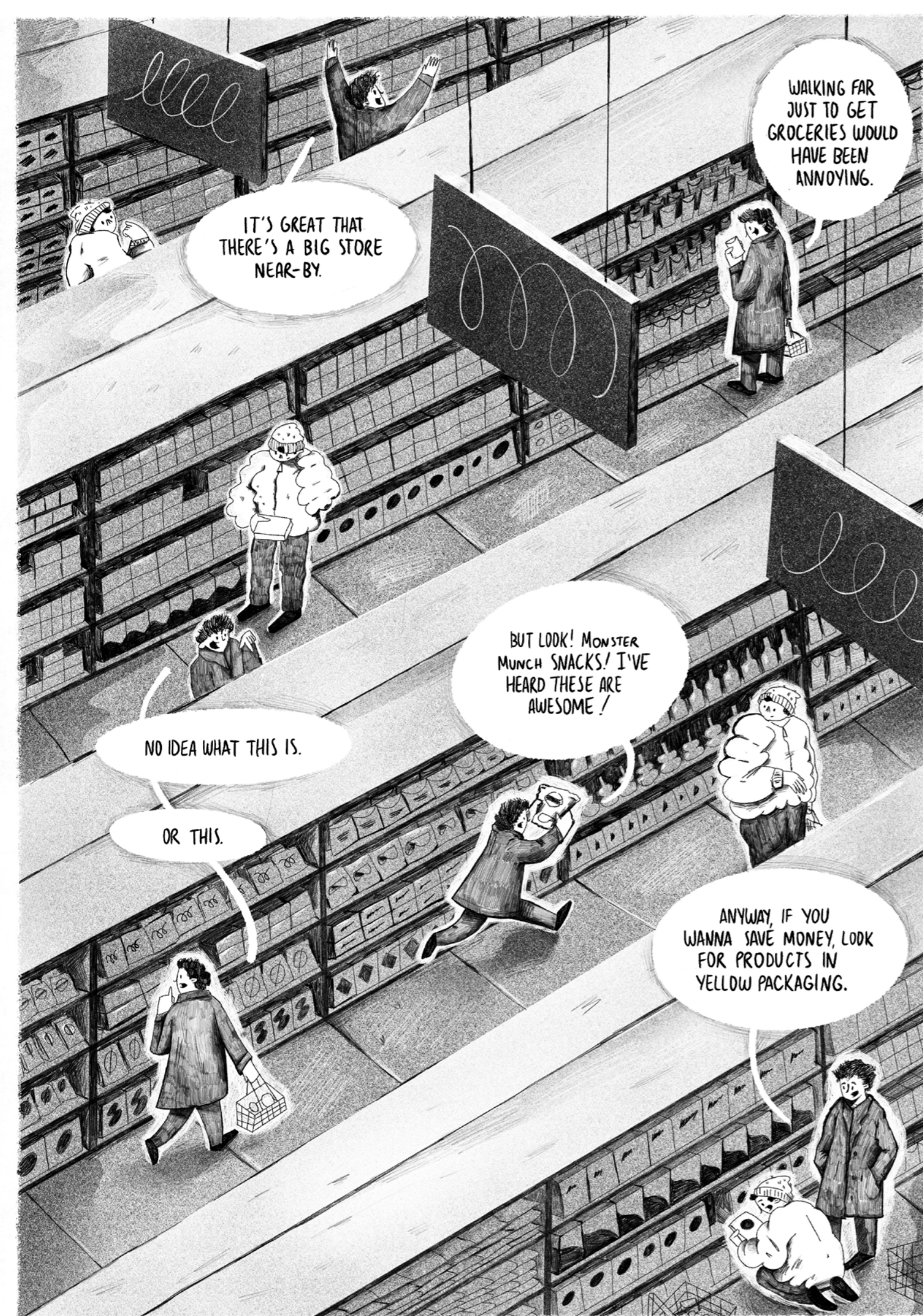
BIG SHOPPING CENTRE

HAS A HOME BARGAINS STORE

UNIVERSITY BUILDINGS

LIBRARY

RAILWAY STATION



IT'S GREAT THAT THERE'S A BIG STORE NEAR-BY.

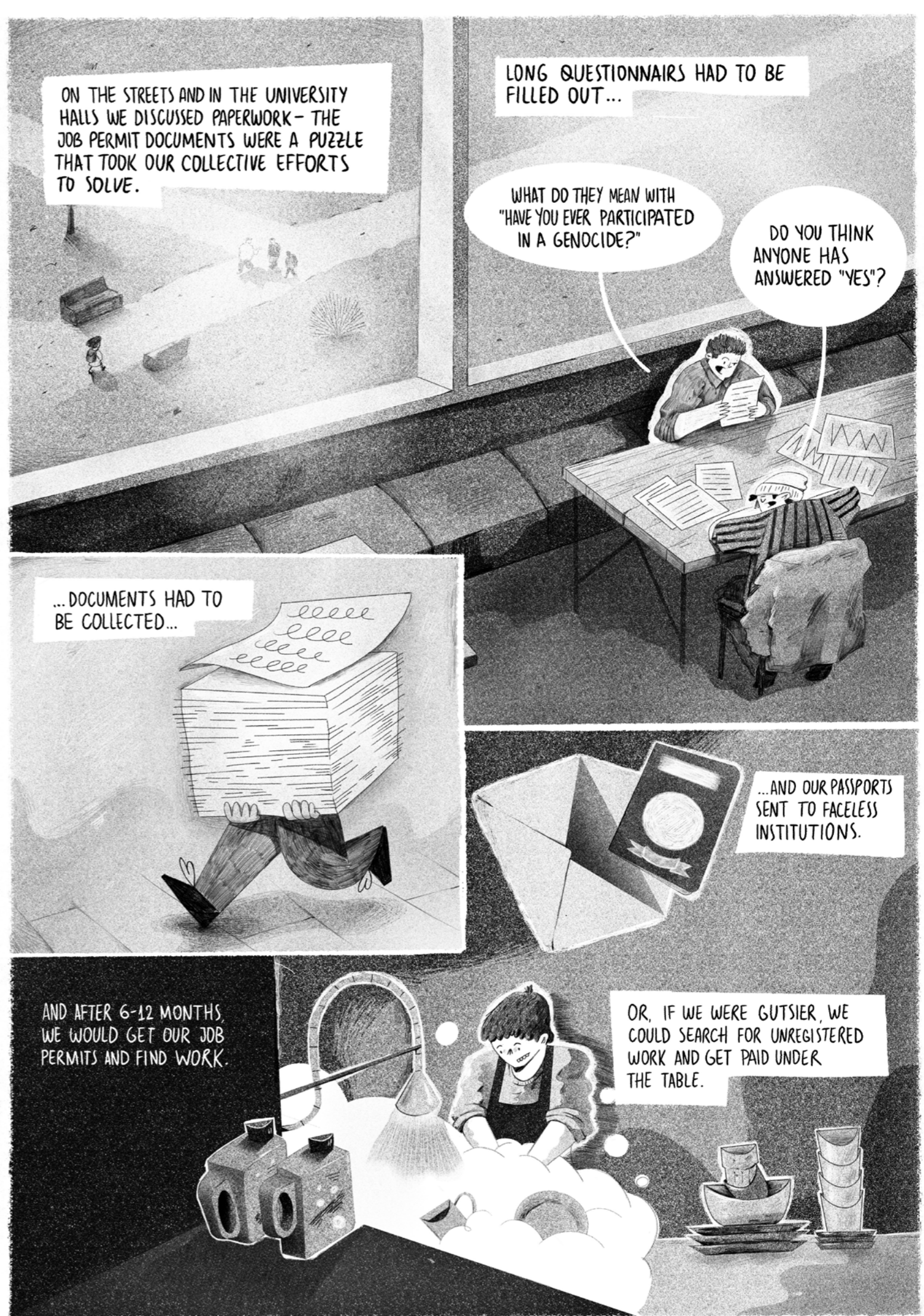
WALKING FAR JUST TO GET GROCERIES WOULD HAVE BEEN ANNOYING.

BUT LOOK! MONSTER MUNCH SNACKS! I'VE HEARD THESE ARE AWESOME!

NO IDEA WHAT THIS IS.

OR THIS.

ANYWAY, IF YOU WANNA SAVE MONEY, LOOK FOR PRODUCTS IN YELLOW PACKAGING.



ON THE STREETS AND IN THE UNIVERSITY HALLS WE DISCUSSED PAPERWORK - THE JOB PERMIT DOCUMENTS WERE A PUZZLE THAT TOOK OUR COLLECTIVE EFFORTS TO SOLVE.

LONG QUESTIONNAIRES HAD TO BE FILLED OUT...

WHAT DO THEY MEAN WITH "HAVE YOU EVER PARTICIPATED IN A GENOCIDE?"

DO YOU THINK ANYONE HAS ANSWERED "YES"?

... DOCUMENTS HAD TO BE COLLECTED...

... AND OUR PASSPORTS SENT TO FACELESS INSTITUTIONS.

AND AFTER 6-12 MONTHS WE WOULD GET OUR JOB PERMITS AND FIND WORK.

OR, IF WE WERE GUTSIER, WE COULD SEARCH FOR UNREGISTERED WORK AND GET PAID UNDER THE TABLE.



£0.15



£1



£0.66



£0.47



£0.26

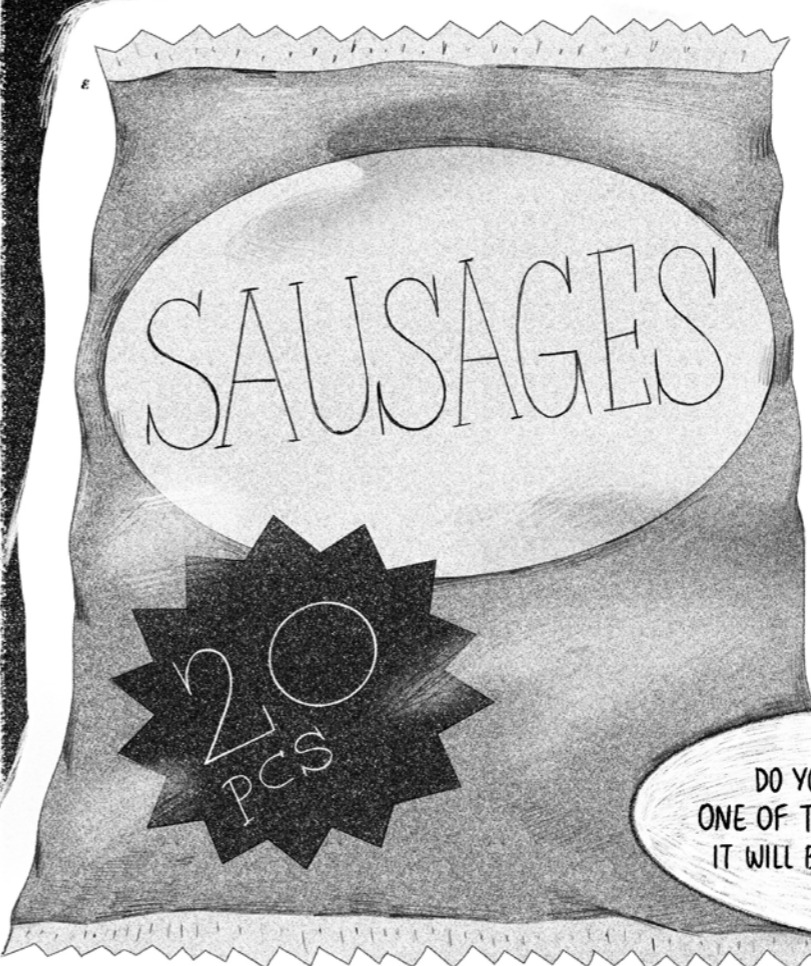


£0.16

£0.78



£0.21



£1

£0.43

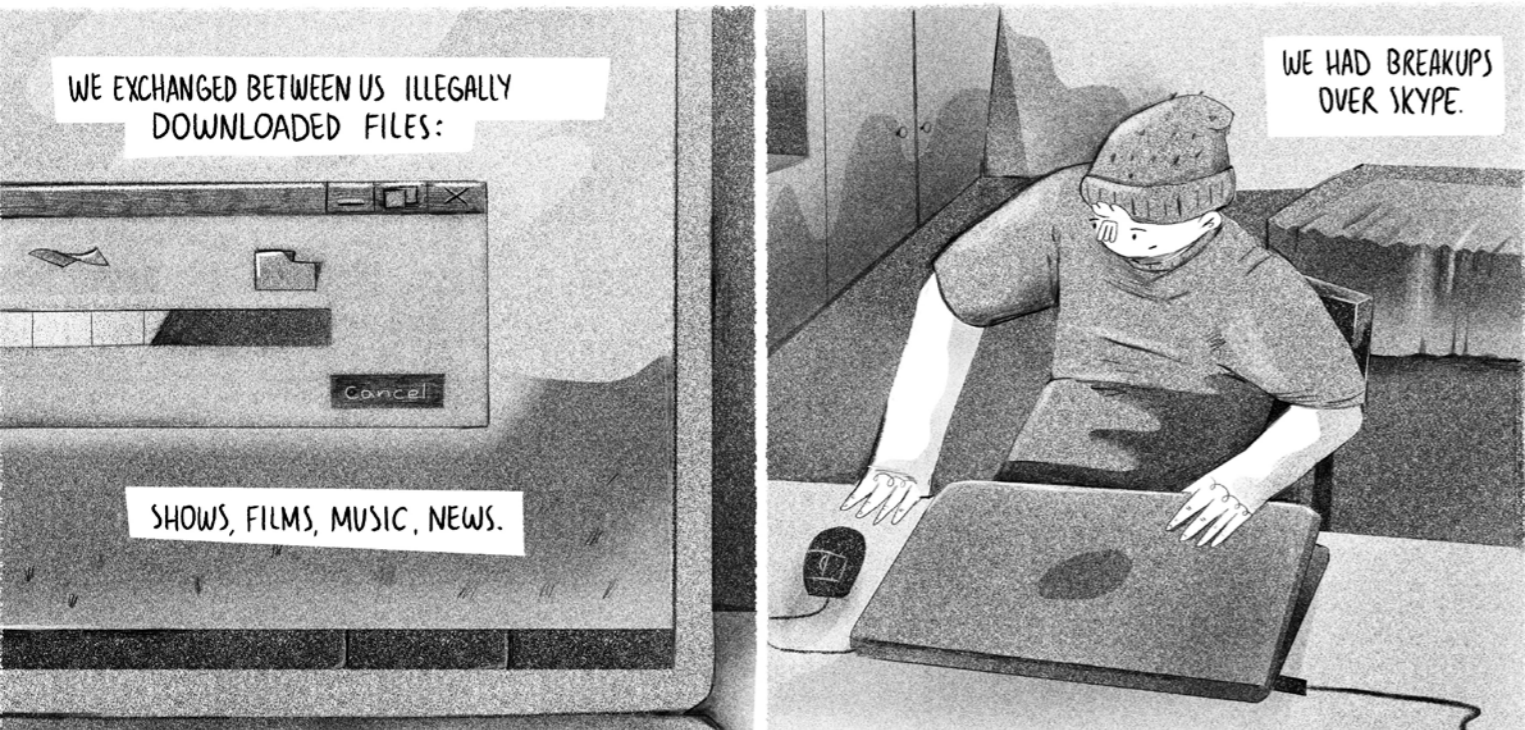


DO YOU THINK THAT IF I POKE ONE OF THESE SAUSAGES WITH A FORK, IT WILL BARK AND RUN AWAY?

WE EXCHANGED BETWEEN US ILLEGALLY DOWNLOADED FILES:

SHOWS, FILMS, MUSIC, NEWS.

WE HAD BREAKUPS OVER SKYPE.



WE GATHERED TO DRINK AND REMINISCE.

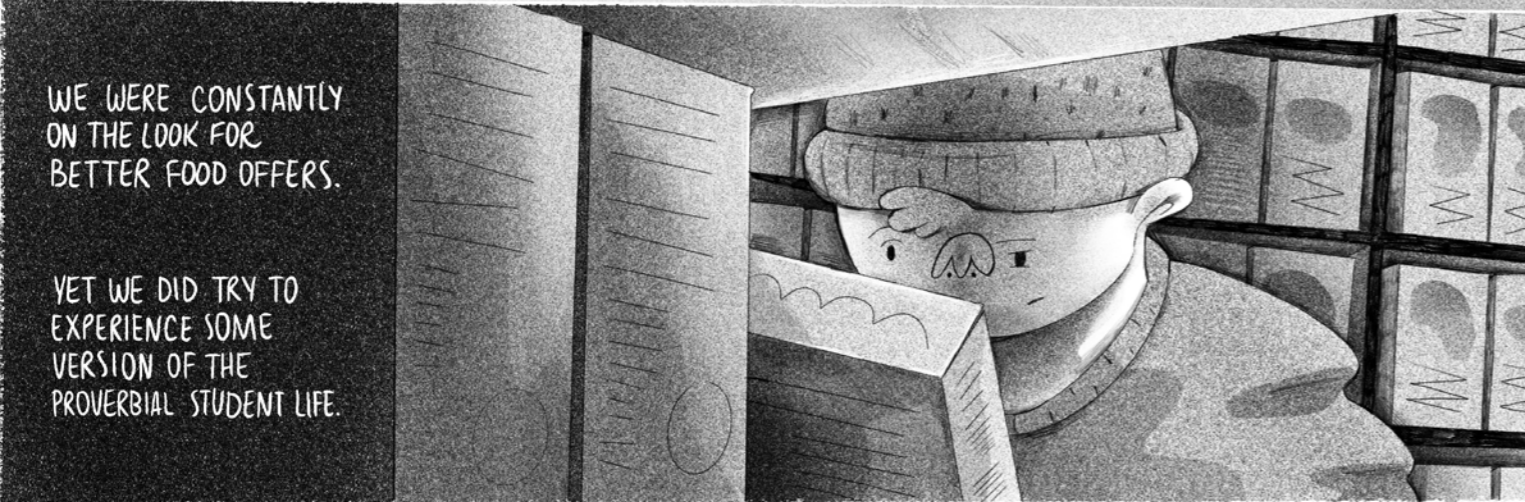
YOU OKAY THERE?

BLAAA...



WE WERE CONSTANTLY ON THE LOOK FOR BETTER FOOD OFFERS.

YET WE DID TRY TO EXPERIENCE SOME VERSION OF THE PROVERBIAL STUDENT LIFE.



HEY, STICK AROUND.

WHY?

I WANNA CHECK FOR MILK.



JUST WAIT FOR A BIT.



DO YOU SERIOUSLY CARE SO MUCH 'BOUT THIS LEMON CURD SERIAL THING!?

UGH! GOSH, WAIT!



DAMAGED PACKAGING

ALMOST EXPIRED



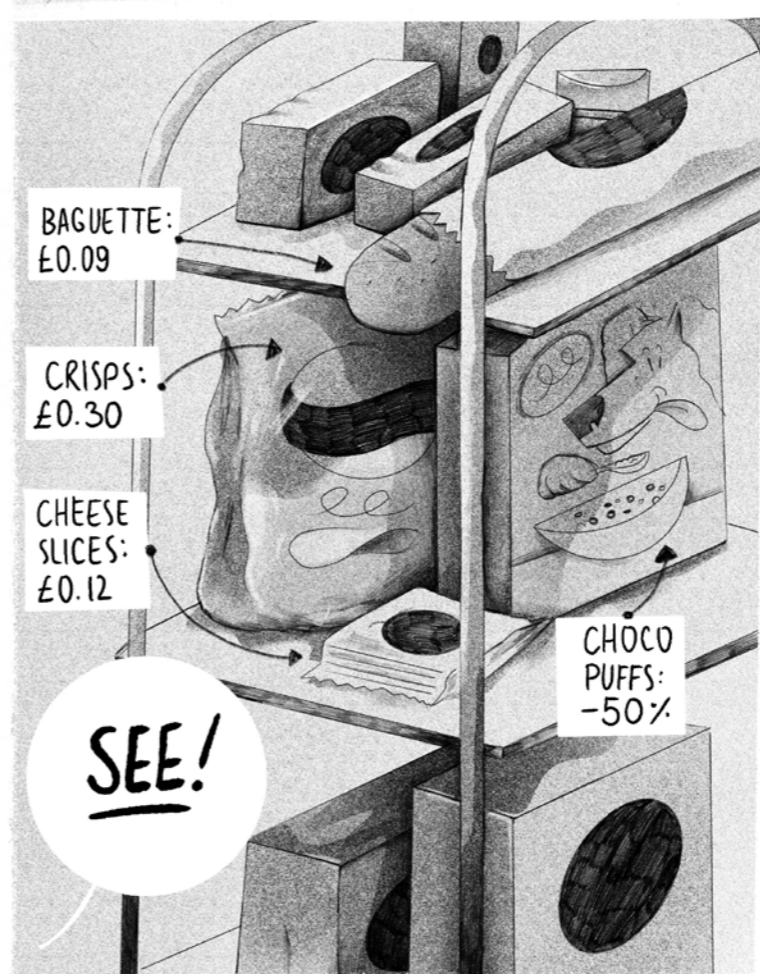
BAGUETTE: £0.09

CRISPS: £0.30

CHEESE SLICES: £0.12

CHOCO PUFFS: -50%

SEE!

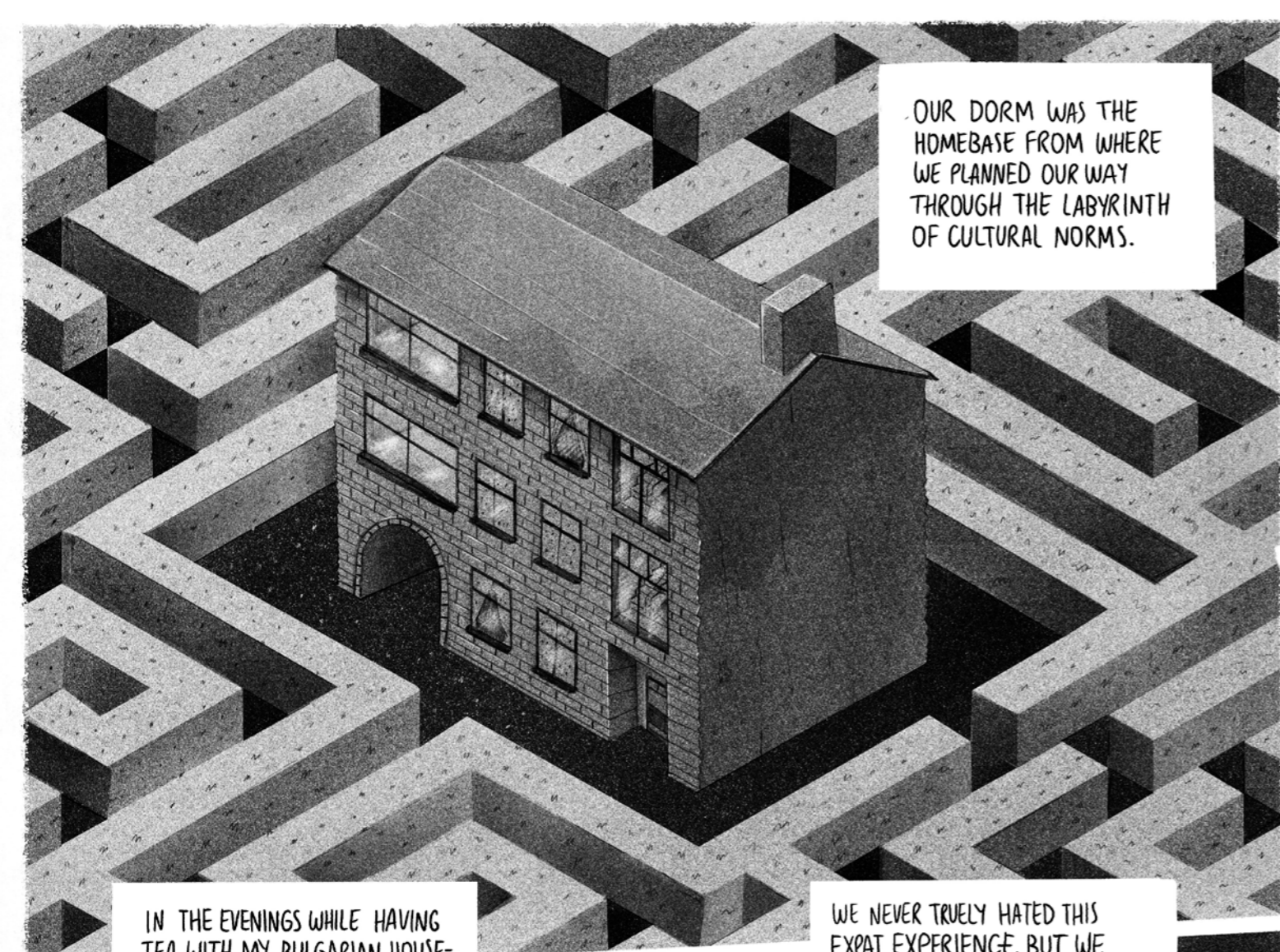


THEY ROLL OUT THE BIG DISCOUNTS BEFORE CLOSING THE STORE.

MHM, MHM ...

ONE TIME I GOT MYSELF A BIRTHDAY CAKE FOR £2





OUR DORM WAS THE HOME BASE FROM WHERE WE PLANNED OUR WAY THROUGH THE LABYRINTH OF CULTURAL NORMS.

IN THE EVENINGS WHILE HAVING TEA WITH MY BULGARIAN HOUSEMATE, WE SKEWED OUR DAILY IMPRESSIONS THROUGH BITTERSWEET JOKES, CURSES, AND ANECDOTES.

WE NEVER TRULY HATED THIS EXPAT EXPERIENCE. BUT WE NEVER LOVED IT EITHER. WE JUST NAVIGATED LIFE AND THAT PROCESS OF GROWING UP FASCINATED US.



YOU KNOW TODAY IS UNIVERSITY DAY BACK HOME. RIGHT?

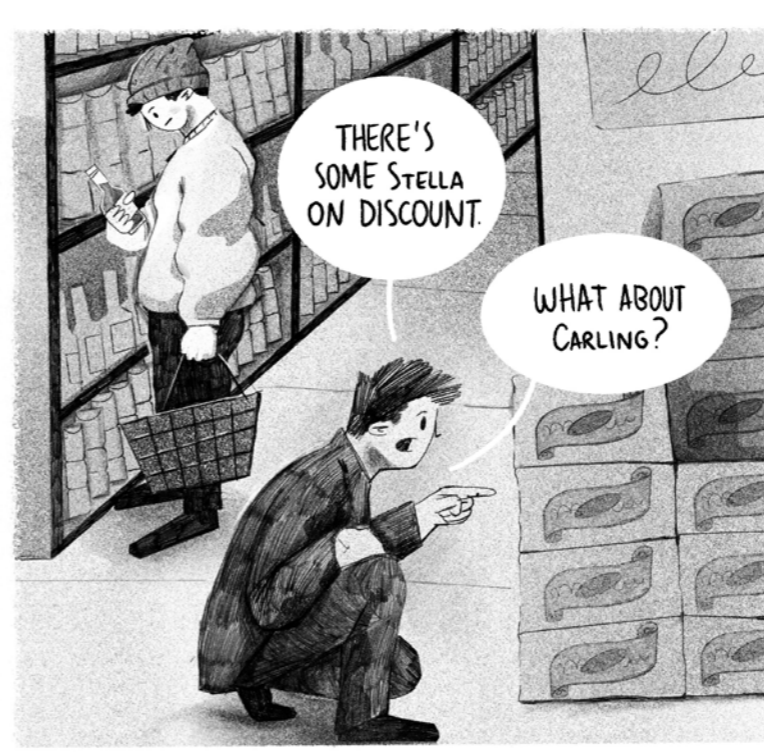


SO?

WELL, ALL UNI STUDENTS ARE OUT PARTYING. SHOULD WE ALSO DO SOMETHING?

GOING OUT IS TOO PRICY...

MAYBE GET SOME BEER FROM THE STORE?



THERE'S SOME STELLA ON DISCOUNT.

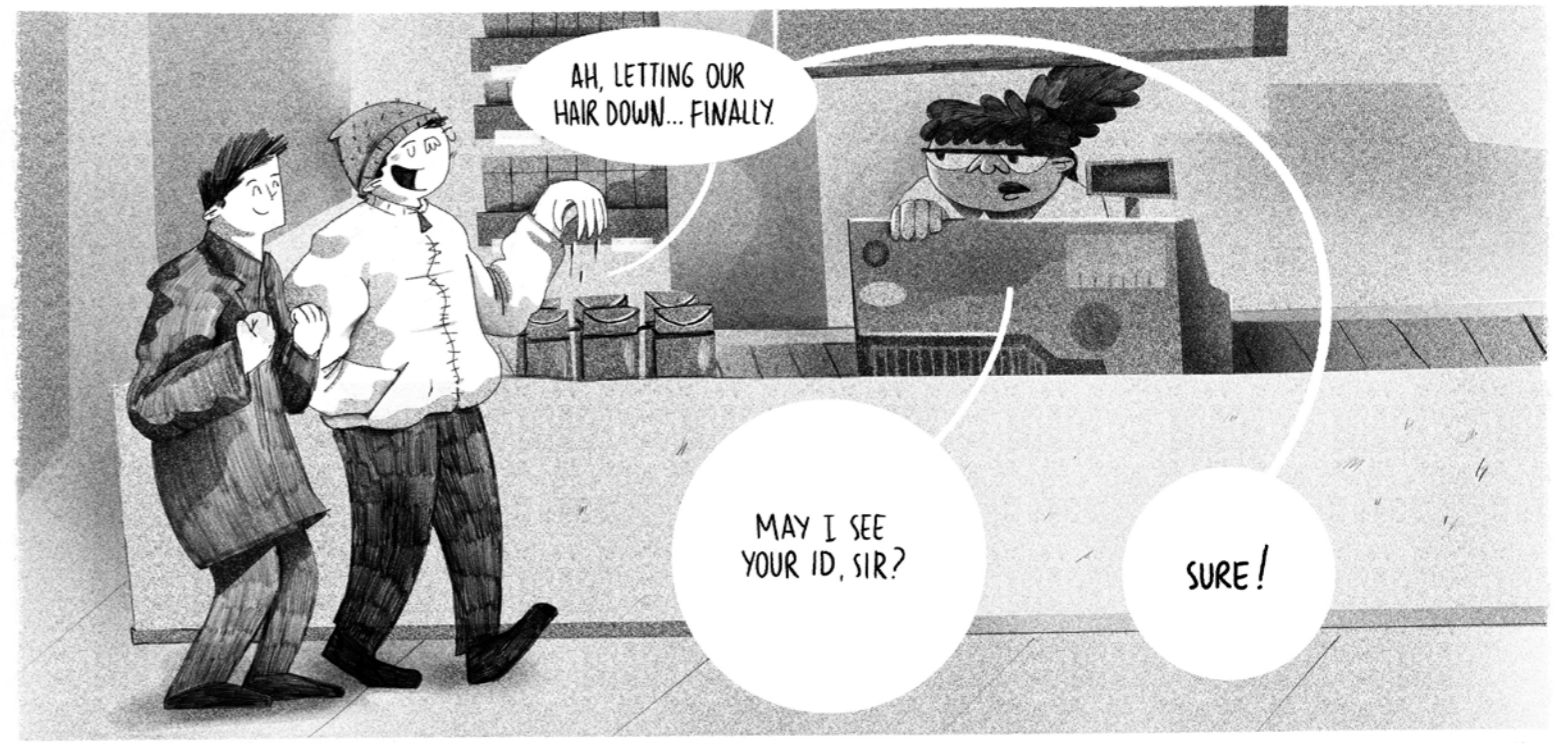
WHAT ABOUT CARLING?



EW, THAT TASTES LIKE PISS.

COME ON, HAVE SOME STANDARDS...

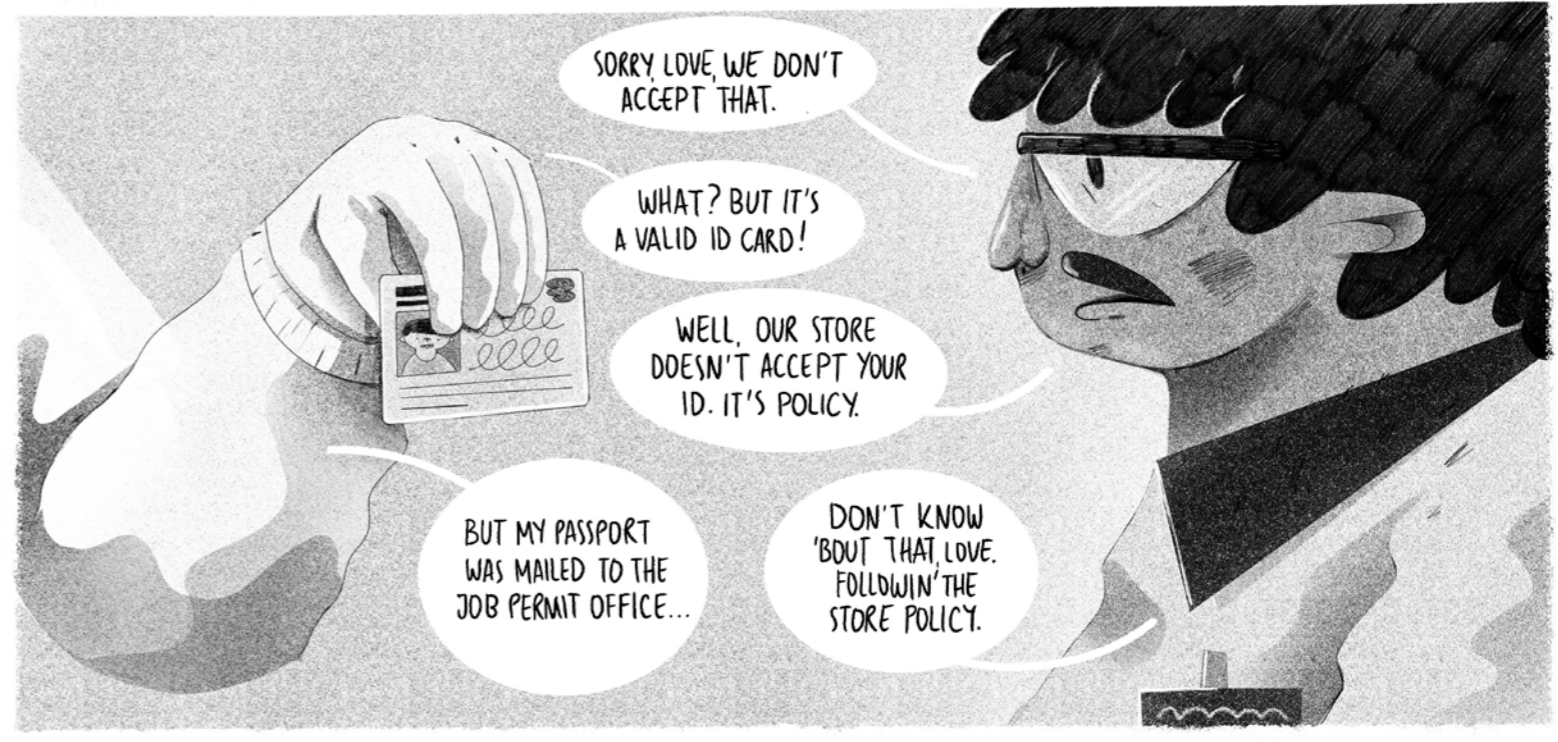
HAA, I'LL GRAB US SOME CARLSBERG THEN.



AH, LETTING OUR HAIR DOWN... FINALLY.

MAY I SEE YOUR ID, SIR?

SURE!



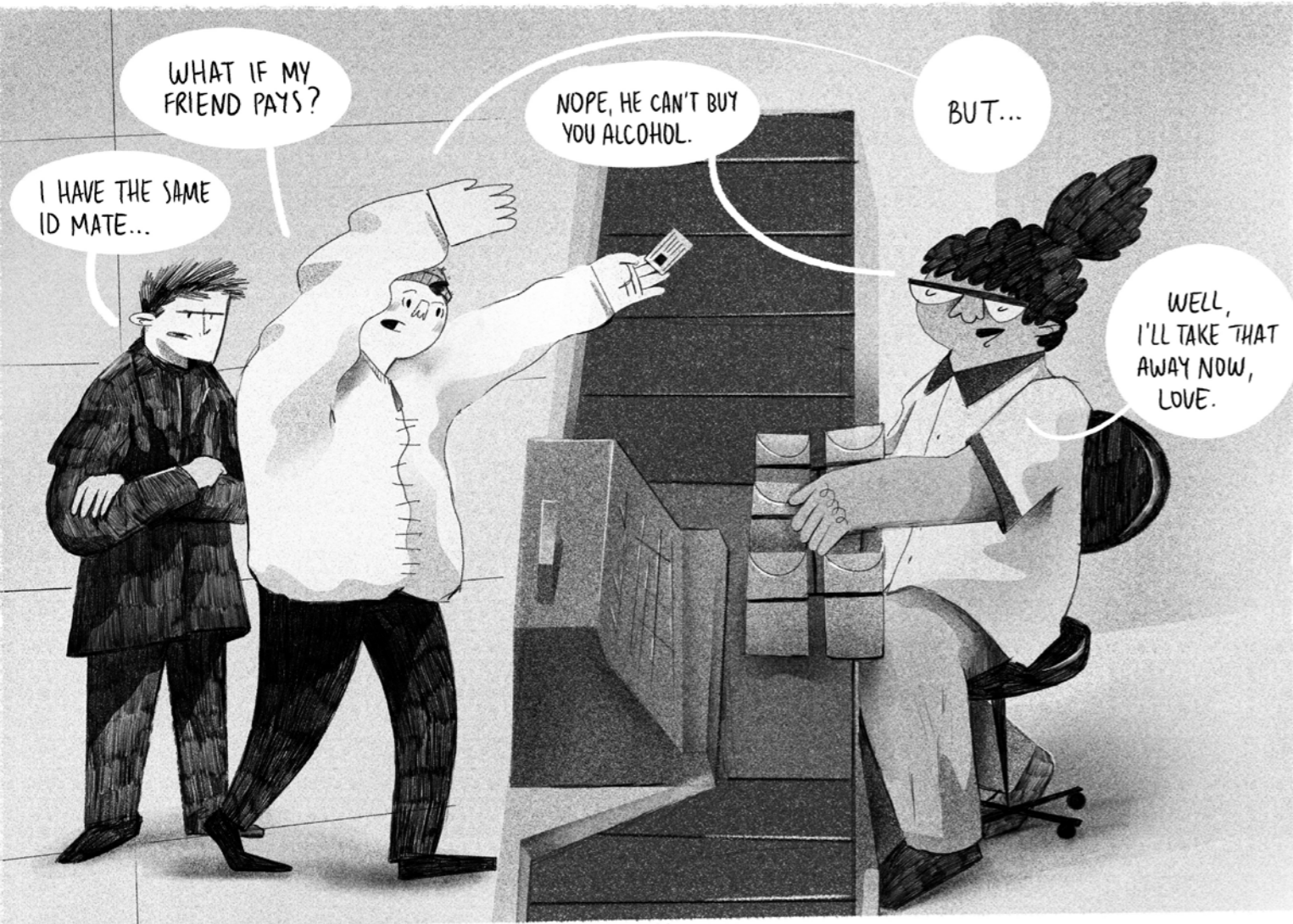
SORRY LOVE, WE DON'T ACCEPT THAT.

WHAT? BUT IT'S A VALID ID CARD!

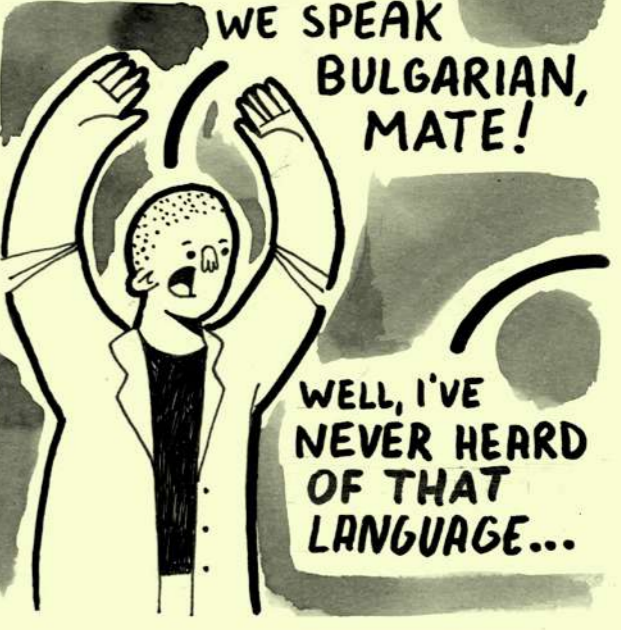
WELL, OUR STORE DOESN'T ACCEPT YOUR ID. IT'S POLICY.

BUT MY PASSPORT WAS MAILED TO THE JOB PERMIT OFFICE...

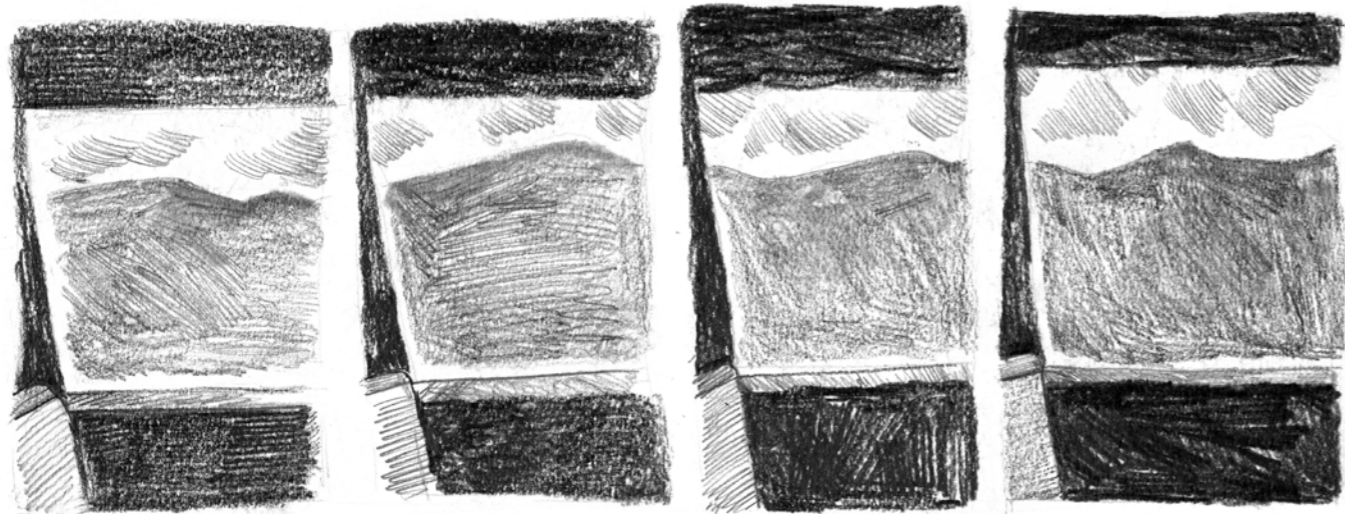
DON'T KNOW 'BOUT THAT, LOVE. FOLLOWIN' THE STORE POLICY.

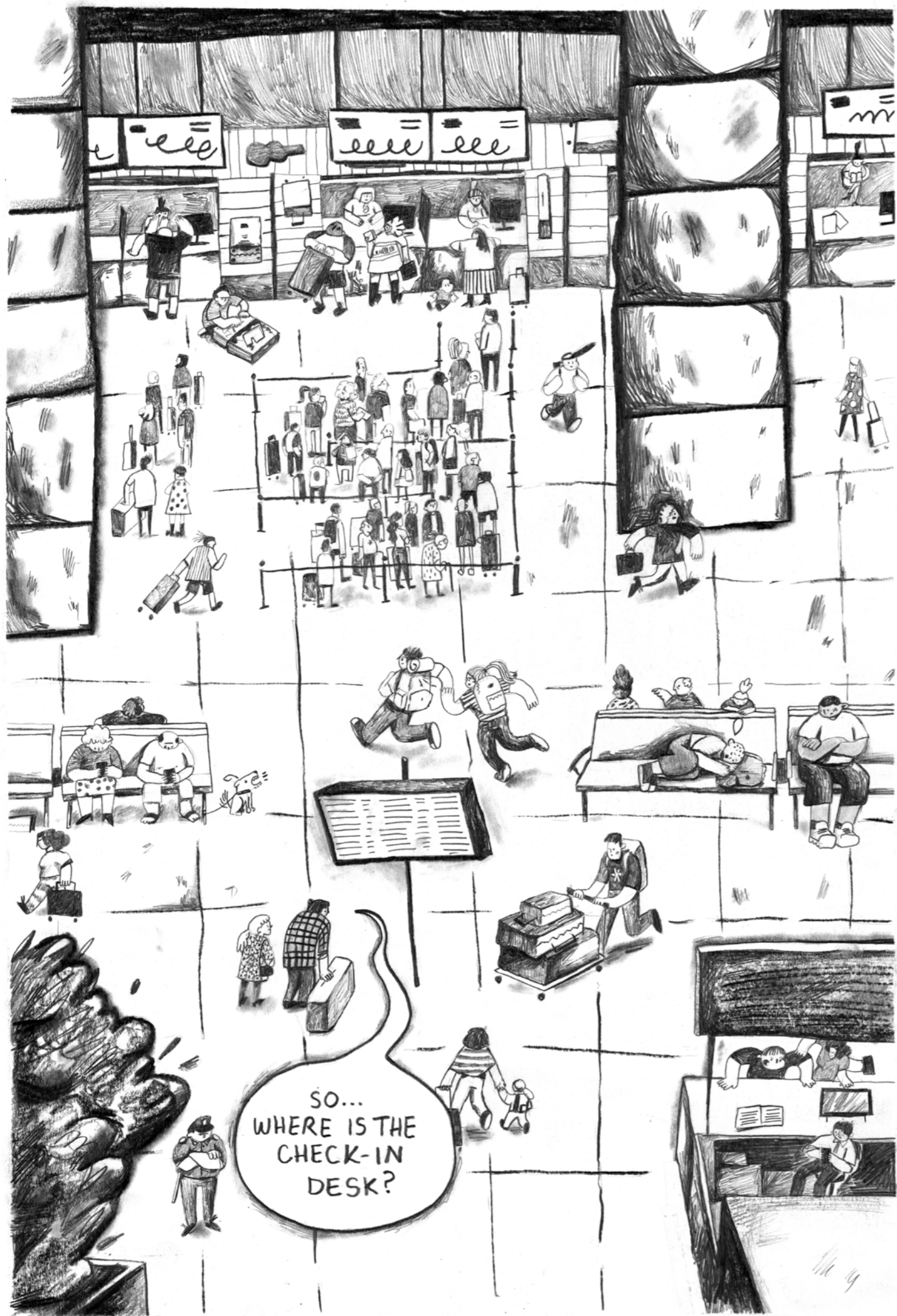


WHAT LANGUAGE?

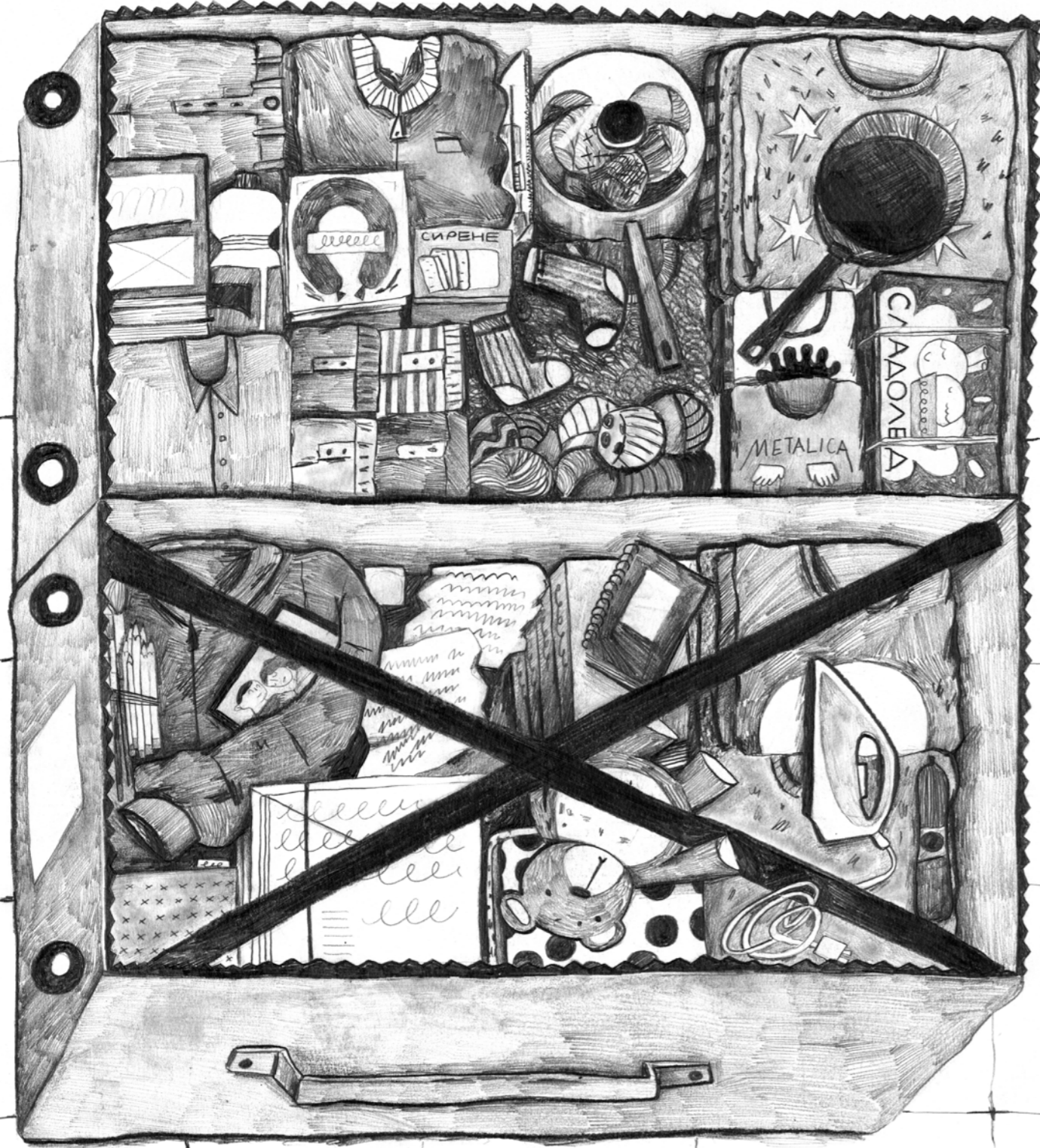
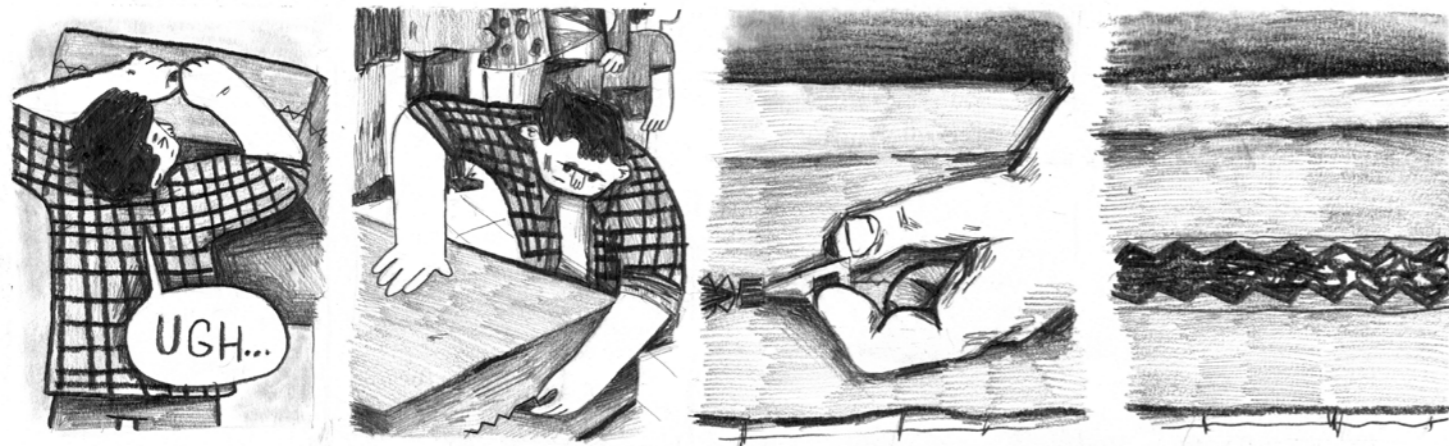


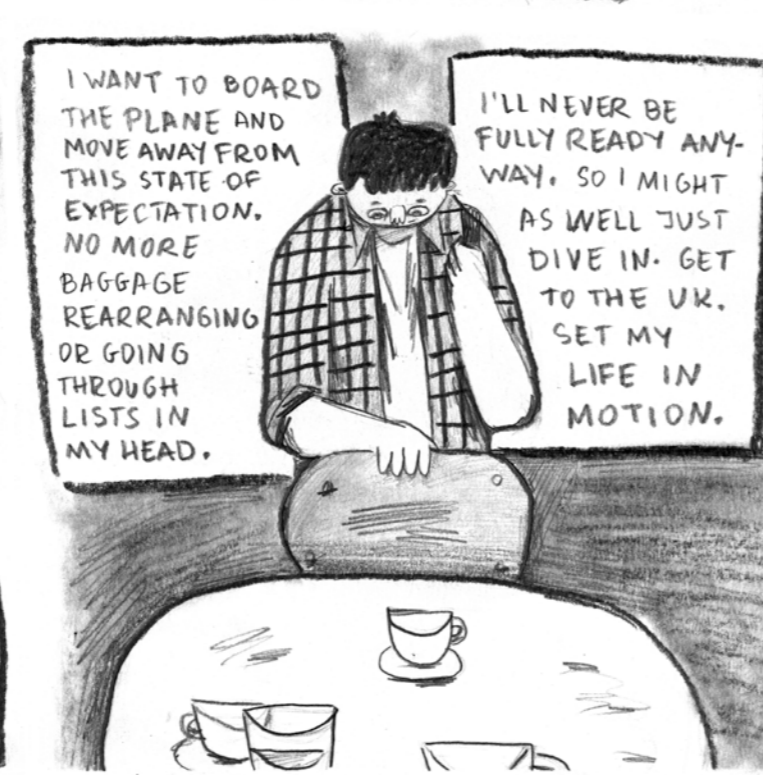
TERMINAL













a perfect migrant

White
 Quiet
 Speaks only local language.
No accent.

Well-educated expert

Christian

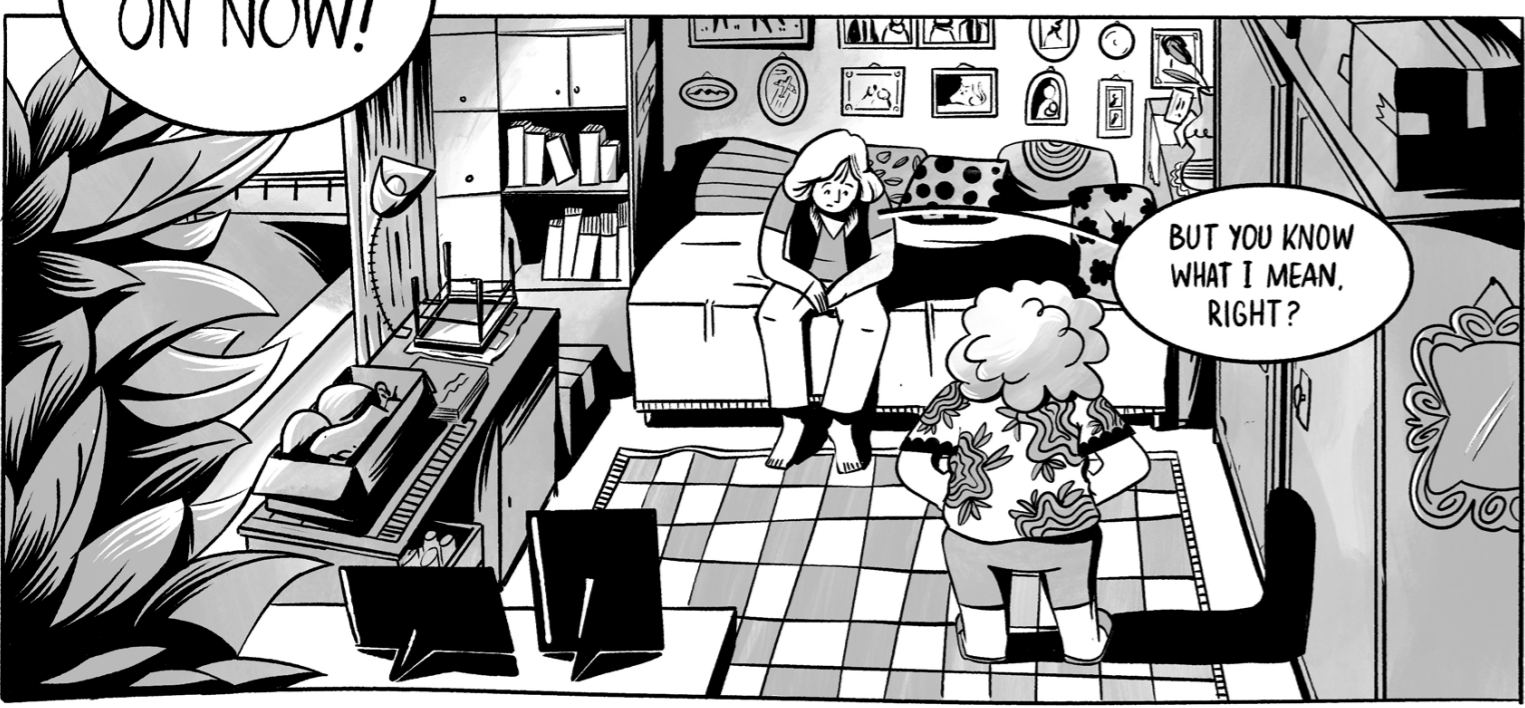


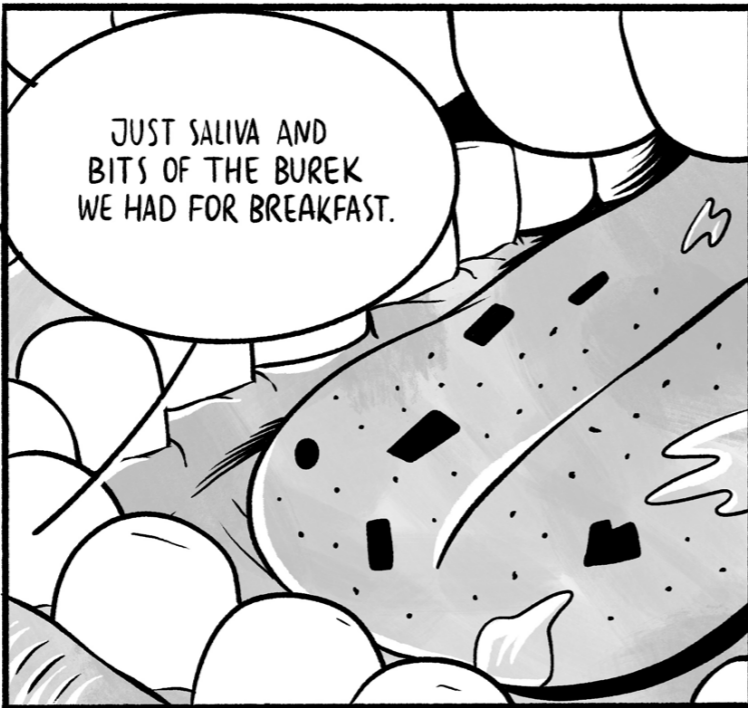
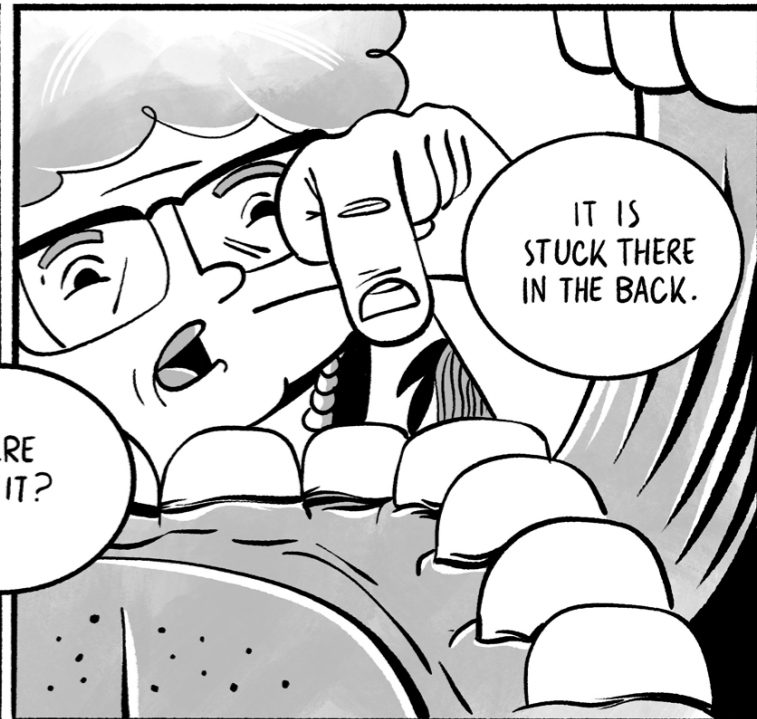
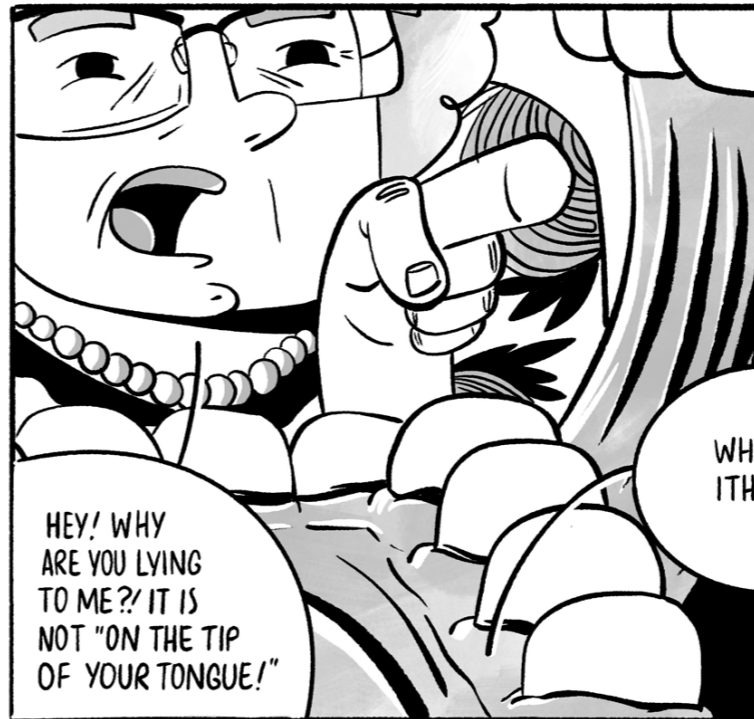
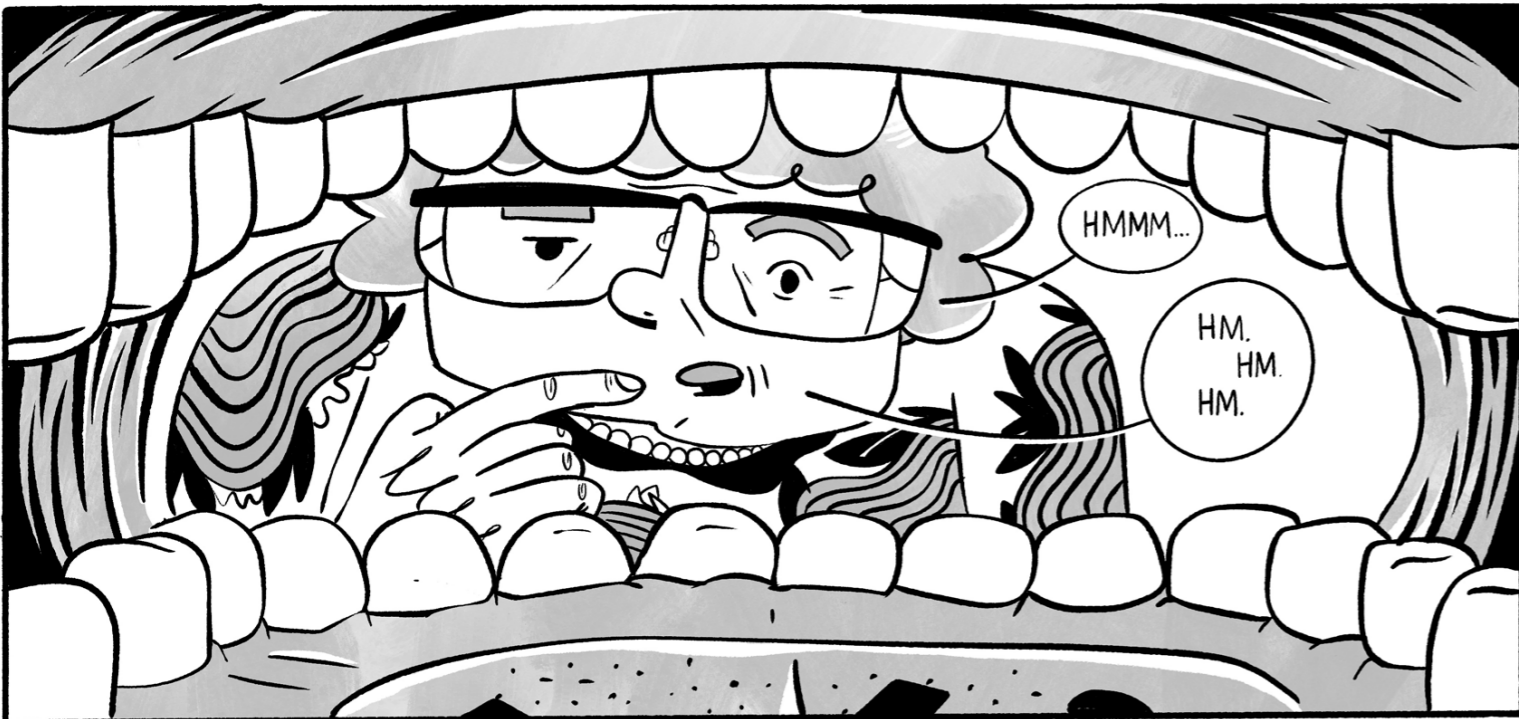
Grateful
 Lower salary-ok.

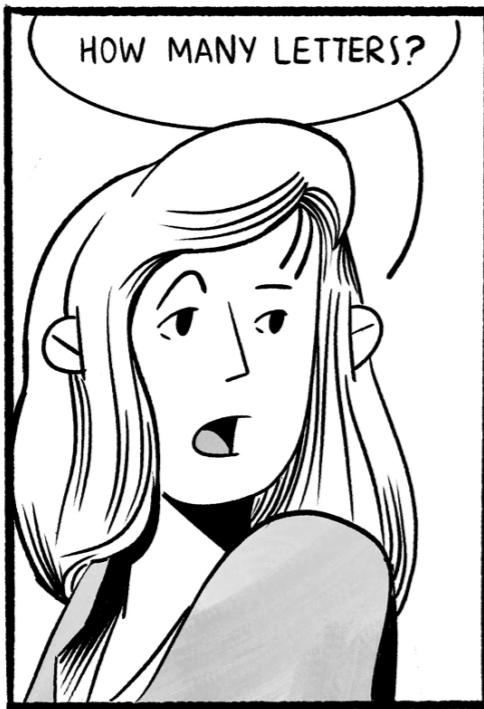
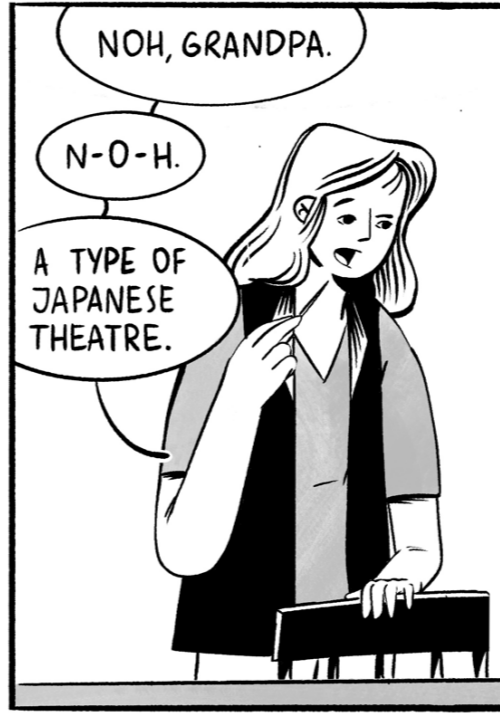
Male that doesn't try to steal our women.
 — If female : doesn't bring kids.

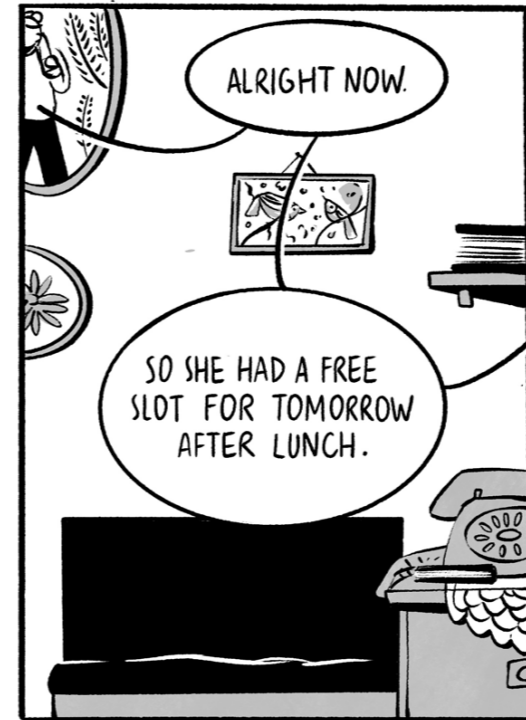
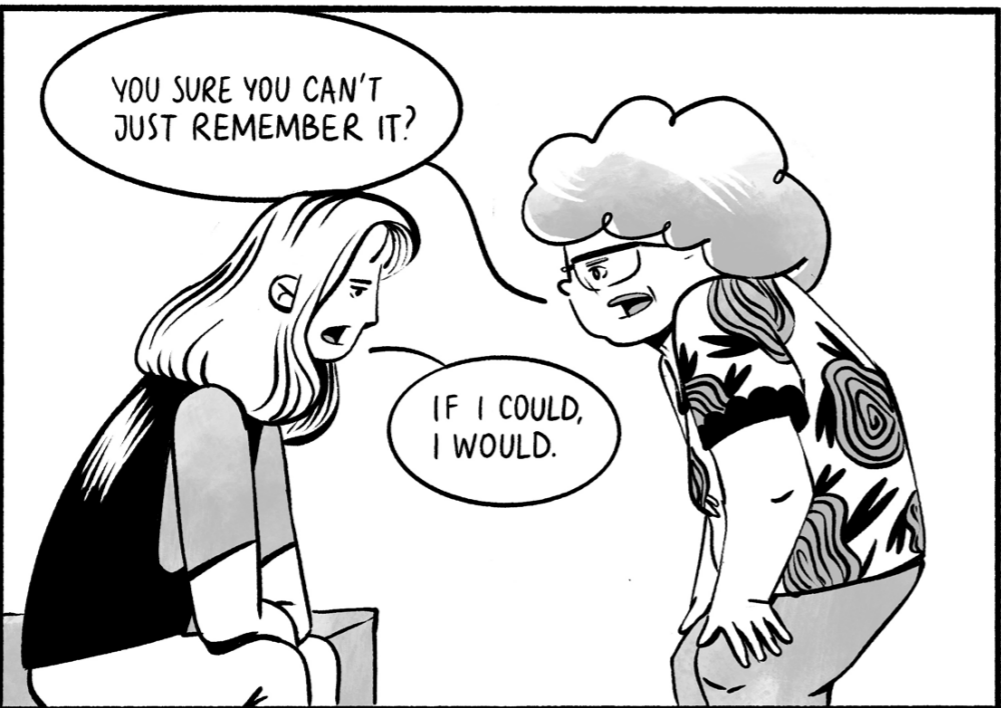
Doesn't steal jobs. Receives whatever job is handed to them.

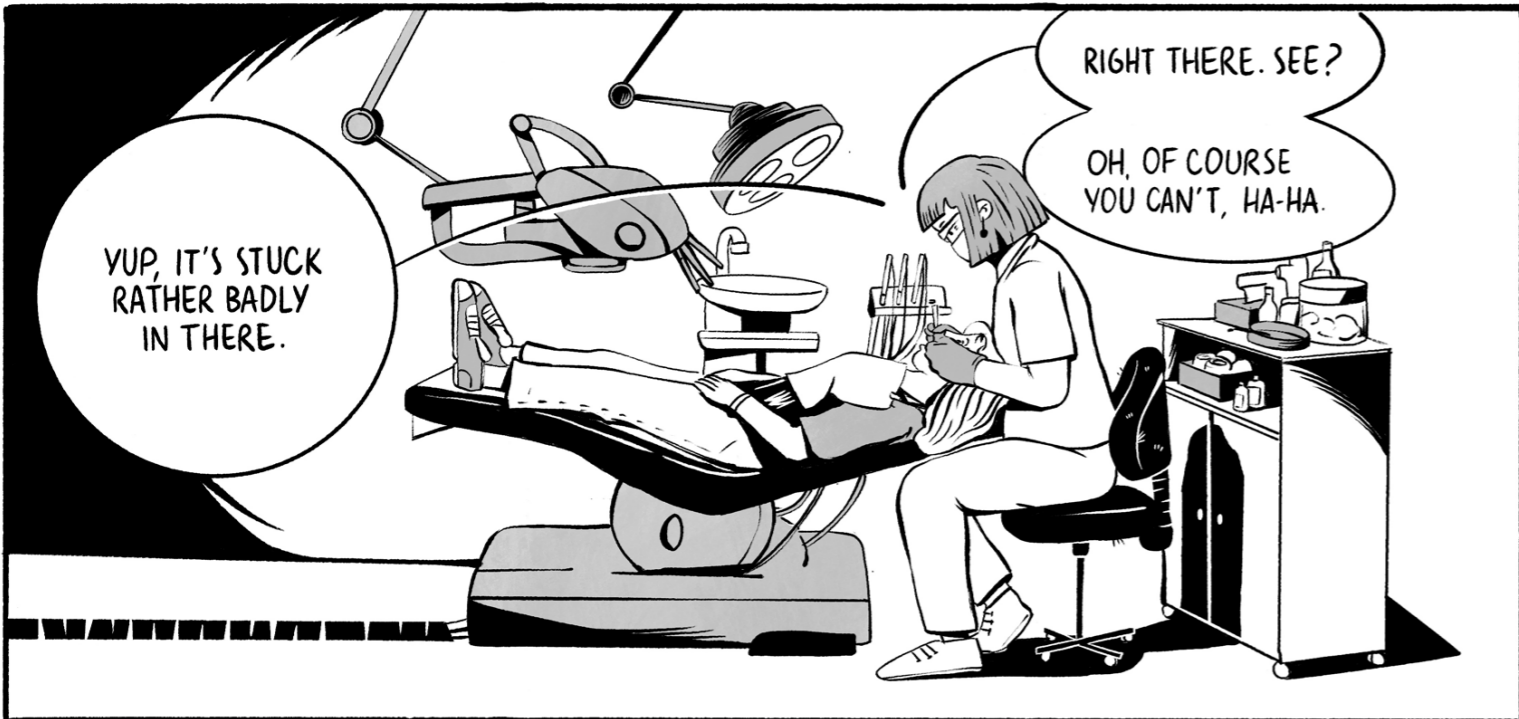
STUCK











YUP, IT'S STUCK RATHER BADLY IN THERE.

RIGHT THERE. SEE?

OH, OF COURSE YOU CAN'T, HA-HA.



MIGHT HAVE EVEN GOT INFECTED AND OPENED A HOLE...

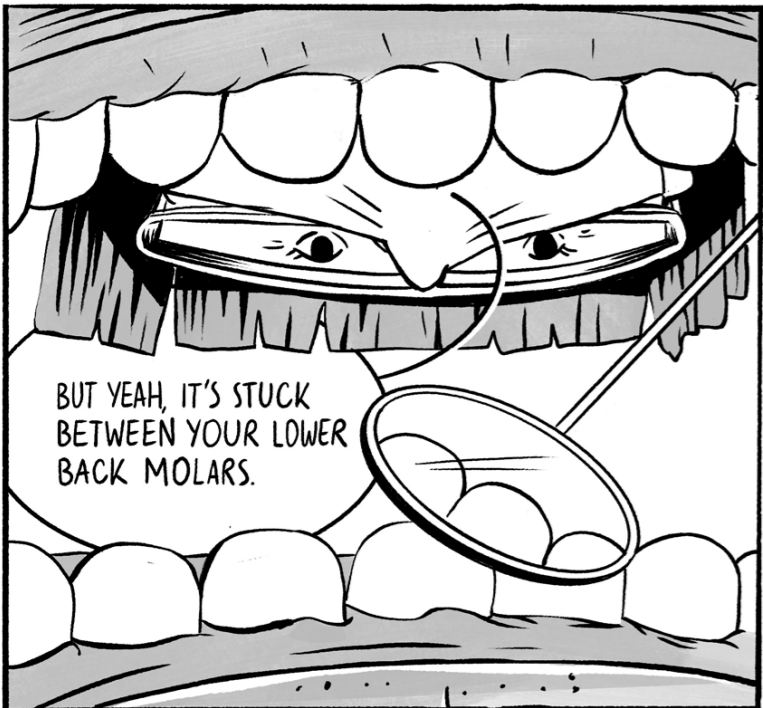
> BZZT <
> BZZT <



...WHERE MORE WORDS COULD HAVE GONE STUCK.



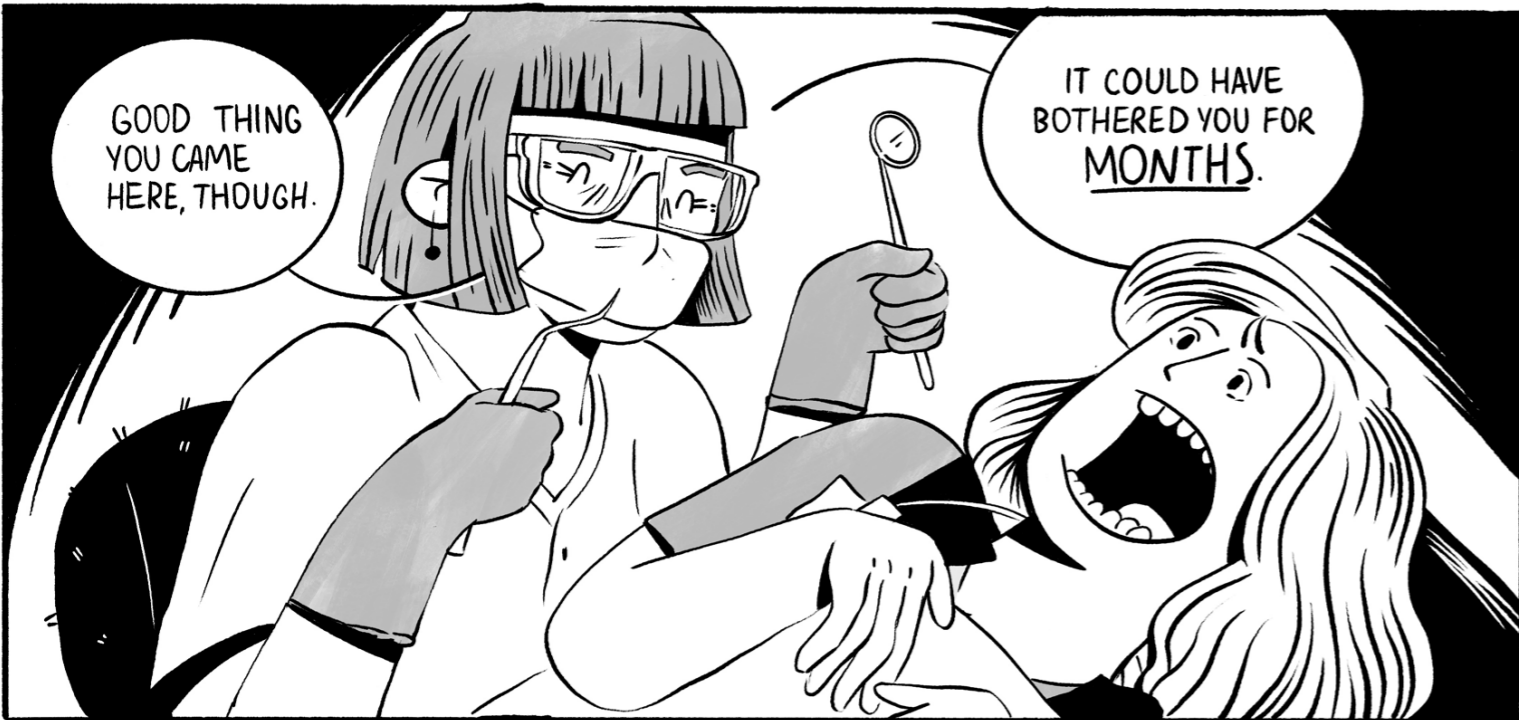
OKAY. SPIT OUT.



BUT YEAH, IT'S STUCK BETWEEN YOUR LOWER BACK MOLARS.



I CAN SEE THAT WORD THERE, A FEW ASCENDERS AND TERMINALS ARE SHOWING UP.



GOOD THING YOU CAME HERE, THOUGH.

IT COULD HAVE BOTHERED YOU FOR MONTHS.



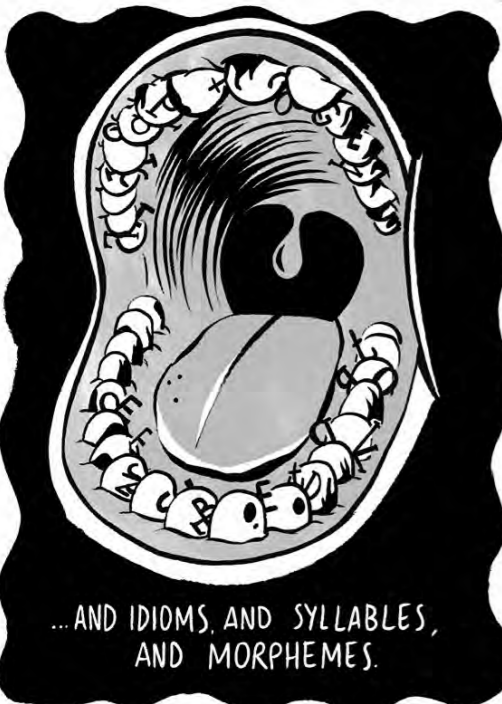
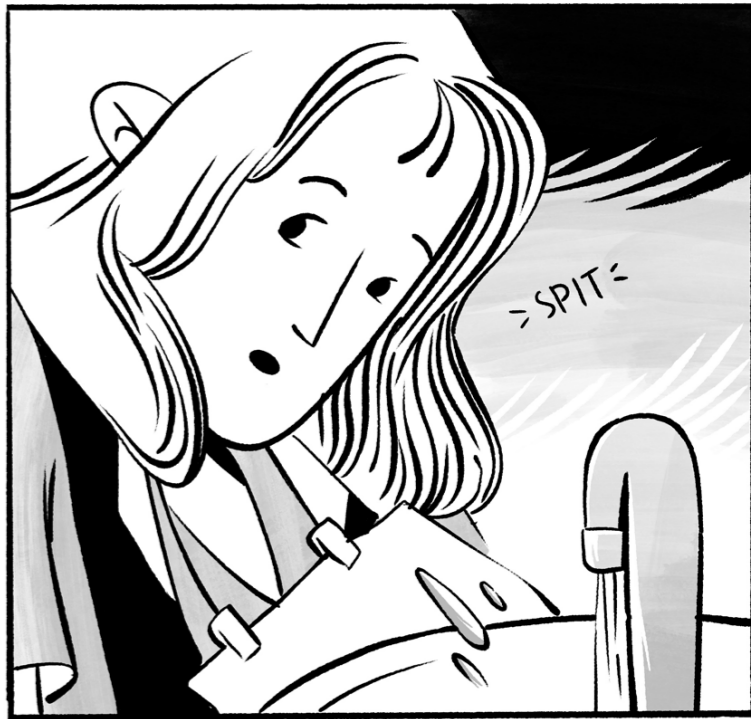
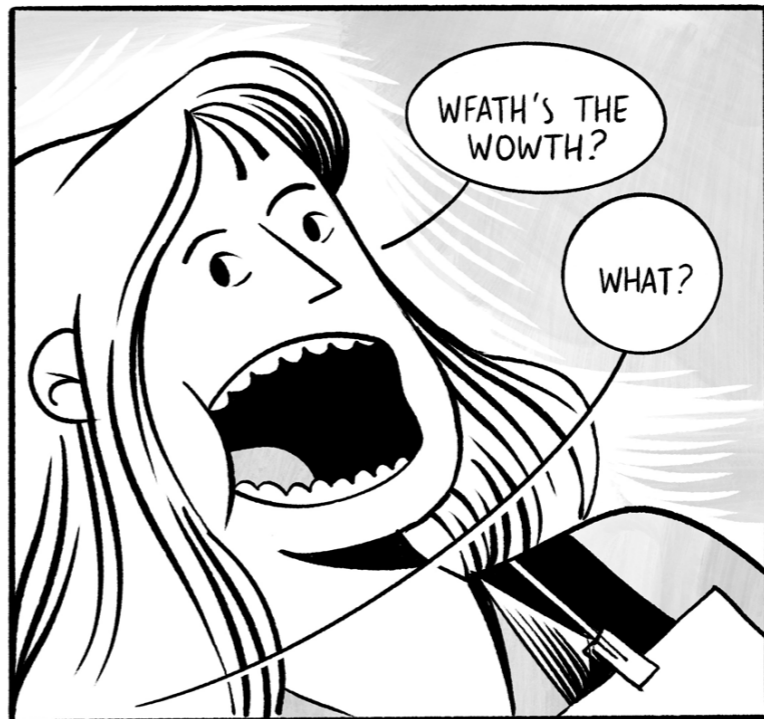
I HAD A PATIENT SEVERAL YEARS AGO.



AN ABSOLUTELY NEGLIGENT GUY.

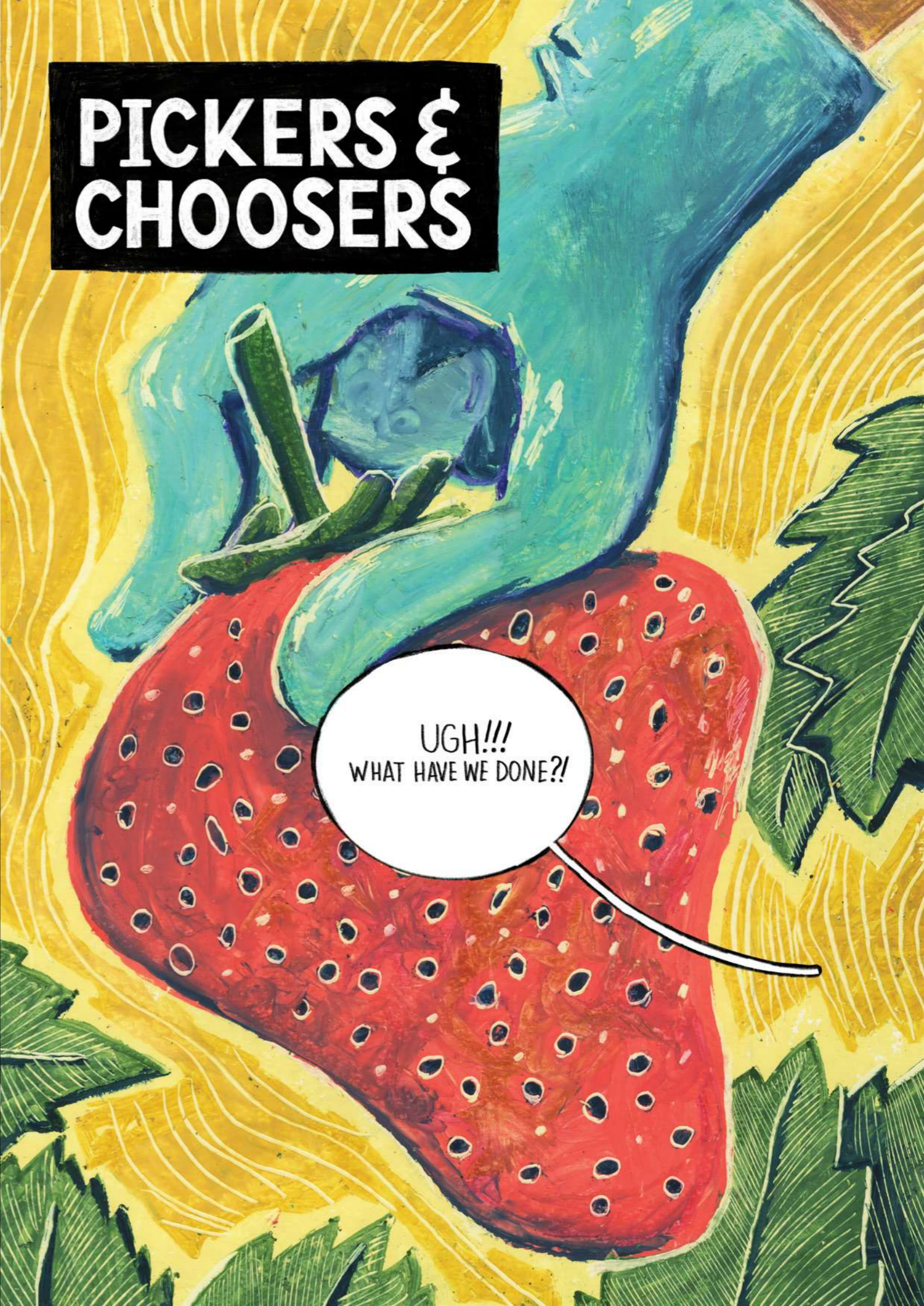


HAD A WORD BOTHERING HIM FOR WEEKS BEFORE HE CAME TO HAVE IT CHECKED.

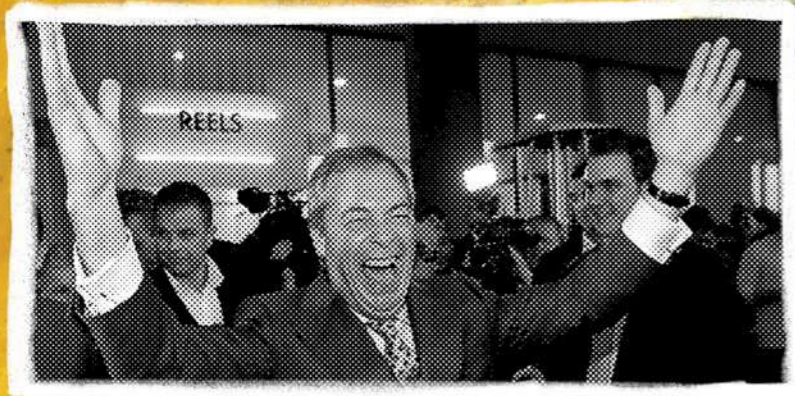




PICKERS & CHOOSERS



UGH!!!
WHAT HAVE WE DONE?!



I HEAR A HOUSEMATE EXCLAIM FROM THE CORRIDOR WHILE ADDRESSING NO ONE IN PARTICULAR.

BULGARIAN
YOGHU

I STEP OUT OF MY ROOM AND SEE HER WALKING DOWN THE STAIRS WHILE THE REST OF THE HOUSEMATES FIDDLE AROUND PREPARING FOR WORK AND RESTLESSLY DISCUSSING THE NEWS.

DAILY MAIL, JUNE 24, 2016

After 43 years
UK 'free from
shackles of EU'

WE'RE OUT!

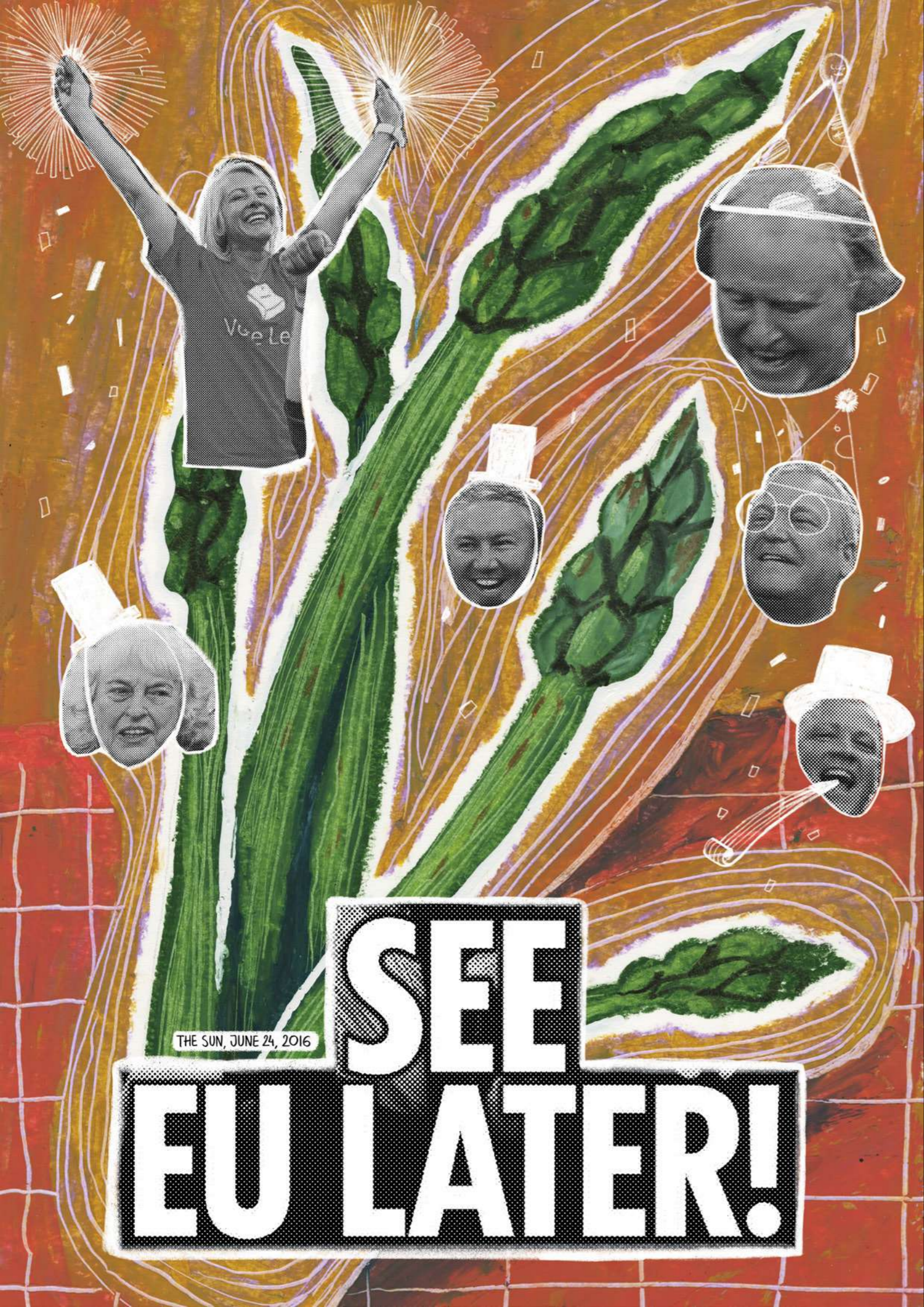
SO WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN TO OUR TRIP TO SPAIN NEXT YEAR.

CHILL!
NOTHING WILL KICK IN THAT QUICKLY.

SO...
WILL WE NEED VISAS?

I KNOW AS MUCH AS YOU DO!
WHY ARE YOU ASKING ME?

HEY PAL, YOU KNOW THIS HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IMMIGRANTS, RIGHT? A LOT OF PEOPLE HAD OTHER REASONS TO VOTE LEAVE. LIKE, PEOPLE STILL WANT TO VACATION ABROAD, THIS WON'T GO THROUGH.



THE SUN, JUNE 24, 2016

SEE EU LATER!

I GO TO WORK, ENTER THE OFFICE. MY FRIEND A. IS ALREADY THERE.

HEY, I'M SORRY. WE'RE SUCH A SILLY COUNTRY.

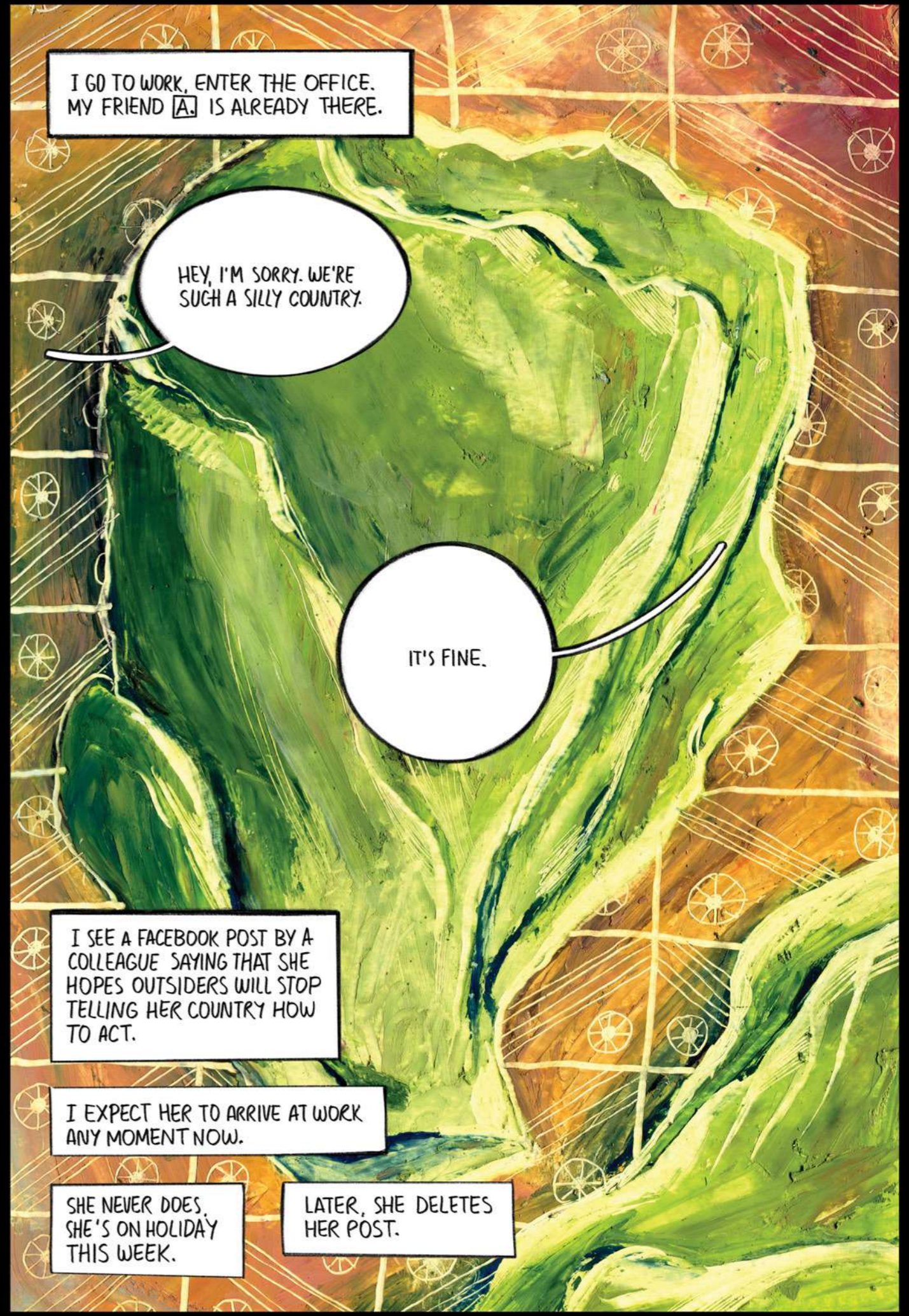
IT'S FINE.


I SEE A FACEBOOK POST BY A COLLEAGUE SAYING THAT SHE HOPES OUTSIDERS WILL STOP TELLING HER COUNTRY HOW TO ACT.

I EXPECT HER TO ARRIVE AT WORK ANY MOMENT NOW.

SHE NEVER DOES. SHE'S ON HOLIDAY THIS WEEK.

LATER, SHE DELETES HER POST.





THE LIGHT IS RED, BUT THERE ARE NO PASSING CARS. SHOULD I CROSS THE STREET? I WONDER IF SOMEONE MIGHT SEE ME AND THINK...

HERE THEY ARE, COMING TO OUR COUNTRY, BREAKING OUR LAWS.

I LET A GUY ENTER THE STORE BEFORE ME. STATISTICALLY, ACCORDING TO THE MEDIA MAPS, HE SEEMS TO FALL INTO THE DEMOGRAPHICS THAT SUPPORTED LEAVE.

DAILY EXPRESS, OCT 31, 2013

BRITAIN IS FULL UP AND FED UP
Today join your Daily Express Crusade to stop new flood of Romanian and Bulgarian migrants

I GRAB SOME GHEESE AND BREAD AND A BOTTLE OF WINE. I LEAVE THE WINE BACK ON THE SHELF. DON'T WANT THE SHOP ASSISTANT TO THINK I DRINK A LOT. I DON'T DRINK A LOT. I RARELY DRINK. STOMACH ISSUES. BUT SHE DOESN'T KNOW THAT. SHE JUST SEES ME BUYING WINE.



I WONDER, SHOULD I LET THE OLD LADY GO IN FRONT OF ME ON THE QUEUE?

SHE ALSO FALLS INTO THE LEAVE DEMOGRAPHIC. DID SHE VOTE LEAVE BECAUSE SHE DIDN'T WANT PEOPLE LIKE ME AROUND?

DAILY MAIL, DEC 30, 2013

Sold out! Flights and buses full as Romanians and Bulgarians head for the UK

- Some one-way tickets are selling for up to £3,000 each
- Buses leaving Bulgarian capital of Sofia until January 9 are fully booked

WHAT ARE PEOPLE LIKE ME?
CAN I HIDE BEHIND MY
WHITENESS?

HERE'S THE SHOP ASSISTANT,
SMILING AT EVERYONE,
CIVIL AND WELL-MANNÉRED.

THAT WOULD BE
£5.25, LOVE. WOULD
YOU LIKE A BAG?

HOW ROMANIAN CRIMINALS TERRORISE OUR STREETS

DAILY EXPRESS, FEB 27, 2013



TV chef Nigella Lawson's sizzling new style
**Why Nigella is
looking so saucy**
SEE PAGE 11

SHOULD I RESPOND POLITELY?
OR SHOULD I EXPRESS MY ANGER
AND DISAPPOINTMENT? NO,
KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT, DON'T
RESPOND. JUST PAY.

OKAY, LOVE, ALRIGHT.
HAVE A LOVELY EVENING!

98% DEMAND BAN NEW MIGRANTS

Thousands support our **Crusade** to prevent
Romanians and Bulgarians flooding into UK

DAILY EXPRESS, NOV 1, 2013

SAY NO
TO NEW EU MIGRANTS
JOIN
OUR
CRUSADE
HERE



WHAT IF I PRONOUNCE 'THANK YOU'
THE WRONG WAY?

WHAT IF MY ACCENT COMES
OUT TOO STRONG?

WHAT IF...?

MY WORDS, MY TRAITORS.



2020

**Romanian fruit pickers flown to UK
amid crisis in farming sector**

Charter flights organised after appeal fails to recruit enough
British workers

- Coronavirus - latest updates
- See all our coronavirus coverage

THE GUARDIAN, APR 15, 2020

**Britain turns to Eastern
Europe, and charter flights, to
save its crops**

EURACTIV, APR 17, 2020

END.

A Suitcase Concretely:
Exploration of
Balkan Immigrants'
In-Between
Belonging Through
the Lens of Comics

Theoretical Thesis Component

Teo Georgiev

Supervisor: Arja Karhumaa

Advisor: Matti Hagelberg

Master of Arts Thesis

Visual Narrative

Visual Communication Design

School of Design, Arts and Architecture

Aalto University 2022

1. Introduction

1.1. Motivations

The following thesis originated as an interest in in-between spaces. The Balkan peninsula is one such area at the periphery of Europe constructed through a complex history and entangled cultural interactions. At the core of this study lies the assumption that the Balkan's innate in-betweenness can be analysed on a magnified scale if observed through the lens of migration. Migrants' constant re-negotiation and re-construction of the meaning of *home* and *abroad* establishes these grey areas of belonging as compelling themes for research.

As a medium and an artform, comics provide a flexible model for such explorations both in a practical and theoretical manner. Comics have steadily increased their impact in the last several decades despite once being considered a 'junk' artform (Chute 2008, p. 452) and either ignored by media researchers (Barker 1989, p. ix) or banned by regulatory organisations (Barker 1989, p. 14, Senate Committee on the Judiciary 1955). They have become fashionable again through the increasing popularity of the graphic novel. Unlike the serialised strips and the superhero comics, the graphic novels are usually unified stories in one or several volumes (Helsel 2018, no pagination). Their experimental nature and malleable structure present novel approaches for creators not only to entertain, but also to examine topics such as class, gender, sexuality, identity, belonging, and marginalisation.

I decided to use this research thesis as an opportunity to explore similar aspects of my own subjective experience. As a Balkanite, I frequently lack the language and references to convey my own life as immigrant. In a way, the *Balkan immigrant* is close to non-existent in popular culture. If featured, it heavily relies on tropes from the Cold War era or from the post-communist period ravaged by organised crime. Positive examples exist – such is the 2017 picture *God's Own Country* (Lee dir. 2017) with the Romanian farm worker Georghe as one of the two main characters. However, after watching the movie, I was left wishing I knew more about Georghe's backstory. Despite the gentle and vivid portrayal, there was the Orientalist position of him as the exotic foreigner, who helps the Brit Johnny confront his own sexuality. In contemporary literature, *The Road Home* by Rose Tremain (2007) also presents the Eastern European labour migrant experience. The book contains rich details of life in London but lacks the specificity of the main protagonist Lev's origin. His place of birth is an image aggregated from ideas about East European post-communist backwardness. The story has a feel-good resolution and hope, but for me lacks the depth and nuance of the life in a post-communist country. If I assume that neither example aimed at presenting detailed versions

of their immigrant character's cultural backgrounds, then that accentuates even more the lack of positive narratives involving Balkan migrants.

The situation in comics is not much different. The comic scene in most Balkan countries is developing with stories still predominantly tackling topics of history, fantasy, and action, but there is a noticeable absence of reflections on migration experiences and themes of belonging. If present, they often fall within the common for the region patriotic discourse aimed at establishing the exceptionality of the communities without leaving space for introspection and vulnerability.

The reason for that is not the insignificant size of diasporas from these states; in fact, all Balkan countries have substantial emigrant communities. There are sizeable Albanian, Kosovan, North Macedonian, and Romanian diasporas in Italy (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica 2021); in fact, the Albanian and Romanian communities are the two largest in the country (ibid.). In Germany, the communities from Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Romania, and Serbia all number hundreds of thousands (Central Register of Foreigners 2022). Romanian population has dropped from 22.4 million in 2000 to 19.5 million in 2018 and 75% of that decline is attributed to emigration (OECD 2019). Spain traditionally has been a desired destination for immigrants with Romanians there numbering over 1 million and Bulgarians – over 200,000 (Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones 2020, p. 4).

Furthermore, the recently elected Chilean president Gabriel Boric is of Croatian descent; indeed, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile 1,3% of the Chilean population can trace its roots back to Croatia (Croatian Government, n.d.). The father of the Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016) was a Bulgarian lawyer, who sought political refuge in 1929 (Minas 2019). These examples prove that Balkan migration is neither a recent phenomenon, nor a past occurrence; migration from the region has existed for a long time and has shaped both host- and home-countries.

The public discourse divisions on migration have been particularly noticeable in the recent years, exacerbated by the refugee waves from conflict areas. The 2016 Brexit referendum is one of the starkest examples of the weaponization of the migration question for the aims of political opportunists. The British left rightfully opposes Britain's colonial legacy of racism and slavery; however, their anti-imperialist stance failed to engage in discussing immigration from regions that were not previously part of the British Empire (Alexandrova 2021, no pagination). The public conversation was eventually occupied by narratives about armies of labour migrant from Romania and Bulgaria coming to steal jobs and wreak havoc. Simultaneously, less dramatic stories that amplified migrants' voices failed to attract significant attention. Sharing narratives from cultural in-between spaces challenges the dichotomy of the *us/them* identity and provides a model, that is more flexible and tolerant to changes in seemingly conflicting affiliations, as discussed by the sociologist Paul Jones and the communication, media, and social change researcher Michał Krzyżanowski (2011).

The news and social media discourse related to the 2015 refugee wave provided another angle to the migration discourse. Many of my Bulgarian compatriots showed aversion to the refugees; populist politicians actively embraced these antagonistic attitudes and similar inclinations were echoed all through the region. It was a form of dissonance considering these states produced a

substantial number of emigrants themselves and the communities were frequently subjected to humiliating practices and stereotypes in their respective host-countries. My assumption is that accessible and compelling stories, testimonies, and portrayals can help establish better visibility and understanding of our own migrant experiences. Thus, this can be a path towards seeing our native communities in relation to the wider world and not as isolated in-betweeners that need to constantly defend their own belonging from the dominant cultures of the day. By being more self-cognisant and expanding of our own experiential vocabulary, we can recognise similar conflicts and tropes within other communities, therefore growing into a more empathetic and inclusive society.

Of course, it would be naïve to expect a thesis of this level to achieve such goals. Yet, by bringing light to the absence of Balkan migration narratives, and subsequently contributing to an accumulation of materials, I hope this project will provide some use.

1.2. Goals and Scope

The thesis addresses only a certain angle of the migration experience: the negotiation of belonging and its occurrence within immigrant communities. It includes a practical and theoretical component that aim to answer a key research questions. At the core of the investigation is the following question: what are ways for depicting notions of belonging within immigrant communities through comics? As an extension of the question, the thesis is concerned with the specific portrayal of migrant communities from the Balkans in the West.

The practical component named *A Suitcase Concretely* comprises half of the investigation into this question. It includes four stories and two one-page strips in the form of a 52-page PDF book that features semi-autobiographical narratives. The collection aims at visualising facets of immigration and expressions of belonging in a narratological manner.

In the theoretical component I unpack the concept of belonging into three modes introduced by the educational theorist and practitioner Etienne Wenger, which are subsequently used for the analysis of three case studies and *A Suitcase Concretely*. The outline of central concepts and historical threads is followed by qualitative research involving three case studies of published and acclaimed comics. Their analysis employs Wenger's modes as a frame for expressing the concept of belonging in a more tangible manner. The featured graphic novels are *Fatherland* (2014) by Nina Bunjevac, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (2018) by Nora Krug, and *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan* (2014) by Mattias Elftorp. The three case studies aim to prove the validity of Wenger's modes of belonging in the context of comics.

The case studies are followed by a presentation of the research-based project *A Suitcase Concretely*. That includes a subchapter on the process and a plot outline of the stories. The subchapter on process, together with this introduction and the conclusion, are the only sections of the text containing a first-person perspective. This is so because, as an author and illustrator of the practical component, my personal experience and viewpoint are central for the deconstruction of the

motivations and the execution of the work. Apart from these three sections, the remainder of the text sticks to an impersonal academic style. After the plot overview, the text continues with an analysis of the practical component through an interpolation of the comics from *A Suitcase Concretely* with Etienne Wenger's three modes of belonging. Thus, by the end of the study, I aim to provide succinct examples of ways for comics to facilitate representations of belonging in the context of (Balkan) migration.

It would be prudent to state the conceptual role the Balkans play in the construction of the text. The historical, cultural, and geographical dimensions of the region are of significant interest to me, yet for the purpose of the study they provide a suggestive framework that introduces specificity and a narrower scope. Through the thesis, I do not aim to taxonomically define features of the Balkans that construct the unique experience of its migrant communities. For research of this scope, an approach of this sort will be reductive and generalist, and I aim at avoiding this by indeed concentrating on the concept of *belonging* instead of *identity*. The work does not claim to be a comprehensive definitive description of the Balkan migration experience, but has a more explorative angle.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Literature Review of Comics

This literature review provides a background that would inform the later analysis of comics. An outline of trends and milestones of migration comics positions the works from the case studies and the practical component within the contextualised space of the subgenre. An overview of the main processes in the Balkan comics scenes further informs the analysis by adding a historical and political layer to the artistic developments in the region.

2.1.1. Migration comics

Migration has existed as a narrative thread in comics for decades. Despite being less known, an early work on the migration comics genre is *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924* by Henry Yoshitaka Kiyama (1931/1999) [Image 1]. In the book, Kiyama explores the lives of four Japanese immigrants in California and their encounters with stereotypes and culture shocks. The collection is an early comics example of immigration dealing with body, language, collective, and individual memories (Nabizadeh 2019, p. 27). Not long after Kiyama's book, Superman was introduced and spearheaded the Golden Age of Comics in the USA (Schulzen & Gonchar 2018). The story of the iconic superhero's escape from his home planet Krypton can be read as a de facto refugee narrative. Not entirely Kryptonian, but more than a common American (Newgarden 2019), Superman frequently must re-negotiate his powers as an outsider with the limiting realities of his new home the Earth¹.

Other milestone comics on the genre include Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980) and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003) and *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return* (2004), each of them dealing with history observed through the memories of migrants displaced due to political turmoil, social unrest, and war. Despite its fantastical setting, almost wordless story, and temporal distance from *The Four Immigrants Manga*, Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006) resonates similarly to Kiyama's work (Nabizadeh 2019, p. 43) with its fascination with a migrant who finds his footing

¹ In fact, Superman's creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster were children of Jewish immigrants. Shuster's family came from Kiev (Ukraine) and Siegel's father was Lithuanian (Newgarden 2019).



Image 1. A strip from the *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924* by Henry Yoshitaka Kiyama (1931/1999). In it the character prefers to be Chinese than to help a woman from his country who is of a lower social class. Apart from the stereotypes encountered by the characters of the book, the collection also provides at the current societal attitudes within Japanese society.

in an unfamiliar environment. The book is reminiscent of the Ellis Island migration tales with its nostalgic sepia-colour illustrations that portray the main protagonist's everyday encounters [Image 2]. By choosing a white male as a main protagonist, Tan – an Australian artist of immigrant parents (Boatright 2010, p. 470) – makes an intertextual critique on the trope of the Western European immigrant that achieves upward mobility while starting from nothing (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 2001, p. 4).

Migration comics have thrived particularly in the last decade (Kauranen & Löytty 2020, p. 74); explorations of migration from conflict areas towards Europe, the USA, and Australia² are especially prominent (Rifkind 2018). Comics research still lacks a wider body of studies on the representation

² Projects such as *Comics and Migration: Belonging, Narration, Activism* (Sarjakuva ja siirtolaisuus: kuuluminen, kerronta, aktivismi) exist within the Finnish migration comics scene. The *Comics and Migration* project has seven active members: Warda Ahmed, Ralf Kauranen, Olli Löytty, Aura Nikkilä, Hannele Richert, Johanna Rojola, and Anna Vuorinne, it was led by the University of Turku and funded by Kone Foundation. *World Comics Finland* is another project that introduced comics through grassroots participation. Without focusing on the visual qualities of the illustrations, the project aimed to provide participants with a new language they could use to express their stories and emotions. *Positive Negative* is an international example which collects small stories of marginalized minority groups and refugees and commissions artists to depict them as comics.



Image 2. The image on the left is a photograph of immigrants seated on long benches in the Main Hall, U.S. Immigration Station - Ellis Island Immigration Station 1902-1913 (photo from New York Public Library's Collections). The image on the right is a page from Shaun Tan's graphic novel *The Arrival* (2006, no pagination), notably referencing Ellis Island and the migration wave to the USA of that period.

of migrants – including refugees – through illustration and graphic narrative (Blanchet 2019, p 331), as it is a new field. Consequently, its novelty provides opportunities for fresh theoretical perspectives and practical approaches towards a theme of an increasing significance in the social and political discourse.

Due to the specificities of the artform, migrants, refugee, and creators alike recognise in comics a platform for expression and amplification of their stories. One feature of comics is the key postulate about the dependency on serialised juxtaposition of images, separated by gutters. Through the process of closure (McCloud 1993, p. 64), the reader can project their own associations and meaning (Rifkind 2017) into the stories, thus making the reading experience notably more engaging. In contrast to photographic documentation, 'comics, with its proliferation of frames, suggests plenitude' (Chute 2016, p. 16). The accumulated documentation focuses the reader's attention to the relationship between the part and the whole, therefore transforming the involvement into potential constructs of new meaning-creation. Or as Chute puts it: '[f]or if comics is a form about presence, it is also stippled with erasure—in the interruption provided by the ambiguous spaces of the gutter, its spaces of pause' (2016, p. 17). One reason comics are a suitable platform for migration and refugee narratives is indeed the readership's agency of meaning-creation.

Another argument is the strength of the artform to convey oral histories, trauma, and unrepresentable memories. By anonymising the refugees, comics provides safety for sharing experiences without the fear of potential repercussions. Representation in comics does not rely heavily on the realistic depictions of identifiable elements, unlike video and photographic documentation. Thus,

refugees that are regularly silenced due to the precarity of their social and legal status can have their voices amplified. Examples include *24 päivää* [24 Days] (Nyyssölä & Vieruaho 2016), *Elias* (Ahtinen 2018) and *At Work Inside Our Detention Centres: A Guard's Story* (Wallman 2014).

Additionally, the comics format tends to humanise refugees and bring an empathetic element to their Kafkaesque interactions with institutions. The process of applying for residence permits, asylum status, or a myriad of other documents is usually isolated from its influence individual s' lives. Sharing these interactions through visual narratives entangles the personal and institutional through the multi-layered intertextuality of image, text, and layout. Prominent examples include *They Called Us Enemy* (Takei, Eisinger & Scott 2019), *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan* (Elftorp 2014), and several of the comics in the collection *Mitä sä täällä teet? Tarinoita maahantulosta* [What Are Ya Doing Here? Stories About Immigration] (Richter 2016).

Furthermore, due to their flexibility and accessibility, comics are a suitable artform for the depiction of abstract feelings such as individual migrants' re-negotiation of cultural and social identities. Nostalgia, homesickness, racism, and belonging have become familiar topics to comics. Examples include *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang (2006), *Anya's Ghost* by Vera Brosgol (2011), *The Best We Could Do* by Thi Bui (2017) and *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* by Nora Krug (2018).

2.1.2. Comics and the Balkans

There is little available systemised English-language research on the topic of East European comics and, therefore, Balkan comics (Kuhlman & Alaniz 2020, p. 8). Global histories of European comics discuss mostly *bandes dessinées* (ibid.) ignoring the national traditions and new waves of creators in countries east of Germany. The lack of English translations and the unavailability of the works are some of the main issues. Yet, a conversation about multiculturalism should also include the examination of comics created under the pressures of dictatorial censorship (Precup 2015, p. 96) – a prominent legacy of the recent Balkan history.

Most developed is the comics scene in the former Yugoslav states³ (Kuhlman & Alaniz 2020, p. 26, Precup 2020, p. 241). Between the mid-1930s and the country's invasion in World War II, its industry had published over 15,000 pages of comics content (Kuhlman & Alaniz 2020, p. 26). Comics publishing continued after the war but was scrutinised by the regime's censors because the medium was considered a projection of Western ideals. However, Yugoslavia turned towards the Western liberal democracies and opened itself for Western popular culture after Josip Broz Tito⁴ severed ties with the USSR leader Josef Stalin in 1948. The result was a second Golden Age of Yugoslav comics. In the 1990s, during Yugoslavia's dissolution, the mainstream scene withered, but the underground and counterculture comics scene flourished with artists such as the Serbian

³ The former Yugoslav states consist of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia.

⁴ Josip Broz, commonly referred to as Tito, was a Yugoslavian communist revolutionary and statesman. Serving as president of Yugoslavia from 1953 until his death in 1980.



Image 3. Aleksandar Zograf's *Regards from Serbia* (2007, no pagination) is one of the most best-known English-translated Serbian comics (Kuhlman & Alaniz 2020) in which the author describes his experience of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the bombing of Belgrade.



Image 4. Excerpt from *Tafë Kusuri* by Adin Oena published in the Kosovo newspaper *Rilindja* (1984).

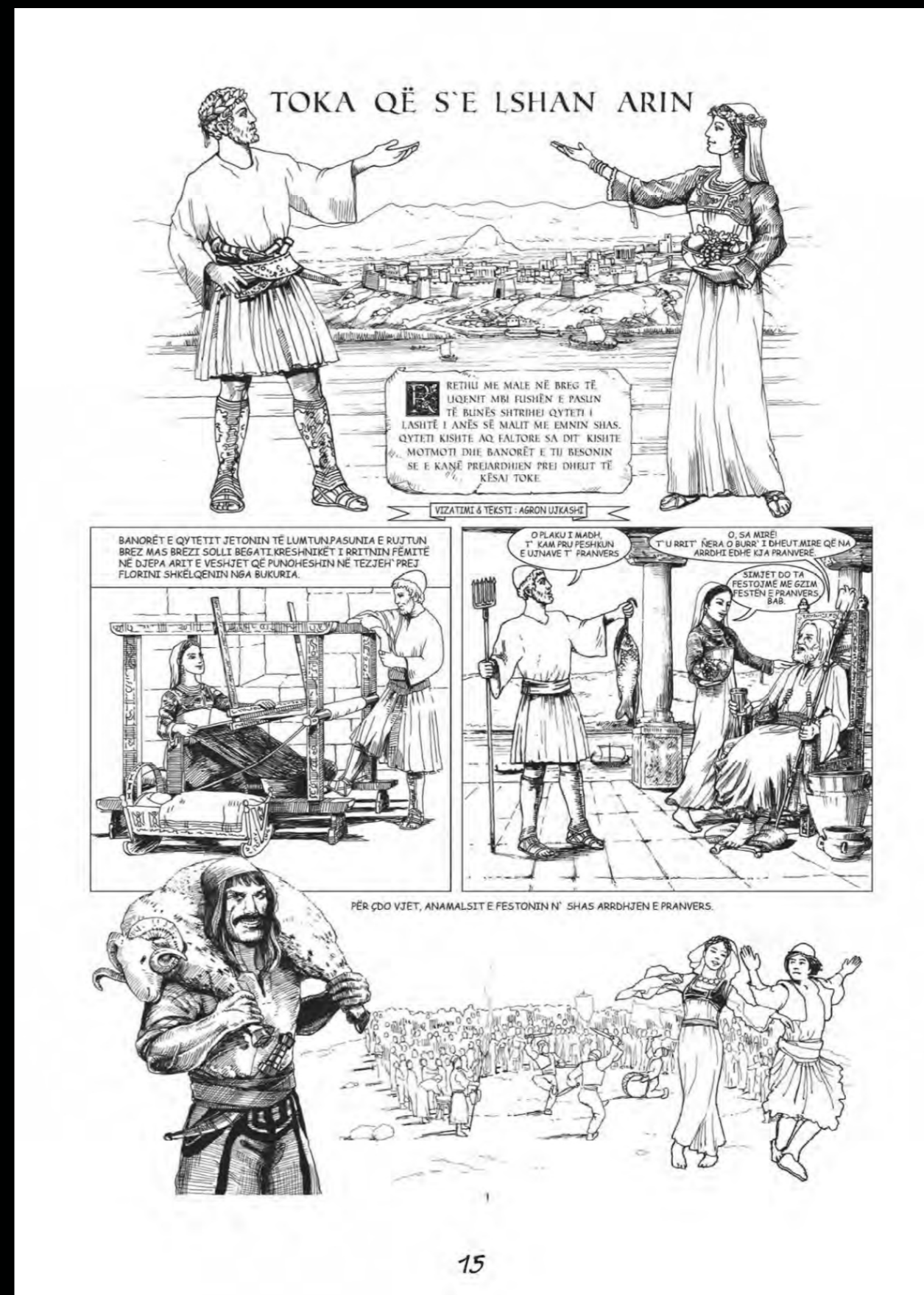


Image 5. Excerpt from the anthology *Novela Grafike Shqiptare* (2014, p. 15) created by Agron Ujkashi. The title *Toka që s'ë lshan arin* roughly translates as *Land that does not wash away gold*.

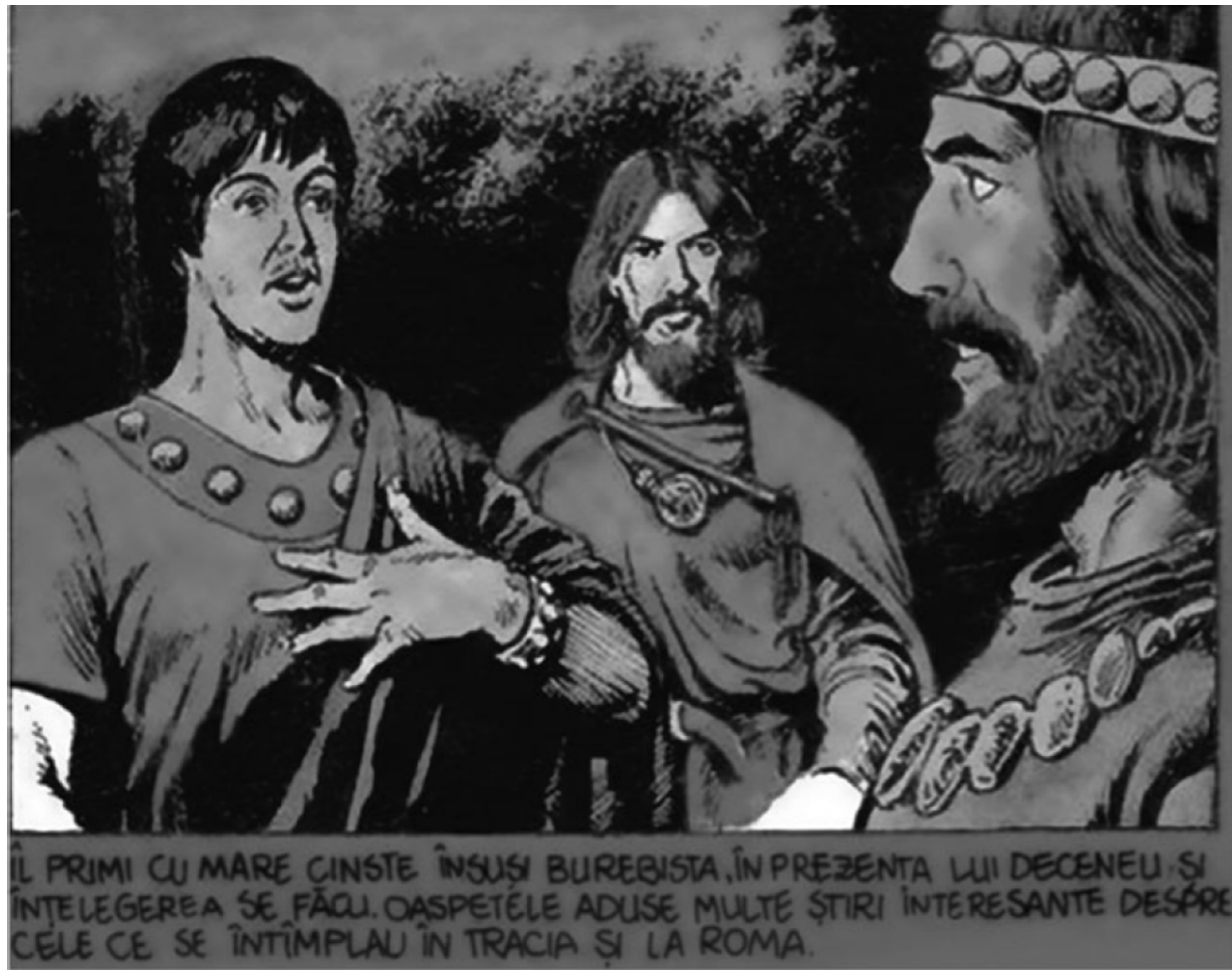


Image 6. As a form of silent protest, artist occasionally depicted historical characters with the features of Western pop stars. Two of the medieval Romanian characters have been depicted to resemble Paul McCartney and George Harrison from the Beatles. Panel is from *Burebista* (1980) by Valentin Tanase.

Aleksandar Zograf gaining prominence [Image 3]. The states of former Yugoslavia gave rise to artists that produced work for established Western publishers like Dark Horse, Marvel, DC, and Epic. Other examples include collectives such as Komikaze in Zagreb and Kosmoplovci in Belgrade, and festivals such as Crtani roman šou [Comic Strip Show] in Croatia, the Serbian festivals Novo Doba [New Era] and GRRR! (Kuhlman & Alaniz 2020, p. 27). In 2012, an anthology called *Balkan Comics: Women on the Fringe* was published featuring close to twenty contemporary female artists from the Balkans.

In contrast, most comics in Albanian such as *Tafë Kusuri*⁵ were produced not in Albania, but in Kosovo [Image 4]. The dictatorial communist regime of Enver Hoxha⁶ entirely banned comics

⁵ *Tafë Kusuri* is a serial character comic-strip started by Agim Qena, continued by his son Rron Qena and published in Rilindja newspaper.

⁶ Enver Hoxha was an Albanian communist politician and the First Secretary of the Party of Labour in Albania from 1941 until 1985.

under the pretext that the artform was junk literature (Bengu 2001). Thus, until recently, there was barely any comics scene in Albania. The first Albanian comics anthology *Novela Grafike Shqiptare* was published in 2014 under the oversight of Shpend Bengu with many of the featured comics relating to local history and national mythology [Image 5]. The scene is, however, developing; there are collaborations between Albanian and other Western Balkan artists in the project *CAN for Balkans*, or between Albanian and Italian artists in the initiative *Dalla prospettiva del mare*.

The Romanian scene, as Precup describes it, ‘appears to be “growing,” if one takes a more optimistic view of the current situation, or “stalling,” if one chooses to focus rather on the very small number of publications, translations, public events, and outlets that distribute comics’ (2020, p. 241). During the communist regime, Nicolae Ceaușescu was personally involved in directing the comics production: he insisted the artform was an educational tool that needed to promote nationalistic narratives to children and students. According to Ceaușescu, comics were not for entertainment, but for preparing children to manage work and life (Nita & Ciubotariu 2010, p. 258). Therefore, most published works were historical⁷ [Image 6] or travel comics in the style of socialist realism (Precup 2020, p. 240). The 1989 regime change was followed by economic crises. The issues of distributions and the precipitating views of comics as infantile literature contributed to a slower development of the scene (Precup 2020, p. 240), with only isolated standout examples.

Bulgaria’s history of comics is similar to its neighbours. The significant publishing before World War II consisted of translated Western comics but included also works of local artists like Boris Angelushev and Rayko Aleksiev [Image 7]. After the regime change in 1944, the government followed a strict Stalinist direction (similarly to Romania and Yugoslavia) according to which comics facilitated propaganda messages of the Communist party. However, from the mid 1950s⁸ the cultural atmosphere became freer to explore other narratives, and specialised publications like *Daga* [Rainbow] and *Chuden svyat* [Wonder World] started featuring sci-fi, adventure, humour, and travel stories. Like Romania, comics aimed at popularising narratives from Bulgarian history, and, again like Romania, Bulgaria went through years of economic turmoil and instability after the 1989 regime collapse. Many artists such as Alex Maleev and Viktor Kalvachev [Image 8] emigrated; others pivoted to concept art, animation, or cinema. Yet, as in other countries in the region, the contemporary scene is developing (Staykov 2013) with Petar Stanimirov, Boris Pramatarov, Diana Naneva, Konstantin Vitkov-Titis, and Daniel Atanasov-Satanasov [Image 9] being some of the leading practitioners.

The most famous comics about the Balkans were created, however, by Western artist. Joe Sacco’s *Safe Area Gorazde* (2000) and *The Fixer: Stories from Sarajevo* (2003) intersect documentary comics with journalism to bring the individual testimonies and perspectives of those affected by the Bosnian War [Image 10]. The authenticity of the details combined with the realistic inkwork of Sacco amplify the voices of people that were otherwise cut off from the rest of the world. Sacco’s comics fit into a group of several works related to former Yugoslavia’s dissolution, most prominently *Fax from*

⁷ Because to Ceaușescu’s efforts, comics became a vehicle for prominent Romanian nationalistic myths and tropes: the ancient Romanian history, the traditional masculine heroics, and the false yet still prevalent ideology that Romania never attacked first another country but always defended itself (Precup 2015).

⁸ After the death of Josef Stalin in 1953.



Image 7. ‘Stalin: “Don’t push around, comrades, there’s space for everyone.’ Because of the caricatures of Josef Stalin, Rayko Alexiev was arrested by the people’s militia after the 1944 coup d’état and severely beaten. He died from his wounds.



Image 8. Artwork variant set by Alex Maleev for Marvel’s Moon Knight #3 (2021) (a) and a cover variant by Viktor Kalvachev for the DC comics The Batman Who Laughs #5 (2019) (b)

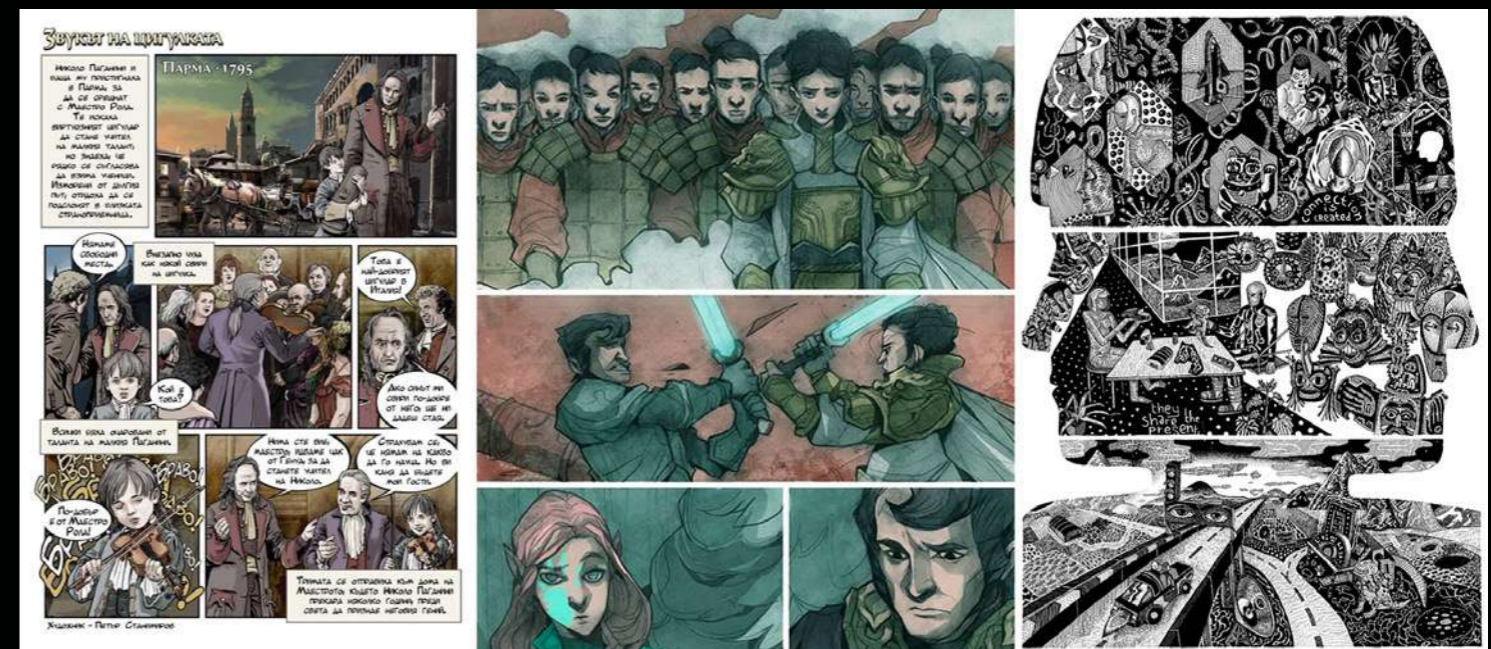


Image 9. The contemporary comics scene in Bulgaria is developing, but it already shows a diversity of styles and thematic explorations. From left to right: The Sound of the Violin by Petal Stanimirov (a), Diana Naneva (b), and Boris Pramatarov (c).

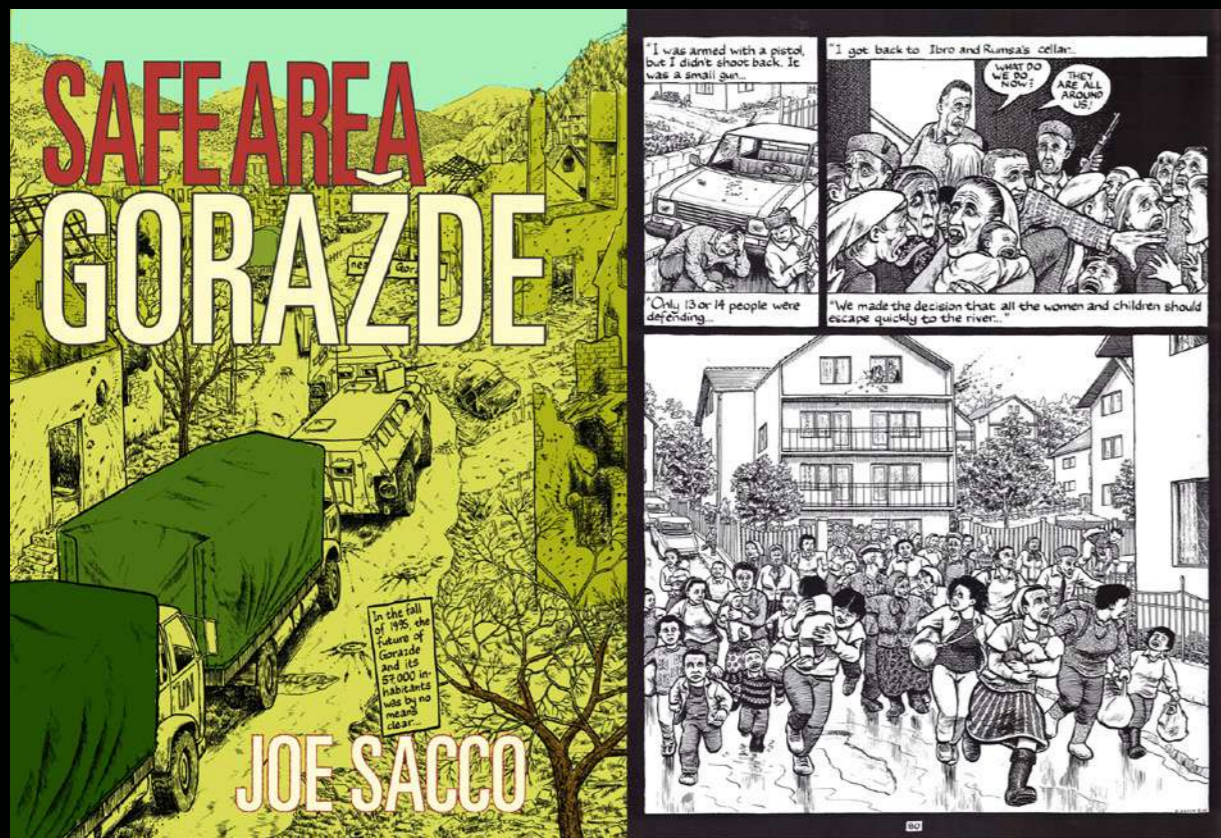


Image 10. Excerpts from Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* (2000).

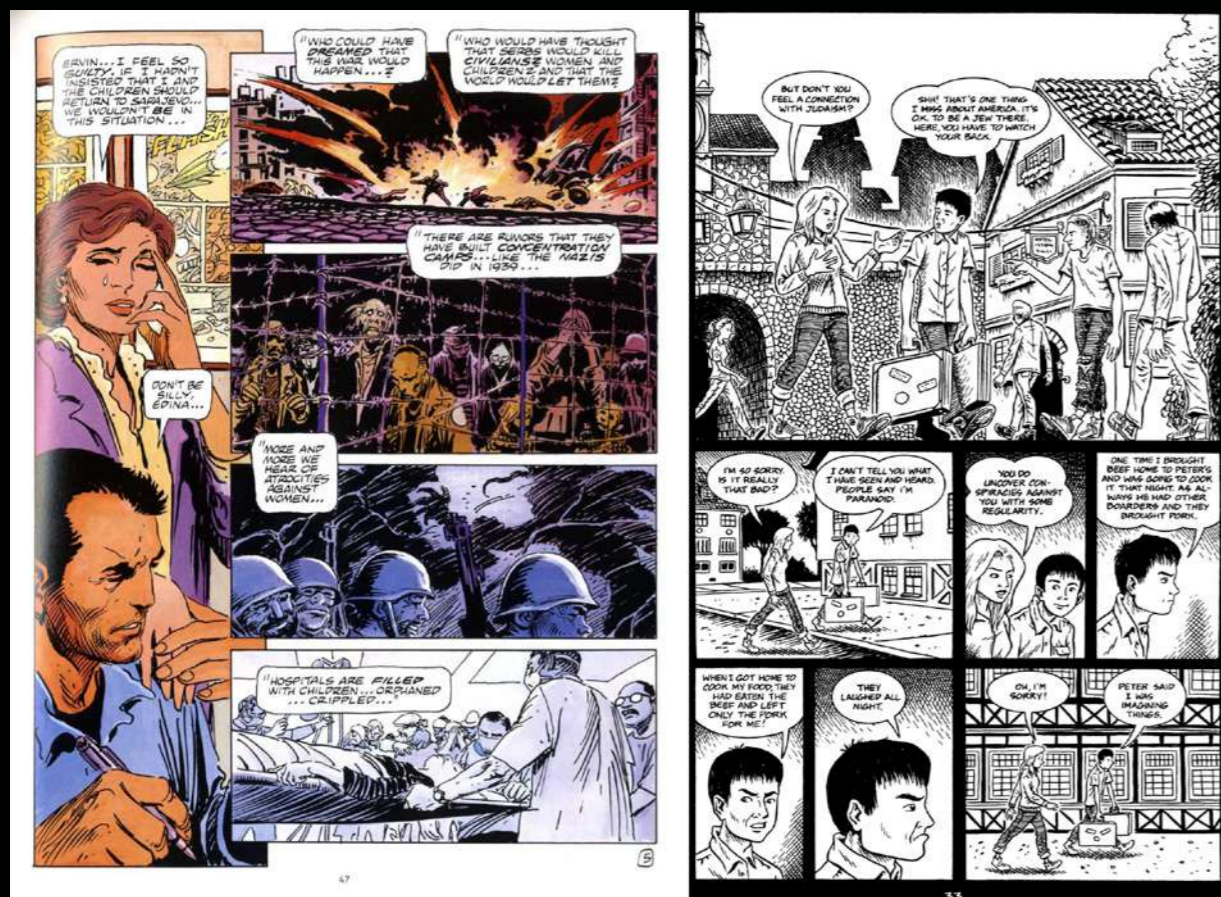


Image 11. Excerpts from the 1996 graphic novel *Fax from Sarajevo* by Joe Kubert (a) and the 2007 book *Macedonia* by Harvey Pekar and Heather Roberson (b).

Sarajevo (Kubert 1996), *Macedonia* (Pekar & Roberson 2007) [Image 11], and *Fatherland* (Bunjevac 2014). All these books describe specific historical events and the effects on regular people, but emigration and migrant lives have rarely been a topic within Balkan comics⁹.

Closer observations of the Eastern European and Balkan migrant experiences started being made after the 2016 Brexit referendum. An example is the book *Here to Stay: Eastern Europeans in Britain* (2021) by the Bulgarian writer and migration expert Yva Alexandrova. It portrays the integration of Eastern European labourers and migrants in Britain and shows their vital involvement in the social dynamics. Nevertheless, the above examples exclude the viewpoints of migrants from non-EU countries, e.g., Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia¹⁰. In the practical component of the thesis, this has been explored through the comics *Pickers & Choosers*.

In terms of the case studies included in this thesis, *Fatherland* by Nina Bunjevac (2014) was selected as a rare example of comics portrayal of Balkan migration. It provides a window into the construction of belonging while regarding the historical context of the region. Another selected case study is *Belonging* by Nora Krug (2018). Its depiction of belonging and homeland suggests interesting parallels into potential explorations of Balkan migrant comics. The final case study is of *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan* by Mattias Elftorp (2014). Even though it fits into the category of refugee comics, the inclusion of football [soccer] player Zlatan Ibrahimović into the story provides a glimpse into integration attitudes in Sweden. These three case studies are juxtaposed against the practical component of the thesis, which attempts to capture several aspects of the Balkan immigrant experience.

2.2. The Balkans: A Region In-Between

The following subchapter investigates the historical framework that has affected the Western perceptions of the Balkans, also known as Southeast Europe. Firstly, the text defines the borders of the Balkans for the purpose of this thesis. Secondly, it investigates the perception development, related to the Balkan history from the end of the 19th century to the 21st century including several definitive events. Lastly, the subchapter presents several examples of these perceptions from media and popular culture.

⁹ A close analogue could be *Wage Slaves* (Bogdanska 2017) and its exploration of labour through the experience of a Polish immigrant in Sweden. Featured in it is an Eastern-European experience, which does include the Balkan experience too; however, the author/protagonist's Polish background contextualises the story differently due to the specific historical development of Poland. As noted by Maria Todorova (1997), Poland forms its own Central European identity to separate itself from the Balkans and from the hegemony of Russia.

¹⁰ There are significant diaspora of Kosovans and Albanians in Italy and Switzerland; the Bosnians diaspora in Germany is also prominent. Their experiences in building diaspora communities and settling in new countries should be also researched as part of the cultural and labour exchange happening with the West.

2.2.1. Terminology and Historical Background

Similar to other heterogeneous areas situated at geographic crossroads, the Balkans consist of diverse cultures and ethnicities, which could be individually analysed along the vectors of language, gender, sexuality, religion, etc. To discuss the region, however, the study must first define its commonly disputed boundaries.

Andrew Wachtel states that the Balkan core region consists of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Northern Greece, Serbia, and Southern Romania. In the periphery, Wachtel places Southern Greece, Turkey, a big part of the Adriatic coast (Dalmatia and Croatia, Montenegro, and Albania), Northern Romania and Southern Hungary (Wachtel 2008, ch. Introduction: The Balkans as Borderland and Melting Pot). Due to a need for a more rigid scope, this study concentrates on several Balkan countries connected by two shared historical periods. Firstly, there is the common belonging to the Ottoman Empire (14th–20th century). This grouping follows the scope set by the historian Maria Todorova in her book *Imagining the Balkans*¹¹ and excludes Slovenia on account of its stronger historical ties to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Todorova 1997, p. 31, Zürcher 1993, p. 3). Secondly, there is the Communist period – and the subsequent post-communist restructuring. In this case, Greece and Turkey are excluded as thesis subjects, due to their positioning outside of the Soviet sphere of influence¹². Following these criteria, the core region that will be the focus of the thesis consists of Albania, Bulgaria, Romania¹³, and most of the former Yugoslavia¹⁴ (sans Slovenia).

It is prudent to note that by referring to *the West* the text considers the heterogeneity of the concept – from historical developments to political systems, to ethnicities, etc. The thesis examines the immigration to Western liberal democracies of developed countries such as the European states west of the Berlin wall, the USA, Canada, Australia, and others. Due to the smaller cultural exchanges and historical influences over each other, developed countries such as Japan and South Korea are excluded from the focus of this research. However, a notable contradiction to that grouping is Greece. Since recently, it has been classified as part of the Mediterranean area and not Southeast Europe. Furthermore, due to its distance from Soviet influence and its closer political ties with the Western liberal democracies, the post-World War II historical, political, and cultural development of Greece places it in a different category.

11 In her book, Todorova applies Edward Said's notion of Orientalism (1978) in the context of the Balkans.

12 Turkey is also excluded from the research due to it being an heir of the Ottoman empire (Zürcher 1993), which was a hegemony in the region that puts it in a different category in terms of cultural power dynamics.

13 Because of its linguistic roots, Romania places itself closer with the Latin countries. Its northern and northwestern regions have a strong cultural connection with the Habsburgs in comparison to Valachia's Ottoman influence.

14 The included countries are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Croatia is included because, due to being a border region, it has had close relationships with the Ottoman empire. Furthermore, the violent war between Croatia and Serbia in the '90s brings its experience close to the rest of the region than the bloodless emancipation of Slovenia.

The abovementioned Ottoman and Communist periods continue to define the perceptions towards the Balkans. The region was referred to as the European Ottoman Empire, Turkey-in-Europe, European Levant, or Oriental¹⁵ Peninsula until the 1878 Congress of Berlin (Todorova 1997, p. 27). During the same period, travel writers and politicians also dubbed it Hellenic, Roman, Byzantine, or Thracian peninsula (ibid.) – the West recognised Southeast Europe as the root of its philosophical, political, and democratic traditions, but the centuries of Ottoman presence had cast a shadow over its heritage. By the time the Balkan nations gained independence (19th–20th century), they had already occupied in the Western European's imagination a grey area situated between the constructed borders of the Occident and the Orient. The peninsula was not exactly part of the Christian West (which also clashed with the Russian Orthodoxy) but also did not belong to Asia. Furthermore, the newly formed states lacked the political experience to self-govern, and the nobility nurtured in most of Europe over centuries. This political vacuum provided an opportunity for the Great Powers to seek influence in the region – whether through Russian diplomacy, Austrian royalty, or through the continuing presence of the Ottomans. The opposing political goals of the Great Powers and the cultural peculiarities of the Balkans' positioned the area as the *others* in Europe (Todorova 1997, p. 3).

Later in the 20th century, the term *balkanization* came to mean the 'parcelization of large and viable political units' (Todorova 1997, p. 3). It refers to the 'reversal to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian' (ibid.) particularly in American academia. The term is still in use today¹⁶ and adds to the external condemnation of the region as an *other* in relation to the self-proclaimed civilized world, i.e., Western civilization. The turbulent events from the beginning of the 20th century also played a significant role in the Balkans' infamy. The Balkan wars of 1912–1913 were initially met with excitement from Western powers who saw the vilified Ottoman empire pushed out of the peninsula. The excitement quickly transformed into a gasp of shock as the allied Balkan states unexpectedly turned against each other. The 'Powder Keg of Europe' – dubbed so by Western powers and illustrated vividly by Western cartoonists (1912) [Image 12] – had exploded in a violent localised conflict. Not long after, other events in the Balkans became the reason for a worldwide conflict: the 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo by a member of a paramilitary movement, fighting for the liberation of Bosnia from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A single event committed by a Balkanite sparked World War I – a conflict of a magnitude unseen by Western society until that time. These events firmly placed the Balkan states in the position of Europe's troubled children. The hegemonic Western cultural discourse imposed this patronising role meanwhile neglecting the fact that many of the Balkan rulers were descendants of the same Western nobility. Therefore, they carried Western imperial ambitions of expansion and influence over a region with a different historical development and heritage¹⁷.

15 In this text the term Orient is used purely in the context of the overviewed history.

16 A recent example is a 2017 interview by the former US president Barack Obama with UK's Prince Harry, where he warned that social media could lead to the 'balkanization of society.' <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05s395q>

17 The particular focus is on tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria, who, according to Todorova (Todorova, 1997, p.5), plunged Bulgaria into the Second Balkan war with the Central European ambitions to enter victoriously in Constantinople. From the participating sides in the Balkan wars, Carol I of Romania was of the Germanic Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen house. Furthermore, Constantine I of Greece was the first Greek-born monarch of the

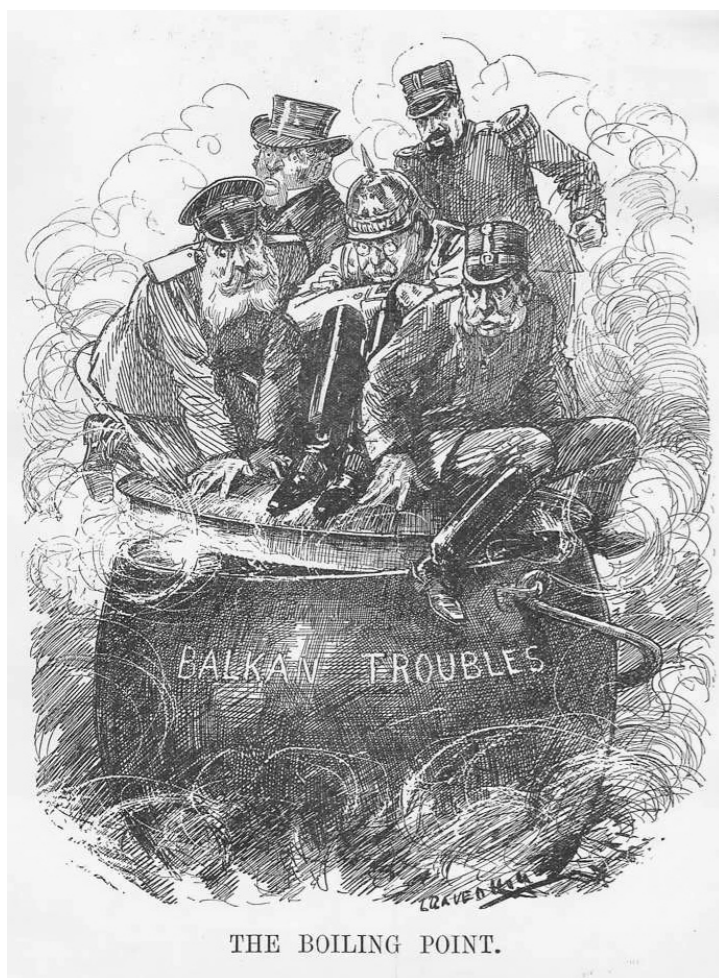


Image 12. *The boiling point* [the Powder keg of Europe], a cartoon published in *Punch* 2 October 1912.

After World War II, the Soviet sphere of influence opposed most Balkan countries – excluding Greece and Turkey – against the liberal democracies led by USA. This was the second period which deeply impacted the collective Western imagination of the Balkans. Together with all Eastern Europe, the region retained an almost teleological connection to the authoritarian and non-liberal¹⁸.

After the fall of the Berlin wall, the Balkans missed the opportunity for a liberal success story such as the one of the Visegrád Group¹⁹. The starkest example are the Yugoslavian wars of the 1990s and the related war crimes, which restored for Europe the painful memories of death and genocide that the continent considered outgrown. That wave of balkanization reintroduced the notion of

country – his father George I of Greece was of Danish descent and his mother Olga Constantinovna of Russia was a member of the Romanov dynasty.

¹⁸ In the second half of the 20th century and especially after the fall of the communist regimes in 1989–1991, there was a push for an emancipatory formation of central European identity. The initiative was spearheaded by the almost concurrent publications of the essays of Jenő Szűcs, Czesław Miłosz and Milan Kundera which attempted to differentiate Central Europe from the legacies and events in the rest of the former communist countries, i.e., the former Soviet Union and the Balkans. That initial success of the transition from communism towards the free market and liberalism in central Europe was not definite, as currently observed through the disproportionate focus on illiberal policies in Poland, Hungary, or Czechia, which reinforce the notion of the intrinsically authoritarian East.

¹⁹ The Visegrád Group includes Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia.

the region's backwardness and savagery, uprooted from the rest of the civilised world. Outside of former Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania were experiencing their own economic and political crises. Indeed, the chaos of the economic model change in the 1990s highlighted these nations' poverty, their weak institutions, and their struggle to build a strong civic society. The newly formed vacuum of authority was eventually filled by organised crime rings, corrupt politicians, and opportunistic oligarchs. All this further established the image of the Balkans as a problematic corner of Europe into the collective consciousness of the West.

2.2.2. The Balkans in Western Imagination

The persistent notoriety of the Balkans can be observed in its representation in works of popular culture and media. The image of the region has rarely if ever existed outside the frames set by its history and by the load carried by its name. In 1907, the British journalist Harry de Windt rhetorically asked 'Why "savage Europe"?' He quickly elaborated that it was named so '[b]ecause... the term accurately describes the wild and lawless countries between the Adriatic and Black Seas' (de Windt 1907, p. 15). In her 1925 book *The Secret of Chimneys* Agatha Christie described the imaginary homeland of her villain Boris Anchoukoff as 'one of the Balkan states... Principal rivers, unknown. Principal mountains, also unknown, but fairly numerous. Capital, Elarest. Population, chiefly brigands. Hobby, assassinating kings and having revolutions' (Christie 1925, pp. 104–105). In addition to these examples from early 1900s literature, the Cold War provided numerous adversaries to the liberal world in the face of communist dictators and spies. After 1990s and the regime changes, the trope of the Serbian bad guy emerged in Hollywood productions like *Behind Enemy Lines* (Moore dir. 2001) or *The Hunting Party* (Shepard dir. 2007). Albanian immigrant gangsters kidnapped American tourist girls in *Taken* (Morel dir. 2008) and then sought vengeance in *Taken 2* (Megaton dir. 2012). In 2013, a YouTube video became viral in Bulgaria: a scene from the rape and revenge horror film *I Spit on Your Grave 2* (Monroe dir. 2013) in which the leading female character wakes up in a car and asks the guy sitting next to her where she was. He eerily answers 'Don't you know? You're in Bulgaria' (Konstantin Dikov 2013), an answer that prompts the woman to start crying and sobbing uncontrollably²⁰. Televised was also the violent overthrow of the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in 1989, which through the news entered the homes of Westerners. The 'disintegration of communism' inside a peripheral country associated with the USSR was suddenly brought to the homes of millions of viewers in the USA (Borcila 2015, p. 1).

Providing a backstory to villains is routine, and part of it is the antagonist's country of origin. A problem, however, arises when a region and a culture are identified monolithically, characterised by intrinsic backwardness and savagery. These persistent depictions reside over time therefore becoming embedded in mass popular culture and institutional approaches. Upon repetition of the trope, it is not difficult to imagine the logical leap between Albanian immigrants kidnapping tourists (as exemplified in the *Taken* franchise and their box office success) and the British tabloid titles about Romanian immigrants stealing jobs. Even if these external notions do not directly affect citizens living in the Balkan countries – although a separate investigation can be carried

²⁰ The virality of the video was a bitter-sweet response from Bulgarians, as it coincided with that year's anti-government protests – the biggest since the collapse of communism.

into the feelings of internalised Orientalism and Balkanism – they become a reality with which Balkan migrants are confronted whenever they move to Western European countries. It is an externally imposed identity, which quickly shifts into an internalised reality that ends up affecting the Balkan experience abroad.

Detailed exploration of these perceptions and relationships also carries importance for the Balkan countries. The fledgling democracies of the region have been trying to build strong and coherent civil society, yet that has frequently been hindered as the communities find difficulty in agreeing on contemporary narratives of themselves. This lack of self-reflection and self-understanding is often weaponized by populist movements, which employ skewed historical narratives to fill up that void of self-fulfilment. Such movements can turn local communities against whoever is the other of the moment – refugees, LGBTQ communities, minorities, etc. A reflection on migration experiences is a path towards better understanding of the labour, cultural, and economic dynamics that shape the region. Furthermore, it provides its people with a comprehension of their relationships with other communities beyond the strict *us/them* dichotomy.

2.3. Belonging

The literature on belonging has been developed in the several decades in parallel to the shifting views on the concept of identity. To examine belonging in further detail, this research requires a model and framework that would help to establish the boundaries of the concept. It is elusive in nature, as it does not allude to quantifiable research and examination. There have been previous attempts at outlining belonging in its different expressions, mostly through exploring its relationships with localities and politics and along the personal/public axis (Lähdesmäki, Saresma, Hiltunen, Jäntti, Sääskilahti, Vallius & Ahvenjärvi 2016, p. 236). For example, according to Yuval-Davis (2006), belonging could be divided into a political and a psychological one. Antonsich, on the other hand, investigates belonging as ‘a personal, intimate feeling “at home” in a place (place-belonging-ness) and belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)’ (Antonsich 2010, p.645). Jones and Krzyżanowski (2011) talk about macro- and microstructures of belonging and its variations based on different contexts. In their 2005 paper *Politics of Identity, Modes of Belonging and Citizenship: An Overview of Conceptual and Theoretical Challenges*, the political scientist Hakan G Sıcakkan and the sociologist Yngve Lithman map modes of belonging to present a concrete structure for discussing attachments to places, structures, and communities. Their modes explore the concept in relation to citizenship and the legal system – a frame too rigid for the purposes of this thesis. In contrast, similar frameworks outlined by Etienne Wenger through communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) are more relevant for this research study, as their boundaries are looser and able to translate cross-discipline, but still provide a path for more definite explorations.

As noted by Lähdesmäki, Saresma, Hiltunen, Jäntti, Sääskilahti, Vallius and Ahvenjärvi (2016, p. 236), analysis particularly of spatial belonging relate to themes of migration, displacement, and mobility. Migration studies contextualise belonging as consisting of various place attachments that could result in a spatial belonging assigned to multiple localities and dimensions (Bennett

2014, Marcu 2014) and feelings of in-betweenness (Huot, Dodson & Rudman 2014). These strong relations between belonging and the sense of in-betweenness indicate that conceptually belonging is a suitable angle for the exploration of sentiments in migration communities.

2.3.1. Identity vs. Belonging

Identity is a concept that serves as a bridge between the dichotomy of individual and social, as noted by Wenger (1998). Without removing the opportunity for analysis of their different dimensions, it helps to understand and examine individual relationships with a particular social group.

To study the complex processes within migration communities, this thesis utilises the concept of *belonging* rather than that of *identity* due to the problematic dimensions of the latter. Identity has become an umbrella concept with its meaning being undervalued and blurred through overuse and overgeneralizations (Wenger 1998, Jones & Krzyżanowski 2011, p. 39). Probyn (1996) argues that positions and experiences surpass the scope of the identity, as it ‘has become a set of implacable statements that suppress, at times, questions about what identity really is’ (Probyn 1996, p. 9). Alternatively, the complex process of affiliation and re-negotiation of different identities will be examined through the model of belonging proposed by Jones and Krzyżanowski (2011).

Affiliations require the use of the *us/them* dichotomy if discussed as strict identities, thus frequently obstructing more than revealing. According to Jones’ and Krzyżanowski’s model of belonging, the creation and establishment of identities can be analysed within contradictory positions and affiliations. Identities, by their definition, establish strict borders (Jones & Krzyżanowski 2011, p. 40), so that by associating with an identity, one automatically signifies the group of the unaffiliated *others*. Identities are routinely discussed as concrete and independent entities established through history, tradition, and collective agreement. Yet, this Enlightenment approach to identities as taxonomically classified entities can be problematic. The nationalism and migration scholar Ulf Hedetoft elaborates that ‘attachment and identity ... are inconceivable and inexplicable without recourse to a certain measure of irrationality, emotionality, sentiment, and unselfish dedication’ (2002, p. 8). A strict discussion of identities ignores the nuances of life and the negotiations carried by individuals who aim to establish themselves as part of a collective. This establishes an issue in discussing identities of migrant communities, as they are not a coherent group, but a collective consisting of highly diverse demographics along lines of ethnicity, class, age, gender, language, religion, etc. It can be especially problematic to study the identities and affiliations of communities from in-between localities. Such place are the Balkans through their common perception as not entirely European, but also not quite Asian.²¹

Belonging, on the other hand, considers the transient nature of identities and their temporal shifts. By discussing belonging, this text is not aiming to negate the notion of identity, but to ‘conceptually unpack’ it, as per Jones and Krzyżanowski (2011, p. 40), into a more borderless concept. That way, belonging can be observed not as a condition but as a process – attachments are continuously ‘(re)

²¹ Perceptions of the Balkans are analysed in-depth in the “2.3. The Balkans: A Region In-Between”

constructed and (re)interpreted' (Jones & Krzyżanowski 2011, p. 43) by the participants. As Jones and Krzyżanowski summarise:

'[B]elonging can be considered a process whereby an individual in some way feels some sense of association with a group, and as such represents a way to explain the relationship between a [personalised] identity and a collective one. In a purely conceptual way belonging is about the relationship between personal identity and a collective identity – there is something about one's personal belonging that is comparable to one's perception of the aims, constitution or values of a given collective.' (2011, p. 44)

Naturally, this 'something' is an untenably broad term that does not aid the exploration of specificities of belonging within migrant communities from the Balkans. A more structured approach would be better suited in this case. Such is provided by the modes of belonging introduced by Etienne Wenger (1998).

2.3.2. Modes of Belonging

Etienne Wenger's three distinctive modes of belonging – *engagement*, *imagination*, and *alignment* – will be applied to explore belonging with better precision. Wenger describes the modes as it follows:

- **Engagement** – 'active involvement in mutual processes of negotiation of meaning' (Wenger 1998, p. 173). Engagement includes shared histories of learning, relationships, practices, and interactions.
- **Imagination** – 'creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our own experience' (ibid.). Imagination features images of possibilities, images of the world, images of the past and the future, and images of ourselves.
- **Alignment** – 'coordinating our energy and activities in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises' (Wenger 1998, p. 174). Coordinated enterprises, discourse, complexity, style, and compliance are defining features of the alignment mode of belonging [Image 13].

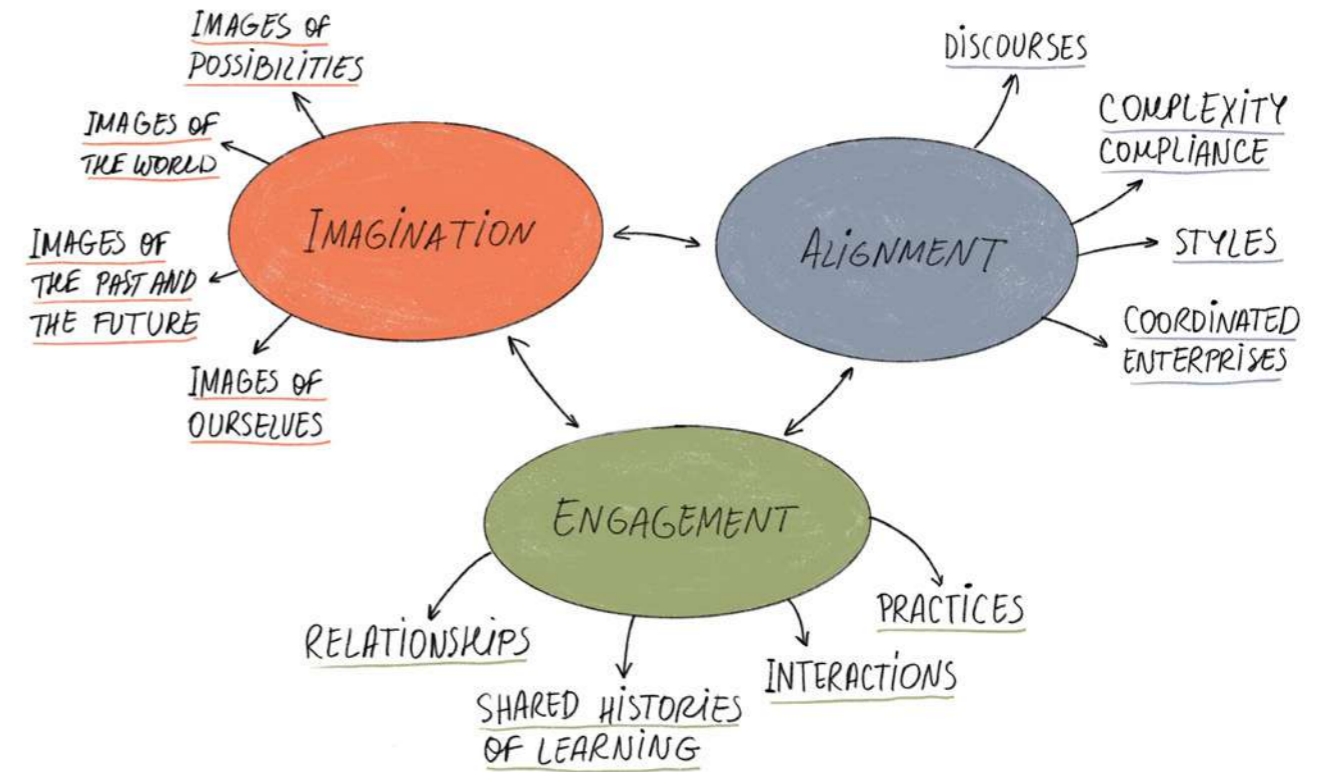


Image 13. The engagement, imagination, and alignment modes of belonging, proposed by Etienne Wenger. Graphic has been recreated from Wenger's book *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (1998).

Engagement

Wenger outlines engagement as a process that involves three axes – ongoing negotiation of meaning, trajectories formation, and the unfolding of histories of practice (Wenger 1998, p. 174). At the intersection of these three axes, engagement as a mode of belonging takes place. For the purpose and scope of the thesis, the text will not go into detailed definitions of those three aspects of engagement. In summary, meaning-negotiation refers to the interaction between subjective experiences and their social interpretation, and, as Wenger notes, is 'a very complex interweaving of participative experience and reificative projections' (1998, p. 151). Trajectories formation is the continuous creation of connections between participants or actors within communities of practice through the engagement in mutual activities or experiences (Wenger 1998, pp. 153–155). Histories of practice concerns the inherited and/or generational continuation of certain practices and activities passed down within communities of practice (Wenger, 1998, p. 158).

Meaning-negotiation and participation do not entail equal power distribution between all engaged sides but frequently involve a strong power imbalance. However, the process of engagement in a participatory interaction means that each side recognises an aspect from itself in the other sides and is therefore willing to engage. In the context of migration, those could be everyday

transactional activities within the social structure, or personal activities involving colleagues, neighbours, dating, etc. One example is interacting with the cashier in a store which signifies the customer's willingness to engage with the local market and the cashier's willing to acknowledge the customer.

Participation is a more direct way of engaging, while engagement itself does not entail the social aspect of participation (Wenger 1998, p. 57). For example, a student doing their homework might not be participating in the activity directly with their teacher and classmates. Simultaneously, the student is engaged with the educational process, which makes them belong in the community of students.

Engagement alone does not define a specific practice community (Wenger 1998, p. 175). If a person is riding on the bus, the action itself and their engagement in it do not make the person member of a 'bus passenger community of practice.' However, the process of paying for a ticket, communicating with the bus driver, and using public transport engages the person within the larger belonging to the community of citizens of a particular city. One way to investigate this dimension of belonging is to explore the everyday activities and practices of migrants. Billig's concept of *banal nationalism* (1995), exemplifies affiliations with national identities, which are being (re)negotiated through the day-to-day individual activities instead of extreme and dramatic proclamations such as chauvinism, separatism, and militarism. The 'waving' of symbolic 'flags' (Billig 1995, pp. 6–7) signifies the association, disassociation, and in-between gradients of national attachments within migrant communities.

At the same time, engagement is bound through its locality and temporality. A practitioner must be physically present to engage in an activity, and that activity is furthermore bound in the time-frame of its occurrence. These boundaries can be perceived as strengths of engagement instead of constraints. Through the mutual engagement of the participants, an enterprise is defined by the participants themselves. That is through the engagement in an activity, the participants both contribute to it, shape the relationships with it and extend it. As Wenger notes 'engagement is an interesting dimension of power: it affords the power to negotiate our enterprises and thus to shape the context in which we can construct and experience an identity of competence' (1998, p. 175).

However, the boundaries of engagement can indeed be also limitations. Engagement in one activity can exclude a participant from engaging in other activities that form their experience due to the requirement for a physical participation in a specific time and place. Engagement can become too narrow and confined and therefore exclude additional views or experiences that can extend the participants' competences.

Imagination

Despite the name for the term, imagination does not refer to delusions or a rejection of reality. Imagination as a mode of belonging is a fundamental way in our perception of the world and our connection to it. Imagination helps us push our actions from the purely behaviouristic mechanics

of engagement towards potential creative outcomes. For example, we might engage in the electoral enterprise through the action of voting. Just an engagement might mean putting a bulletin into the electoral box. However, combined with imagination mode, the action could be perceived as expressing a position about the potential future of the community.

Imagination also represents a different level of belonging to a certain community of practice. Belonging could be expressed through the imaginative constructions of fantasies without these fantasies being escapist. On the contrary, imagination helps us see ourselves and our world in images of potential futures – it facilitates the creation of ideas, ambitions, and motivations. In contrast to imagination, engagement tends to work on an individual level without establishing a better understanding between the participants. Engagement does not help the participants understand 'the world, each other's experiences, or their shared enterprise more accurately' (Wenger 1998, p. 177). Imagination, on the other hand, brings actions within engagement under a shared vision.

Imagination, therefore, is frequently used for political purposes and nation-building. The common ideas about the future of a nation – or the common desire to return to an ideal nostalgic past – have played a significant role in gluing together ethnic communities under national banners. Imagination entails not only an individual act but also involves the extension of the individuals into visions of common societal narratives. Through it, individuals can trace connections between common past and potential futures; groups can agree on collective visions, ideas, and ambitions.

An issue with the imagination mode of belonging is that it can heavily rely on stereotypes. Specifically, an action from the past can define a community and thus determine its future. An example is the one of the conflicts within Nora Krug's graphic memoir *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (2018), in which she reflects on her German identity in relation to stereotypes and internalised guilt deriving from the World War II atrocities.

Imagination can also easily create separation lines and define the communities that are permitted to a certain belonging and others that are not. Communities might exercise overly rigid dynamics of belonging dictated by an excessive inflexibility with the re-negotiation of the shared histories.

Alignment

According to Wenger, alignment is a mode of belonging that does not require a mutual engagement (1998, p. 178). Through alignment, spatiality and temporarily are extended into larger enterprises that coordinate practices, actions, and energies. Alignment is the mode of belonging that elevates individual action into a contribution towards something bigger. It refers to the collective understanding and agreement about the codes of the community, not evident in the engagement and imagination modes of belonging. If an individual engages with a community of practice, they might still not align with the broader enterprise. The same individual might also relate to the imagination of the community, but that might not lead to any collective action. As Wenger summarises, imagination and engagement do not result in coordination of action (Wenger 1998, p. 179).

Expressions of alignment include government institutions, fashion trends, religious movements, standards, regulations, etc. Alignment, nor defined by spatial and temporal limitations, connects a community of practice on a larger scale than the direct engagement. It is also a more proactive mode than the imagination, which does not require a specific physical expression. Alignment increases the impact of a community because of the coordination established across localities, viewpoints, and competences.

However, an intrinsic connection exists between alignment and power. That connection presupposes the abuse of power from enterprises of hegemonic dominance, therefore potentially negate the individual's agency. The possibility for participants to re-negotiate individual involvement with a community of practice is therefore lost. The power dynamics within the frame of the alignment mode are intriguing aspects that ought to be considered when affiliations are analysed from the structural or institutional angles.

3. Case Studies

The following analysis chapter aims to summarise the information gathered from the case studies on *Fatherland* (2014) by Nina Bunjevac, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (2018) by Nora Krug, and *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan* (2014) by Mattias Elftorp. The findings contain several expressions of Etienne Wenger's modes of belonging (engagement, imagination, and alignment).

3.1. *Fatherland* (2014) by Nina Bunjevac

This first case study analyses the 2014 graphic novel *Fatherland* by Serbian Canadian artist Nina Bunjevac. The graphic memoir is thematically split into two parts – *Plan B* and *Exile*. The first part contains the memories of Nina Bunjevac and her mother Sally of leaving Canada and settling back in Yugoslavia. The second part deals with the family's past and the wider historical context behind the life of Nina's father Peter. A disagreement amongst the Yugoslav immigrant community on a shared vision for the future for Yugoslavia is a core plot driver in *Fatherland*. Following Wenger's framework, this tension expresses the different interpretations of the imagination mode within a single community of practice. Bunjevac parallels the official historical account and the formal reports of her father's death with personal lived experiences and memories (James 2015, p. 527) in order to explore these frictions and their effect on individuals. For that purpose – for stronger authenticity and narrative richness – the graphic memoir juxtaposes artifacts of historical archives against the testimonies of Bunjevac and her family, aiming to visualise an alternative narrative of her father's story through an impactful visual representation. These testimonies challenge the official national records expressed through the presupposed exceptionalism of hegemonic cultural memory, and, therefore, re-examine hybrid identities of the characters.

From the beginning of the book the reader learns that Peter is entangled with an anti-communist terrorist cell, which functions in Canada and the USA. Exiled from Yugoslavia in the 1950s, Peter Bunjevac dies in an explosion in 1977 while he and his collaborators are preparing the bombing of the Yugoslavian consulate in Toronto. The incident was widely covered in the news and investigated by international and local police; it was also a family secret and source of shame until Nina and her mother share their memories of Peter in 2012.

The graphic memoir starts with an illustrated map of Toronto and the surrounding area, directly providing a localisation for the narrative. Only a few pages in, the reader sees Nina Bunjevac in 2012 preparing coffee for her now older mother. The panel focuses on the coffee being prepared with a *cezve* – a small pot with a long handle used for making Turkish coffee [Image 14]. The *cezve* method of brewing coffee is still common around countries such as the states of former Yugoslavia,



Image 14. The character of Nina Bunjevac preparing coffee for her mother with a cezve (Bunjevac 2014, no pagination).



Image 15. As noted in the novel, Sally's 'choosing to forget this little house' (2014, no pagination) is a method of dealing with the difficult memories that it recalls. More on forgetting as a way of suppressing trauma is explored in the section on *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan* (2014) by Mattias Elftorp.

whose territories are strongly influenced by the Ottoman legacy (Wachtel 2004, ch. Introduction: *The Balkans as Borderland and Melting Pot*). Through this scene the author already foreshadows a narrative thread connecting Canada with Yugoslavia.

The cezve pot is a residual cultural artefact of Ottoman period, which Balkan migrants commonly bring with them to their host-countries. Such is the case with the North Macedonian migrants in Italy, who drink mostly Turkish or Macedonian coffee, but 'not Italian' (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2015, p. 134). The café culture provides a common setting for people to informally discuss and reflect upon their everyday lives with the action of coffee drinking tying them together into a common activity. As per Wenger, coffee drinking therefore becomes an expression of the engagement mode of belonging. However, it still signifies a belonging to the migrants' own native community of practice, not to the community of the host-country.

The narrative of *Fatherland* continues with Sally and Nina exchanging memories of Peter and of their departure from Toronto. Sally leaves with her two daughters for Yugoslavia (Nina still being a toddler) under the pretext that she is visiting her parents for a few weeks. However, she never returns to Peter, who keeps their youngest son Petey with him, as he does not want the boy to be exposed to communist influences. Due to her young age at the time of the move to Yugoslavia, Nina barely has any memories of her father and most of her knowledge about him has been constructed

second-hand through retellings by other family members. This engagement with oral histories is a form of memory mnemonics that establish common histories, ergo, visions of the future. In this sequence of Sally and Nina's memory retelling, the reader can observe the engagement and imagination modes at play – over a common ritualised action, the protagonists re-negotiate images of their shared past. This is portrayed even more directly through the sequence of Nina helping Sally recognise their old Toronto house [Image 15].

Told through series of flashback, the reader follows Sally's growing anxiety provoked by the threat of violence that Peter's affiliation with the terrorist cell imposes on the family's life. She therefore seeks to regain a sense of safety through moving with her daughters to Yugoslavia (Peter demands that their son remain with him). It is an ironic sequence highlighted by the indicated locations on the maps – issues of Yugoslavian politics plague the family during their life in Canada, so the family returns to Yugoslavia to escape the danger. This is a theme throughout the book – Yugoslavian national history has a strong influence over the characters' lives. As noted by Dragana Obradović, *Fatherland* is an exploration of the way 'individual agency is conditioned by historical circumstances' (2020, p. 47).

MEANWHILE, BACK IN THE KITCHEN...



Image 16. The kitchen table as a safe space where close relatives could share their opinions, impressions and (government) critiques (Bunjevac 2014, no pagination).

After escaping from Peter to Yugoslavia, Sally and her daughters move in with Sally's parents and start slowly settling into a life under the Titoism.²² A scene from the comic book of the time when Sally lived with her parents in Yugoslavia depicts a conversation around the kitchen table. This is particularly interesting with the intertextual representation of spaces of engagement [Image 16]. Similar to the Stasi in the German Democratic Republic and the KGB in the USSR, the Balkan communist countries operated secret police organisations that worked closely with civilian collaborators²³. That led to a wide mistrust among the population and avoidance of topics they could be discussed – anything political, especially critical of the party, could mean repercussions (Markov 1990). The kitchen then became a haven for sharing anxieties, frustrations, and criticisms amongst close family members. It was also a safe space for Sally's brother to call Peter 'a good guy' (Bunjevac 2014, no pagination) without severe repercussions from the government (as Peter was a staunch royalist supporter). However, the kitchen table is not isolated from the shadow of history: Sally's mother frequently retells stories from her partisan days and her fights from World War II against the Nazi occupiers. In three out of the four panels on the page, Sally is composed centrally, yet she faces the reader backwards. Framed by her brother and mother on both sides, Sally seems stuck between the desire to return to her husband in Canada and the safe perceived stability of life in Yugoslavia. Per Obradović (2020), Sally is incapable of her own agency while paralyzed between competing historical narratives and, therefore, amidst two conflicting visions of shared futures, or interpretations of the imagination mode.

In *Fatherland*, Sally's recollections of her mother – a staunch supporter of Tito's Communist regime – and her husband's royalist nationalistic activities are an aphorism of the tensions and divisions among the Yugoslav community along shared visions of the future. Sally (and by extension her daughter Nina) is stuck in an in-betweenness of ideas. The reader observes Sally negotiating her own affiliations to either of those worlds. At the same time, she belongs to neither, ergo rendering her individual decisions more reactive and removing her sense of agency. That is exacerbated by the feminist lens through which Nina Bunjevac retells the story, putting her grandmother and her mother in the centre of it and showing their agency in navigating these social conditions and power dynamics.

In the 2012 timeline when Sally is retelling her story, escaping her husband only to find herself pressured by her mother was like 'leaving one prison only to find you're living in another one' (Bunjevac 2014, no pagination). The dim light in this confession scene includes several panels depict Sally's coffee mug from an angle that shows it being empty, yet she still clings tightly to it. These visuals underpin the feeling that she was left without a right path of action – empty of options, her agency was negated through social and gendered power, leaving her to react to the historical circumstances [Image 17].

In *Exile* – the second part of *Fatherland* – shifts the focus from the strictly personally experienced story of Nina's childhood to the historical context of the family's past. From a wider historical

²² Titoism is the political philosophy associated with the Yugoslavian politician Josip Broz Tito and characterised by worker's self-management and nonalignment. It was established after Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform in 1948 (Repe 1992).

²³ At the time of the story, the secret police organisation in Yugoslavia was the State Security Administration (UBDA) that functioned from 1946 until 1991.



Image 17. The testimony of the mother testifying for feeling as if she had lived in-between two expressions of confinement. Her hopelessness is accentuated through the repetitive showing of the empty mug clenched between her two hands (Bunjevac 2014, no pagination).

point, the narrative conflict is rooted in the hostility between factions within an outwardly coherent immigrant community, and the effect on the everyday lives of the politically unaffiliated migrants. The different factions are the pro-regime communists and the royalists (Bunjevac 2014, no pagination) [Image 18]. The royalists, or Serbian nationalists, support the idea of establishing a Serbian ethnic dominance in Yugoslavia which otherwise facilitated a myriad of ethnicities (Albanians, Bosnians, Croats, Macedonians, Serbs, etc.)²⁴. The inability of the communists and royalists to establish shared visions of the political future of their home finds its roots in the history of former Yugoslavia. It was the last truly Balkan country during the time of Tito (Wachtel 2008, ch. 5), as it included a multitude of ethnicities within a single state. However, the process of the country's balkanisation – the dissolution into small entities – had already started under the surface with tension brewing between different groups that saw common future Yugoslavs and those that imagined prospective independent countries forged along lines of ethnic homogeneity²⁵.

24 Serbian nationalism raises in popularity after Tito's death in 1980, culminating with the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav wars.

25 There were also deeper divisions, such the extermination of Serbs by the Croat fascist organisation (the Ustashe) during the World War II Nazi occupation (Yeomans 2012, p. 17), or the killing of Bosnian Muslims by the

1968 MY BROTHER'S ARRIVAL BRINGS HOPE AFTER THREE FAILED PREGNANCIES. THE COUPLE IS ON TOP OF THE WORLD.

THEY PURCHASE A SMALL WHITE HOUSE ON BROADWAY STREET IN WELLAND...



AND BEGIN ATTENDING SUNDAY SERVICES AT THE SERBIAN CHURCH IN NIAGARA FALLS.

THE SERBIAN POPULATION IN THE NIAGARA REGION IS RATHER LARGE, AND IS GENERALLY DIVIDED INTO TWO GROUPS: ROYALISTS AND COMMUNISTS.

IN HOMES OF ROYALISTS ONE MAY EXPECT TO FIND PORTRAITS OF EITHER KING PETER, THE CHETNIK LEADER DRAZA MIHAILOVIC OR BOTH. THOSE STILL LOYAL TO THE PARTY CAUSE WOULD PROUDLY DISPLAY THE PORTRAIT OF TITO.

MY FATHER JOINS THE FIRST GROUP.

Image 18. A page explaining the divisions within the Yugoslav immigrant community. The image of the church shows another expression of the modes of belonging through the religious practices of the tsarists.

This historical division informs Bunjevac's further investigation into the family history of Peter and its ties to immigration. Peter was born to Serbian parents Stana and Djuro in a small Croatian village (part of former Yugoslavia at the time). Djuro himself was born in Gary, Indiana to parents who had immigrated to the USA at the turn of the century, so that Djuro's father could work in a factory. The family returned to Yugoslavia due to young Djuro's tuberculosis diagnosis. There, Djuro, who in his later age had become the 'village drunkard' (Bunjevac 2014, no pagination), impregnated and married Stana – the mother of Peter.

Explained in the comic through the dissonance between Djuro's previous life in Indiana and the one in the Croatian village, his story – and alcoholism – are pieces of the wider historical picture of early 20th century Southeast Europe. After World War I, people that had emigrated from the South-Slavic Habsburg territories returned to their previous homes, now part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. However, many of them preferred to move to the bigger cities instead of the villages due to their exposure to new habits and customs abroad.

'Life in America and experience away from home had broadened their world outlook. So, instead of making their homes in the villages, most returnees established themselves in neighbouring urban centres such as Bileća and Trebinje, where society seemed closer to the American style of life. They opened grocery stores, general stores, coffee shops, or bars. Life in America had left a lasting influence on the returnees, and they could easily be recognised. They retained certain Americanisms in their diet, dress, and work. Their hats, watches, and gold teeth set them apart' (Vucinich 2007, pp. 5-6).

Bogičevci, the village where Djuro's family returned, was indeed one of those territories. Due to the child's medical condition and the need for 'fresh air' (Bunjevac 2014, no pagination), the family decided to remain in the village instead of moving to a city. Or, as Nina Bunjevac writes:

'I often wonder how Djuro felt at this point, having been raised in an American city and then, all of a sudden finding himself knee-deep in the old-world mud homesick and isolated...' (Bunjevac 2014, no pagination)

Stana's family's story is similar and provides a glimpse into separate reality of Yugoslav families of the time (the 1920s–1930s), when the men were often absent working abroad and sending back money. In a page from *Fatherland* dedicated to the topic, the reader observes the impact of this

Serbian nationalist Chetniks (Hoare 2013, p. 105).

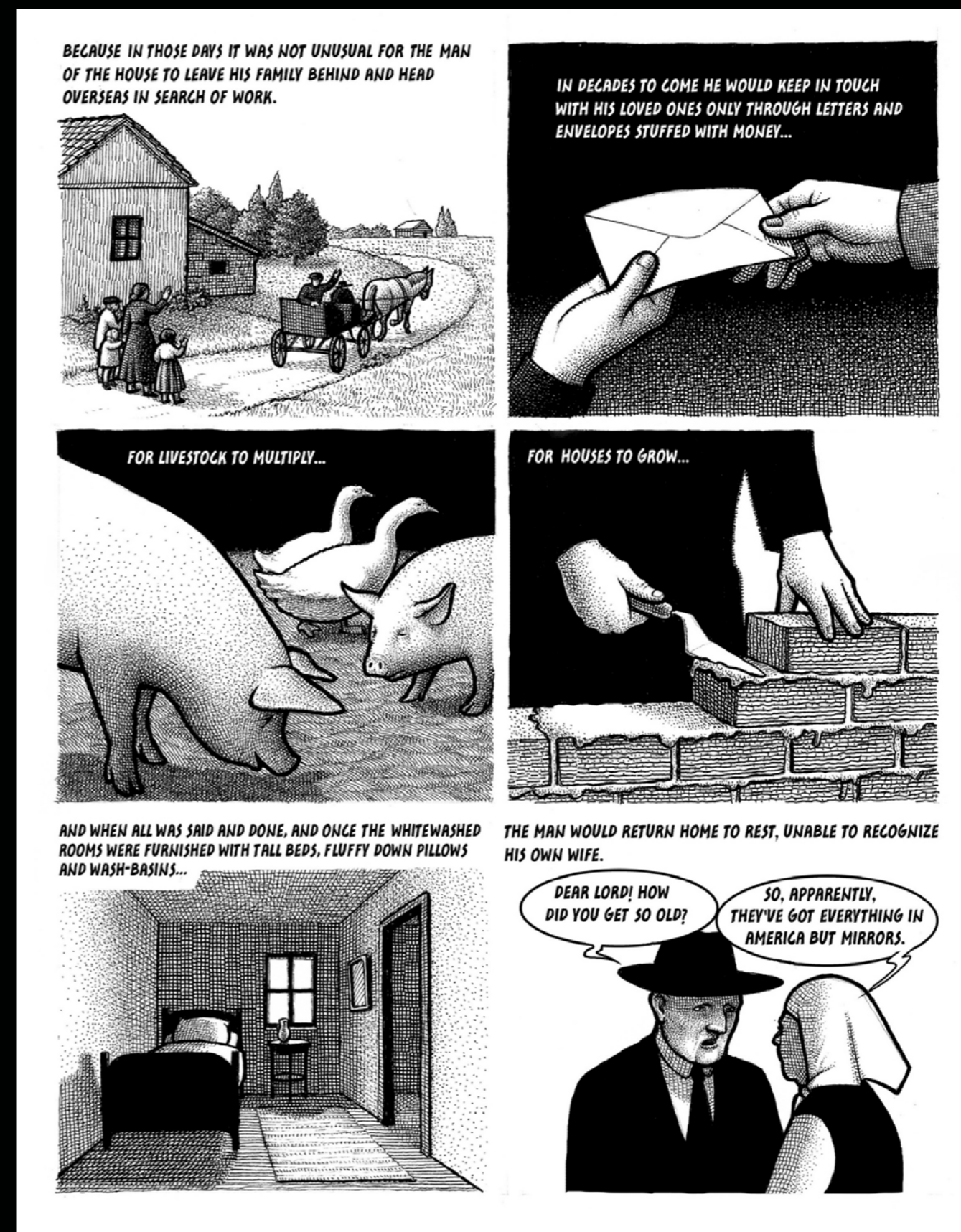


Image 19. The labour migrants – usually male – go off to work abroad. Through the remittances they sent back, their families were able to increase their living standard by building houses or purchasing new land or livestock. The current dynamic of the *Gastarbeiter* and *pechalbari* labour migrant groups is analogous. More about the *pechalbari* group is discussed in 4.4. *The Imagination Made in A Suitcase Concretely.*



Image 20. Examples of the way Nina Bunjevac both uses photographs to capture moments of everyday life but also stages some of the comics panels to feel like photographs, accentuating the disconnect between the outwardly happy memories and the reality of family conflicts.

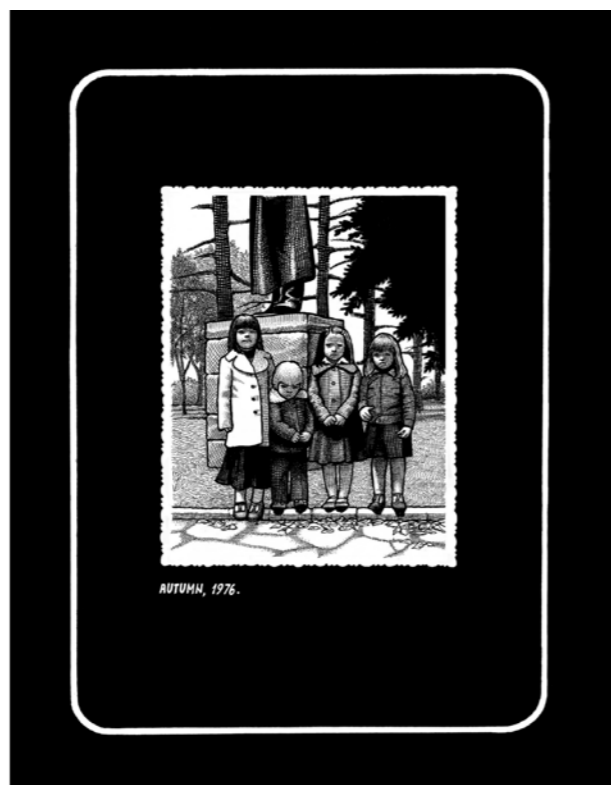


Image 21. Photographs are commonly used as artefacts preserving and reminding characters about their native identity or their affiliations with home. Parallels can be drawn between using photos on the wall both in *Fatherland* (a) and Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (b). Tan's sequence also expands the commonality of these affiliations by illustrating the rectangular windows in a composition reminiscing a photo collage.

type of labour migration on the domestic life of Yugoslav families. The expansion of the property and livestock improved the family's welfare, but, as the last panel of the page shows, families frequently became estranged, and their relationships were reduced to transactionality [Image 19].

International and labour migration have been a long-lasting process in the Balkans (Brunnbauer 2012, p. 14). Economic emigrants and refugees from the area maintained close relationships with their families and home communities during the 19th and 20th centuries, therefore 'creating social fields of action which crossed state borders' (Brunnbauer 2012, p. 14). The so-called *Gastarbeiter* migration emerged after World War II. Many labour migrants from former Yugoslavia (frequently seasonal workers) went to Austria and Southern Germany from where they could easily maintain relationships with their home (Brunnbauer 2012, p. 15). The accessibility of the home-country softened the difficulties of migrant life. During the Cold War, this was the case in former Yugoslavia due to Tito's softer policies and higher toleration of labour migration, but it was not the reality in the rest of the Balkan socialist countries. After the regime changes, big waves of labour migrants emerged in the 1990s from Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania, too. The remittances that the migrants sent home were a valuable way of raising the living standards in a domestic environment of low wages and underemployment. The remittances played a vital role for purchasing land, building home, buying consumer good and spending money on wedding and education (Brunnbauer 2012, p. 16–17). The substantial number of labour migrants from Bulgaria and Romania after their accept-

ance in the EU in 2007 – especially after 2014 when the labour restrictions were lifted²⁶ – continued the *Gastarbeiter* mindset. However, the psychological distance between, for example, the UK and Romania has been reduced due to the proliferation of commercial air travel.

In the case of Yugoslavia, the consolidation of the national identities is another aspect of post-World War II labour migration. That can explain the migrants' closer relationships with home, observed in Bunjevac's story about Peter. Indeed, the closeness of the emotional-turned-factual relationships of Bunjevac's family with the politics and history of former Yugoslavia is part of the root conflict in the story. It is also the story of many migrant dynamics in the Balkans. In majority of the states, the diaspora communities played a significant role in the shaping of national identities already in the 19th century during the movements for liberation from the Ottoman Empire. Later, during the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, diasporas were critical for the financing of nationalistic groups (Hockenos 2003).

Lastly, this case study of *Fatherland* will note the use of photo reproductions in the story. In combination with the official documents and oral histories, the photographs are another layer of the narrative collage that Bunjevac is assembling. They signify not only aspects of Nina's personal history, but also provide visual context of the belonging to the Yugoslav past. All the photos in the

²⁶ As of June 2021, around 342 000 Romanians and 79 000 Bulgarians reside in the UK. Since 2019, the number of Romanians has declined by 109 000 and the number of Bulgarians by 42 000. However, the increase of these populations since 2006 before the two countries were accepted into the EU is still significant. In 2006, both Romania and Bulgaria had only around 14 000 nationals living in the United Kingdom (Office of National Statistics 2021).

graphic memoir depict scenes from the life in former Yugoslavia. Often the photographs function as archival documentations, as noted by Obradović. However, in some cases they are part of the backgrounds, or are '[synthesised] into the mis-en-scène of the panel, so it is impossible to differentiate the present time of narration' from the past (Obradović 2020, p. 48). The blurring of the timelines of events shows the effect the history has had on the protagonists' lives [Image 20]. Sections of the story are also laid out analogous to a family photo album – an artefact that should in theory capture the joyous moments of a family. Yet this reference to a family album is a subversion that only highlights the absence of the father and the tragic nature of the story.

Images indeed could serve as concrete cues of affiliations. Following Wenger's framework, photographs exemplify specific temporal and localised moments, expressions of our engagement mode captured on a physical artefact. They can also relate to belongings that one desires to escape from or re-negotiate. In another segment of *Fatherland*, photographs also serve to remind Peter of his Yugoslav belonging during his life as a worker in the Canadian ore mine [Image 21a]. Photographs provide a concrete expression of the characters' spatial belonging through their materiality. They can be encountered as a common trope, seen also in Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* [Image 21b] and in Nora Krug's 2018 graphic novel *Belonging*.

The case study of Nina Bunjevac's graphic memoir *Fatherland* analysed comic depictions of memories and national histories related to migration. A particular focus was the migration from former Yugoslav states inside the frame set by Bunjevac's book. Through comics, official narratives and personal lived experiences can be intertwined into a visual exploration and re-negotiation of belonging. Photographs can serve as archival materials, but also as intertextual tools for blurring the temporal shift in the narratives and thus exposing the historical effects on the protagonists' sense of belonging.

3.2. *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (2018) by Nora Krug

The following chapter is a case study on Nora Krug's book *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* and will further analyse the multi-layered approach of comics towards the exploration of memory and attachments. The case study will investigate the role that language plays in the sense of belonging. It will again examine the use of photographs, but from the point of graphic enunciation, and will compare Krug's renditions to those of Nina Bunjevac.

Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home is a 2018 autobiographical graphic novel written and illustrated by Nora Krug. In the book Krug examines themes of home and belonging through her family's history and German culture. Belonging is a collage-like tapestry of collected memories, history, found artefacts, and archival materials. Through the work, the author/protagonist explores and negotiates her own perceptions of home especially through Heimat – a concept considered particularly German (Clewell 2020, p. 461) and loosely translated in English as *homeland* (Ashkenazi & Dittmar 2020, p. 3).

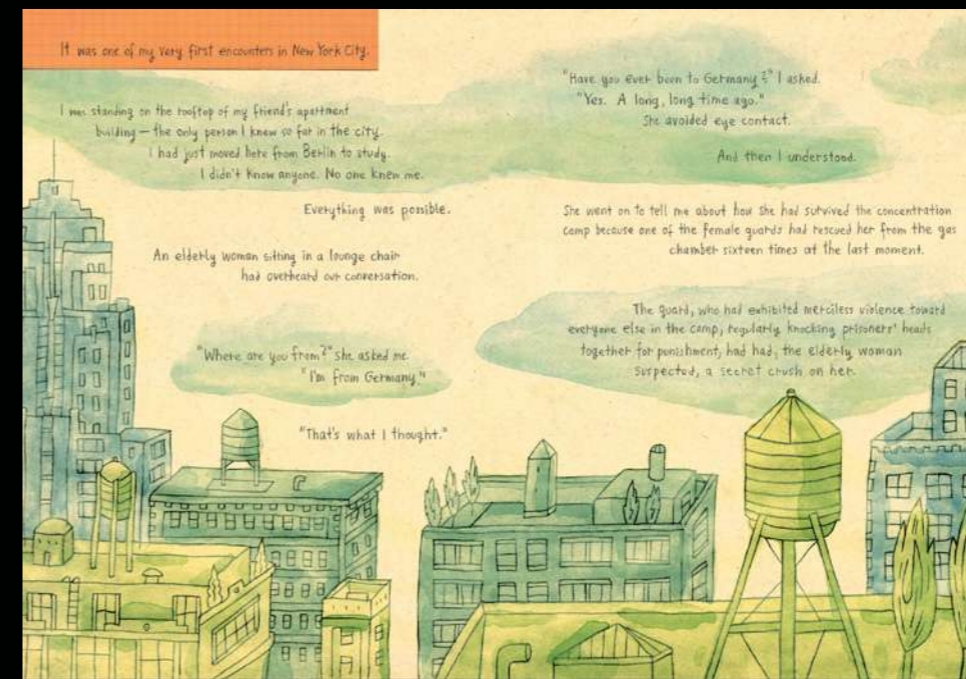


Image 22. The encounter between the character of Nora Krug and the Holocaust survivor in New York.

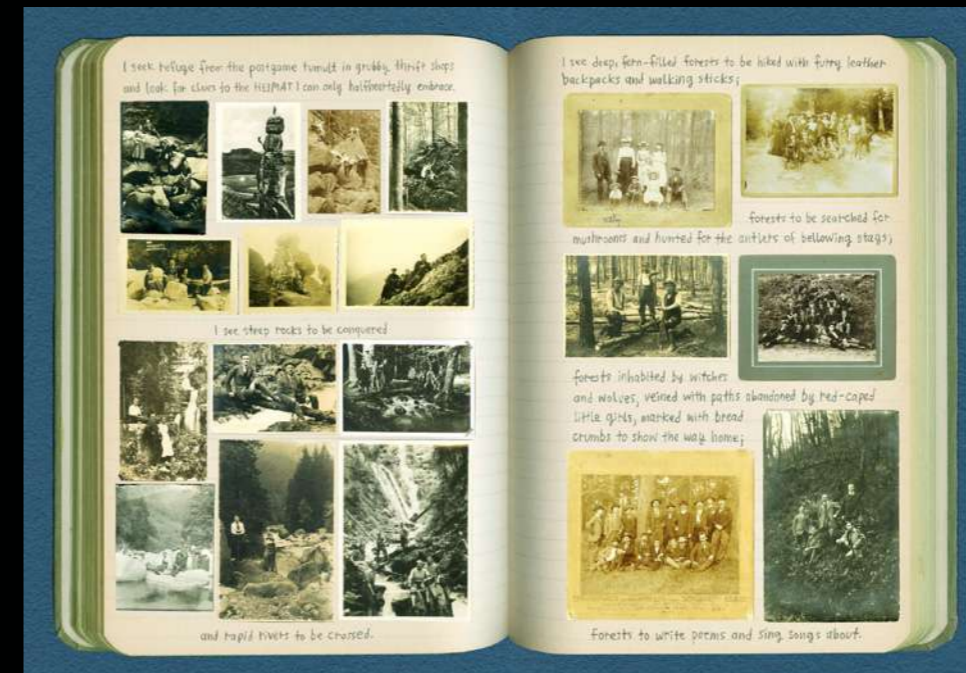


Image 23. The use of photos imposed over the intimate space of the journal pages highlight the depth of the affiliations and symbolism of Germany that the character of Krug has been brought up with.



Image 24. The photos of subjects facing backwards looking at scenes from Germany is a continuation of the symbolism and believes that construct one's belonging to a community of practice. That is indicated by Krug's confession about being watched "from behind" (2018, no pagination). This both signifies the engagement through histories of practice and the imagination of visions that span generations.

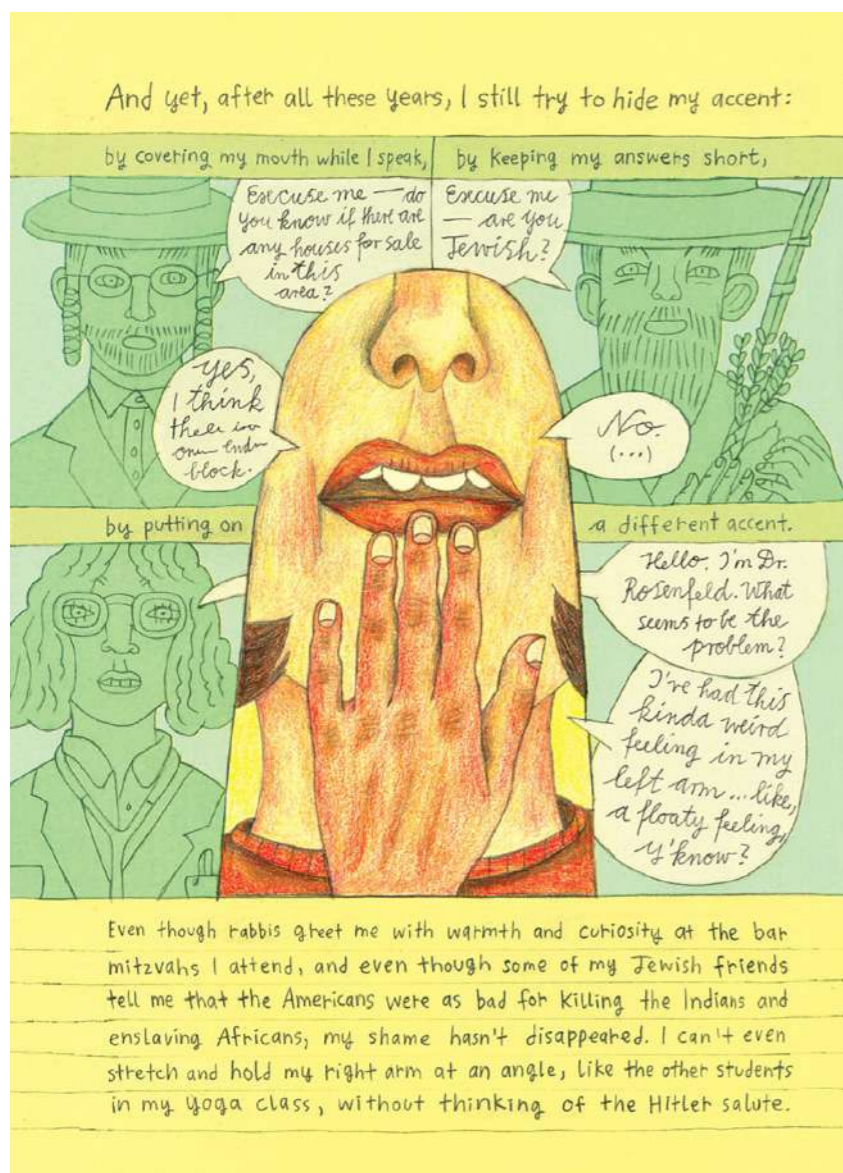


Image 25. The character of Krug is cognisant of her accent and the way in which that projects her national identity. More about the performance of language is discussed in 4.3. *The Engagement in A Suitcase Concretely.*

The story could hardly be summarised in a few sentences as it does not follow a linear structure. At its beginning, the author ponders over the first time she viscerally confronted her own Germanness through an interaction with a Holocaust survivor in New York [Image 22]. The first two chapters of the book describe the starting point of Krug's understanding of her German affiliation. The concept of spatial belonging (Lähdesmäki, Saresma, Hiltunen, Jäntti, Säaskilahti, Vallius & Ahvenjärvi 2016, p. 236) is conveyed most strongly through the photos and postcards collected by the author [Image 23, Image 24]. Krug's own feeling of identity in these first two chapters centres around the stereotypes of Germans as cold people, and of Germany as forever being the land of the Huns and the Nazis. In these chapters, the author expands on her initial desire to relate to her own history and culture beyond the historical burdens of the Holocaust without forgetting or negating its legacies. The strive for a stronger grasp of her own culture and heritage is the driving force behind her subsequent investigation of the theme of belonging.

From the beginning of the book, Krug employs a myriad of visual methods, styles, and materials to explore the history of her family during World War II. She excavates the stories about her maternal grandfather – described in the book as an 'in-between man... [n]either a resistance fighter, nor a

major offender' (Krug 2018, no pagination) – and about her paternal uncle, who died at the war-front at the age of 18 and has never actually met Krug's father. These family narratives intertwine with an introspective look on symbolism and cultural properties. Through overlaying, Krug aims to find a 'less painful and more fulfilling mode of belonging' (Clewell 2020, p. 464) to German culture. Much of the disassociation with her belonging Krug attributes to the German education system. The school failed at helping her transcend the feeling of collective guilt despite rigorously teaching about the German atrocities during World War II (Clewell 2020, p. 460). Reactions such as Krug's anxiety to speak English with a German accent [Image 25] exemplify the results of those unresolved emotions.

Language characterises an important aspect of attachment through the engagement mode of belonging (Wenger 1998, pp. 51-54) and by providing a quick and direct way of meaning-creation between engagement participants. As Wenger notes, language and words are one reification of meaning. The face-to-face communication is so immediate that it affects 'the negotiation of meaning through a process that seems like pure participation' (Wenger 1998, p. 62). Wenger continues:

'As a consequence, words can take advantage of shared participation among interlocutors to create shortcuts to communication. It is this tight interweaving of reification and participation that makes conversations such a powerful form of communication' (Wenger 1998, p. 62).

These shortcuts to communication can result in rapid identification of the participants that are not members of a certain community of practice. The concerns of Krug about her accents indeed channels worries about her disengagement from the community of practice in their host-countries.

Another reason for Nora Krug's disappointment with the German education system is its inability to provide a 'sense of identifying with a group and believing in an idea larger than oneself' (Krug 2018, no pagination). She cannot indicate a specific feeling of belonging – *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl* in German (Clewell 2020, p. 461) – in the same way that she can define the American cultural identity (Krug 2018). The particularly German word *Heimat* (*Heimat* also being the German title of Krug's book) is a concept that used to encompass the idea of a larger than oneself belonging. The word *Heimat* is associated with the idea of an 'organic' belonging to a specific place and community and it can relate to both localities and nationalities (Williams 1985, pp. 227–229). It derives from German culture – specifically, German Romanticism, German nationalism, and German statehood (Blickle 2004) – and refers to the essential belonging to place, 'the location in and from which identity is constructed' (Ashkenazi & Dittmar 2020, p. 3). It is at the centre of the spatial identity, i.e., the negotiation of a belonging to a specific place.

Nora Krug provides a double page spread with a definition of *Heimat* taken from the German Brockhaus encyclopaedia, followed by the question 'How do you know who you are, if you don't understand where you come from' (Krug 2018, no pagination). The encyclopaedic definition is

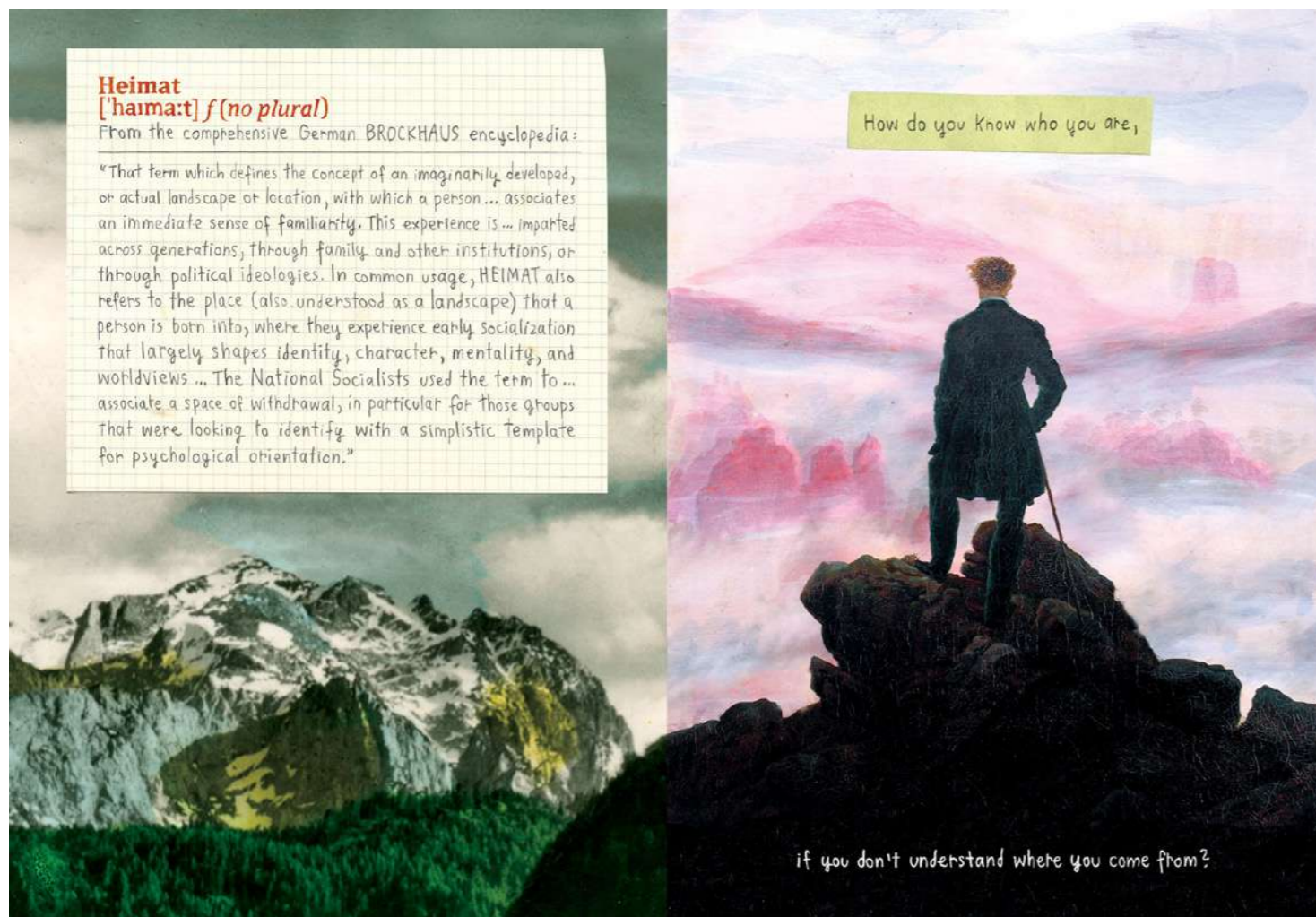


Image 26. The definition of Heimat imposed over a scenic image of *der Wild* that has been visually connected with *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* by the German painter Caspar David Friedrich. The images and text together create an idiosyncratic representation of the Romantic idea of belonging to the homeland.

positioned on top of a rendition of the German mountains – an allusion of *der Wild*, which is one of the ‘things German’ (Krug 2018, no pagination) collected by the author in the book. A follow-up question is displayed on top of the 1818 painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* by the German Romanticist painter Caspar David Friedrich [Image 26]. The illustrations of the spread contrast the informal graphic enunciation invoked through the author’s hand-lettering. This creates a tension between Krug’s expectation to viscerally understand her own *Heimat*, and her inability to grasp it from the perspective of an immigrant with unresolved questions about the past. This tension can be also observed in Bunjevac’s *Fatherland*, where the author questions the official narrative via her family’s oral histories from the position of an immigrant distanced further from the narrow belonging to a single community of practice.

This notion of Heimat was frequently employed in propaganda and political discourse to recast nostalgic sentiments of a pre-modern idealistic time, with the most notable example being its use by the National Socialist party before and during World War II. As discussed in 2.3.2. *Modes of Belonging*, this is indeed one of the limitations of the imagination mode: without providing a

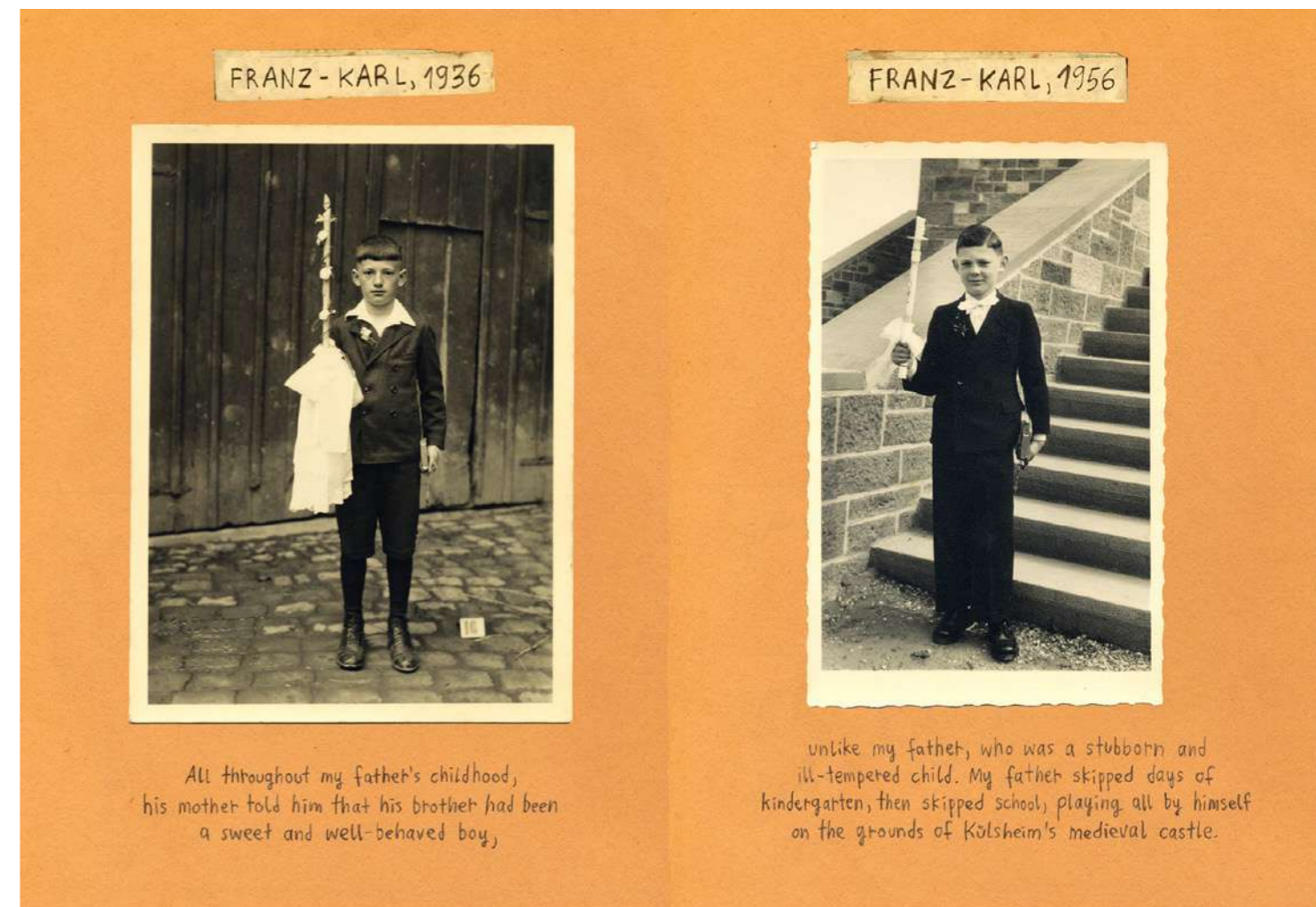


Image 27. Nora Krug’s reinterpretation of *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* next to a World War II photograph places her character’s re-negotiation of belonging in a context when new historical developments have changed the romantic idea of Germanness.

possibility for re-negotiation, a community of practice can become disillusioned and disconnected from its surrounding (Wenger 1998, pp. 177–178). Through exploring Nazi history and attempting to re-claim Heimat outside of German identity’s shortcut stereotypes, Nora Krug extends the concept of Heimat beyond its legacy.

Krug does not merely exhibit a nostalgia towards a certain historic period and place. She actively partakes in an examination of her *German guilt*²⁷ and the stereotypical perceptions of Germans. Through a spread reinterpreting the painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, Krug acknowledges her sharpened sense of Germanness and her inability to tangibly grasp it [Image 27]. She feels more German than ever and yet notes:

²⁷ When discussing German guilt, Nora Krug refers to the Holocaust and atrocities of the Germans during World War II, which are often invoked in relation to German identity.

‘... the longer I’ve lived away from Germany, the more elusive my idea of my identity becomes. My Heimat is an echo, a forgotten word once called into the mountains. An unrecognizable reverberation.’ (Krug 2018, no pagination)

Krug’s varying degree of attachment to her home-country extends into the conceptual realms of *being in exile* (Ashkenazi & Dittmar 2020, p. 1). As highlighted by Gerd Gemünden, immigration is rarely a condition comparable with the *de facto exile* (Ashkenazi & Dittmar 2020, p. 2) and to use those terms interchangeably would be cynical. In this case, the text employs exile as the ‘loss of authority ... including control over the narrative of one’s life’ (Gemünden 2014, p. 16). Therefore, like other authors in exile, Krug takes the dialectical position of in-betweenness, which signifies affiliation with different belongings, making the participant both an outsider and insider in a particular culture. Through understanding her position of an in-betweener, Krug examines institutional and personal dimensions of Heimat and homeland.

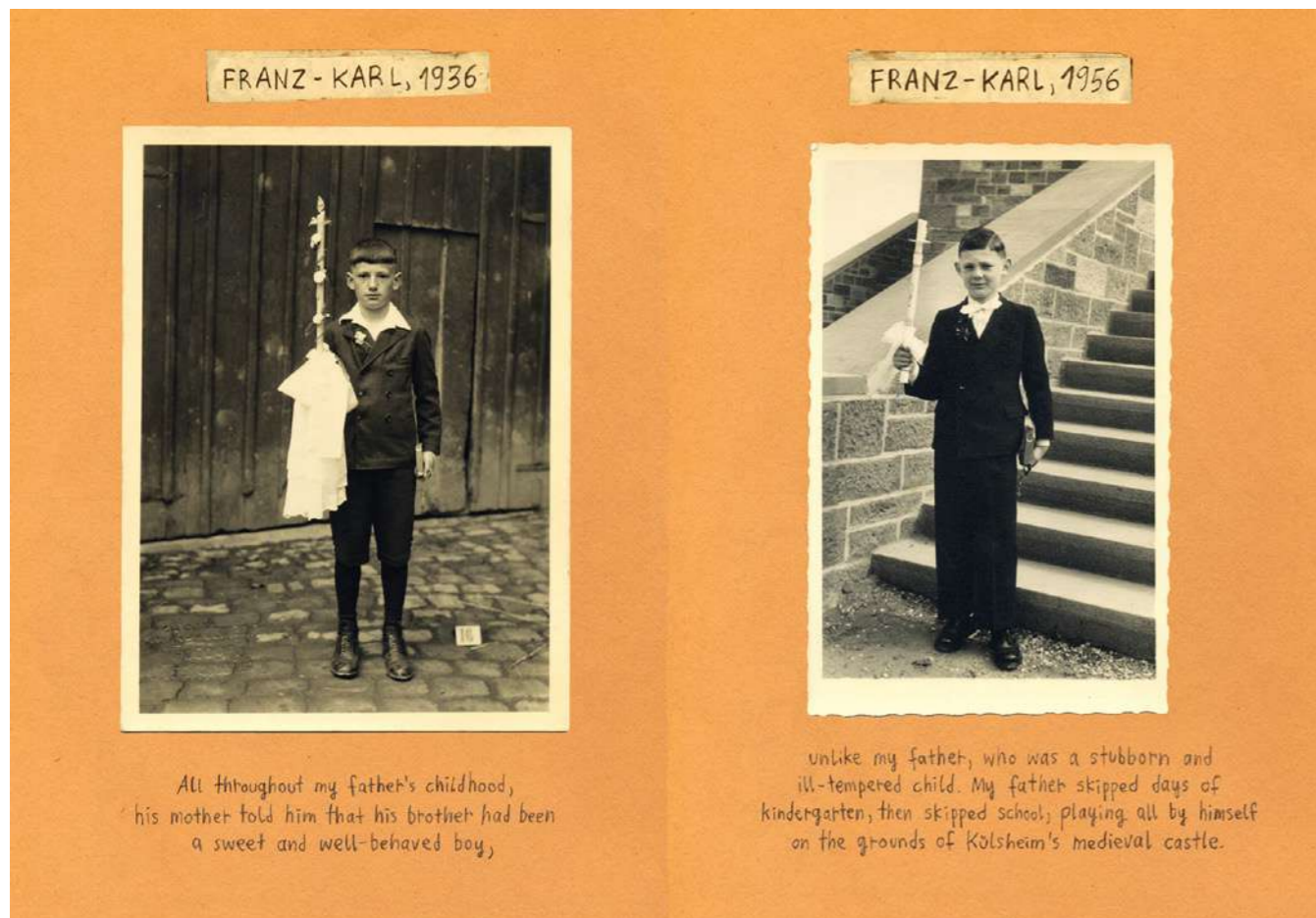


Image 28. The First Communion photos of Nora Krug’s uncle Franz-Karl (a) and her father, also named Franz-Karl (b).

The graphic novel continues with Krug exploring the story of her uncle Franz-Karl, killed as a young soldier at the warfront at age of 18. Nora Krug’s father, born in 1946, was also given the name of Franz-Karl. In an earie double-page spread, Krug juxtaposes photographs of both brothers’ First Communions [Image 28]. According to psychologist and literary critic Gabrielle Schwab’s study on German transgenerational trauma, Krug’s father is a typical example of a ‘replacement child’ intended to compensate the loss of an older child during the war (Schwab 2010, ch. 5). This is also shown through the frequent scolding that he gets from his mother (i.e., Nora Krug’s grandmother). His hometown Kulsheim is not his Heimat but an ‘open wound’ (Krug 2018, no pagination), which he describes ‘as if it had been lived by someone entirely unrelated to him’ (ibid.). For Krug’s father, Kulsheim is a place that he leaves and never returns to after his mother’s death.

Krug overlays the almost identical photos of the two brothers, creating a new image that ‘looks directly’ (Krug 2018) at her [Image 29]. This puts the author directly in a position of confronting her family’s past. As Clewell explains, for Krug:

‘...a requirement of belonging to her family ... entails performing the work of discovering, acknowledging, and, in a sense, publicly mourning the traumatic legacy that continues to haunt her father and, by extension, her own identity as a German...’ (Clewell 2020, p. 480)

The author recognises the pain she feels for her father as she notes that ‘even inherited memory hurts’ (Krug 2018, no pagination). Like Nina Bunjevac’s blurring of the lines between past and present in *Fatherland*, Krug aims to bring together her family’s history into her own lived experience by learning as much as possible about the actions of her relatives during the war. She seeks to extend her own imagination mode of belonging beyond the limitations of the German education and the stereotypes imposed onto her.

The book also follows the story of Krug’s maternal grandfather Willi and the activities that took place in his town Karlsruhe during *Reichskristallnacht*²⁸. She remembers him as estranged and difficult to emotionally define. By uncovering archival materials, Nora Krug finds that her grandfather was a member of the Nazi Party and for a brief time fought on the Western Front in Flounders. She learns that his affiliation with the Nazi party was in fact due to pragmatic concerns about his job and that he did not partake in Nazi activities. However, as Krug’s mother notes, ‘he was a bit of a coward’ (Krug 2018, no pagination). In the end, Krug appreciates Willi’s lack of involvement in any of the Nazi deeds and the fact that one of his neighbours – ‘married to a Jewish woman’ (ibid.) – was ready to vouch for her grandfather’s innocence ‘anytime and under oath’ (ibid.). Simultaneously, she also states that ‘[i]t was the Jews and the ‘politically unreliable’ who lost their jobs, not the eighty-five percent who didn’t join the party’ (Krug 2014). Krug never learns whether her grandfather knew or approved of Hitler’s politics.

28 The Night of Broken Glass was a pogrom against the Jewish population carried out by Nazi Party’s storm troopers and German civilians throughout Germany on 9–10 November 1938.

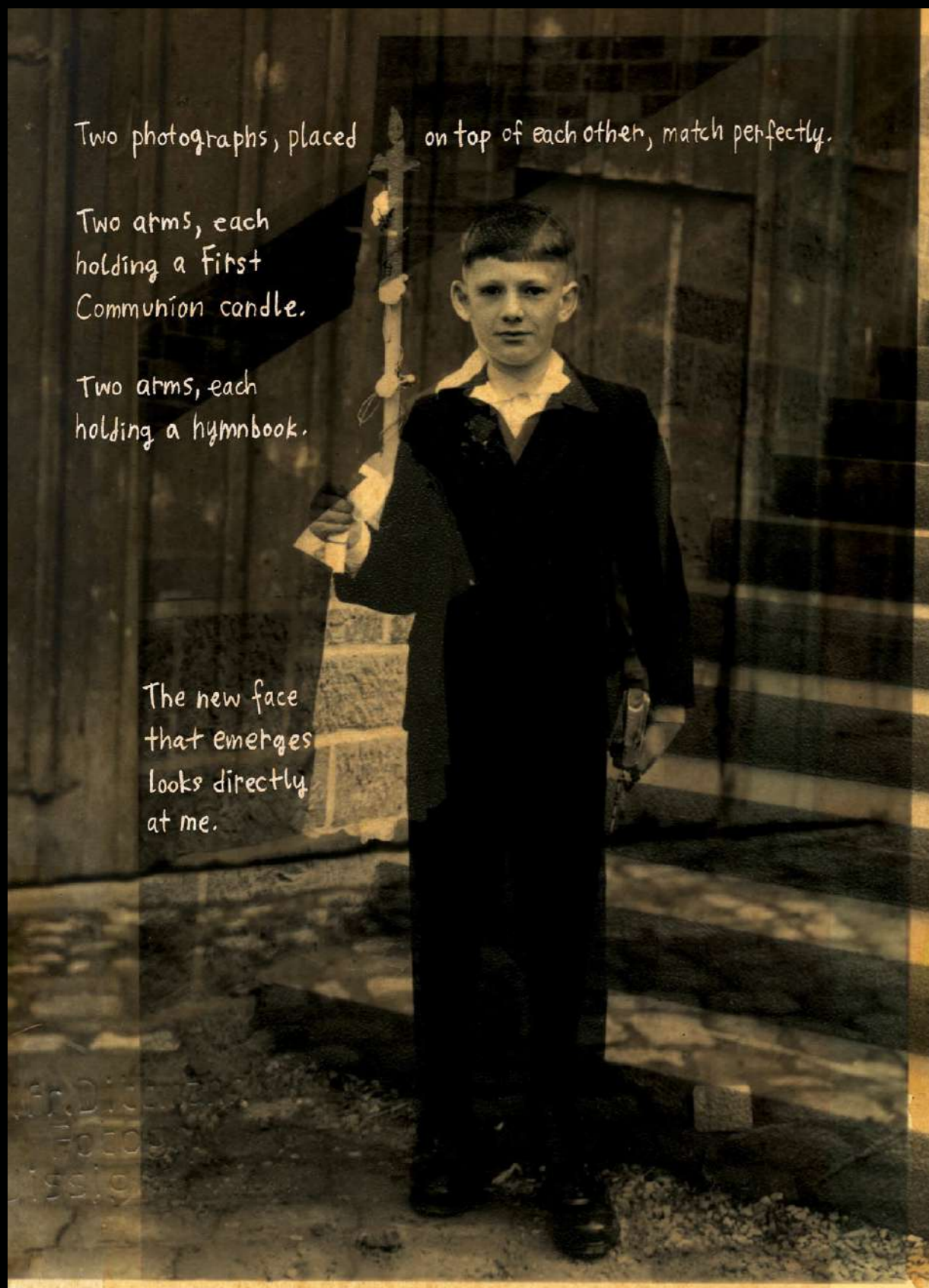


Image 29. The overlaying of both First Communion photos.

By confronting history and her grandfather's place in it, the author reconciles with his ambiguous involvement with the Nazi party and World War II. The author arrives at a better and more nuanced understanding of the relations her family has with history through examining Willi's activities. An exchange between Nora Krug and her father while on the way to Kùlsheim ties homeland and history together. Nora asks her father whether he would visit a piece of land he had inherited, assuming that is his Heimat, to which he disagrees. Her enquiry into the nature of his Heimat receives the following answer:

“I don't know. HEIMAT is a small, defined space, where you feel comfortable,” he says, as if quoting from a dictionary. “Kùlsheim used to be my HEIMAT.” [underline by author] (Krug 2018, no pagination)

That moment of the story signifies the author-protagonist's break with the idea that Heimat is defined specifically through history and culture. As Jones and Krzyżanowski mention in their framework (2011), the rigidity of the identity softens through belonging, as the personal lived experiences bring together the historical narratives and reshape them into the present.

There are many parallels that can be drawn between Nora Krug's work and Nina Bunjevac's *Fatherland*. Like Bunjevac, Krug examines historical events through the stories of her family. Krug is also an immigrant – as stated at the beginning of the book, she has lived in the USA for over two decades. The simultaneous attachment to the German and American belongings provides her with a unique viewpoint to examine the cultural and historical spaces from a distance, evidenced already by the dedication at the beginning of the book [Image 30].



Image 30. The dedication at the beginning of Krug's graphic memoir.

Through an informal manner of storytelling, Krug places herself closer as an observer of the historical narratives, and therefore to the processes of reflection and re-negotiation of belongings, than Bunjevac. A reason for that is their *graphic enunciation* (Marion 1993), the mode of narration related to the act of producing the image. Marion bases the conceptualisation of graphic enunciation of André Gaudreault's theory of *monstration*. Gaudreault explains monstration in the following way:

‘...a mode of communicating a story, which consists of showing characters (in English, monstration) who act out rather than tell the Vicissitudes to which they are subjected. Monstration could thus be used to replace the term “representation,” which is too specific, too compromised, and far too polysemic.’ (Gaudreault 2009, p. 69)

As Kai Mikkonen (2017, pp. 82–86) points out, enunciation refers to the recognition of the comic artist's subjectivity through their visual style, comic book devices (like panel use or layout), their specific way of hand lettering, etc.

Nora Krug's narrative is underpinned by the specific emotionality carried through the messier, scrapbook-like style of the book. Laying it out as a journal invites the reader into the personal space of the author. In this case, evocations of graphic enunciation are the scanned photographs and notebook backgrounds, the naïve illustrations, the diary style of handwriting, and the informal tone of voice. All of those contribute to a narration mode of spontaneity, as if the reflections are occurring concurrently with the reader's unravelling of the story. In contrast, through Bunjevac's crosshatch black-and-white illustrations, Fatherland's story feels more planned and controlled, which brings a sense that the author-protagonist is further removed from the action.

Despite the differences, the graphic enunciations in both Nora Krug's and Nina Bunjevac's books are valid approaches to belonging narratives and re-negotiations. Viewed from the perspective of Wenger's modes of belonging, each of these approaches of enunciation relates to the theme of belonging through different mode combinations. While Bunjevac's more distant and controlled narrative tailors towards the imagination mode, Krug's spontaneity correlates better with the mode of engagement, and both of their books feature examples of the alignment mode.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Bunjevac explores the imagination mode through the re-tracing and re-negotiation of common histories within the Yugoslavian immigrant communities. Krug, however, delves deeper into the everyday minutia of Germanness, observed from the distance of immigration. The examples of common inseparably German objects, speaks to the everyday rituals and participations in the German community of practice [Image 31]. These '[t]hings German,' as

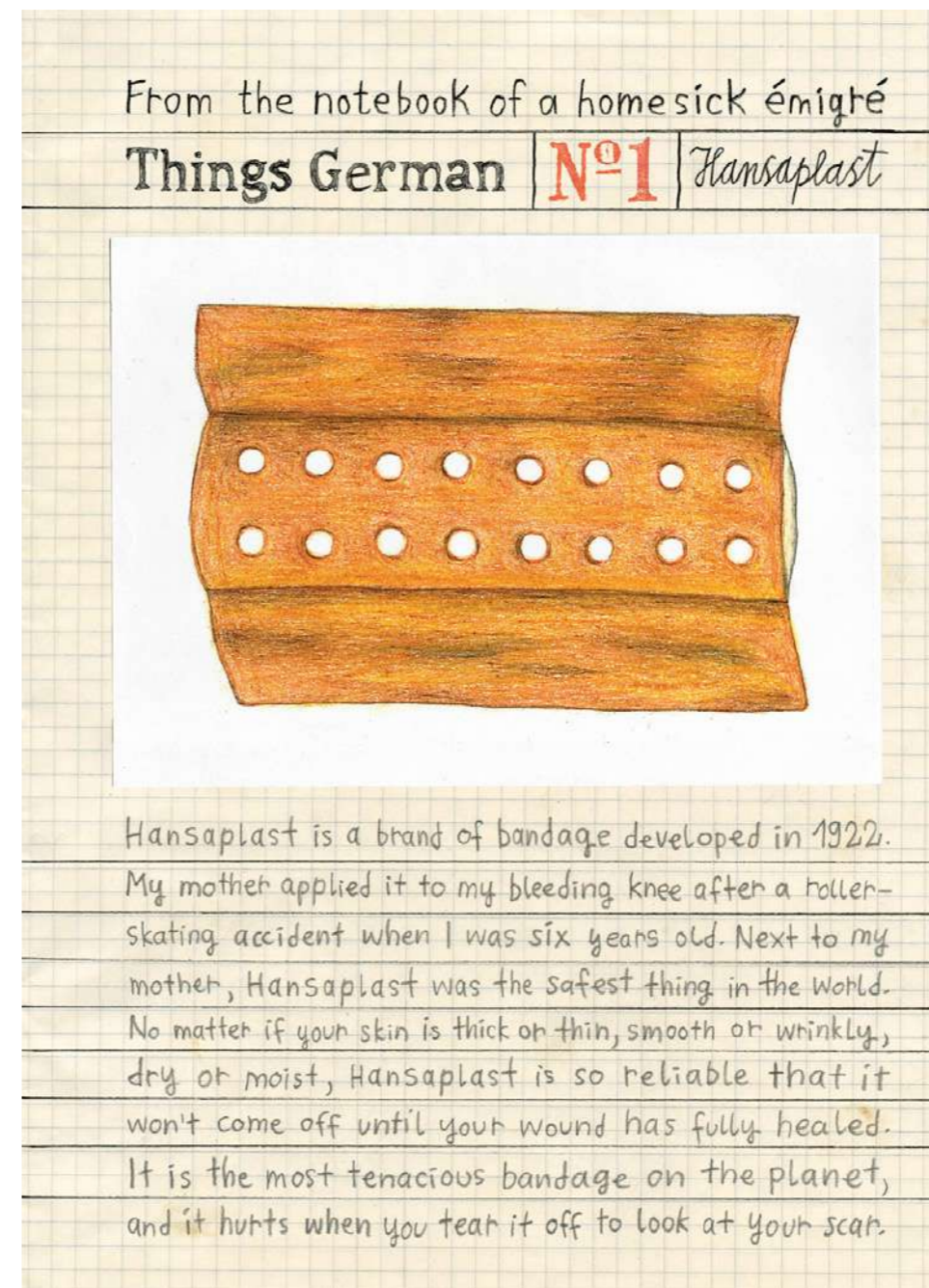


Image 31. Several 'Things German' pages are dispersed throughout the book sharing not only the symbolic objects and concepts, but also the character's subjective relation to them.

Krug calls them – 'Hansaplast,' 'der Wald,' 'der Leitz-Aktenordner,' 'das Pilze Sammeln,'²⁹ etc. – are all objects, actions, and concepts, restricted in time and place. A particular nuance of engagement is also derived from the text at the start of these pages: 'From the notebook of a homesick émigré' (Krug 2018, no pagination) signifies Krug's in-betweenness and her willingness to re-negotiate her position towards the German community of practice. In the pages of her graphic novel, she collects those 'things German' as a form of materialised Heimat. The engagement with material objects, concepts, and actions is a form of performance of belonging. Through the familiarity with the object

29 Hansaplast is a brand of bandage; der Wald means "the wild"; der Leitz-Aktenordner is a brand of ring binders; das Pilze Sammeln refers to mushroom picking.

Hansaplast and the action of mushroom picking, Nora Krug signals (i.e., performs) her German cultural belonging.

The case study of Nora Krug's graphic novel *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* explored belonging through reconciling with history and the blurring of personal and historical engagement. By confronting a family's history that she has not been part of, the author-protagonist extends her German belonging outside of the indoctrinated limitations imposed by education and stereotypes. Instead, she explores the comforts of her homeland through everyday activities and objects, and through knowing the specifics of her family's past. Krug confronts the externally imposed constraints of the imagination mode by dissecting it in detail. She therefore enriches it through a meditation on her day-to-day engagements and participations metonymically signified by objects, concepts, and activities.

The case study also describes graphic enunciation and observes its influence on the perception of the stories in Krug's *Belonging* and Bunjevac's *Fatherland*. The diverse approaches of image-making carry significantly different emotional nuances, thus providing extra information to the journeys of re-negotiation and exploration undertaken by the author-protagonists.



Image 32. Sara and her father are met at the airport by a government worker who gives them the masks.

3.3. *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan* (2014) by Mattias Elftorp

The third and last case study analyses Mattias Elftorp's 2014 graphic novel *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan* paying particular focus on the juxtaposition of the alignment and engagement modes of belonging, observed in the context of refugee comics. In terms of Balkan migration, the story of Sara and her father is compared against the perceptions of football player Zlatan Ibrahimović, whose indirect role in the story provides a reference for Sara's experience. Zlatan's presence in the plot is important as a midpoint between the perception of 'real Swedes' and the dramatic story of Sara and her father. In the context of this thesis topic and the involvement of Balkan migration, it is symbolic that Zlatan is put in the position of being the integrated other. Despite being born in Sweden, knowing the language and being at the top of his career field, his membership and belonging is still being viewed as conditional, which further accentuates the challenges of Sara and her father.

The 2014 comic book *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan* is written and illustrated by the Swedish artist Mattias Elftorp. The case study analyses the inclusionary and exclusionary practices in the construction of belonging in the context of refugee narratives and frames the refugee experience particularly through the alignment and engagement modes.

Elftorp's book provides a valuable depiction of the dynamics between refugees, social environment, and institutions, despite being published in the eve of the 2015 European refugee waves. An important part of the analysis is football [soccer] player Zlatan Ibrahimović's role for the story. His background provides a glimpse into the arbitrary lines of the identity assignment, even though his presence in the book is more symbolic and indirect. Ibrahimović's Balkan roots are the reason

for this story to be an interesting case for the Balkans' position as an in-between space. Simultaneously, his presence in the plot adds emotional beats to the narrative and becomes a reference point for the main protagonist Sara's journey.

The book begins with the arrival of a refugee girl named Sara and her unnamed father to Sweden by a plane. Coming from an undisclosed country³⁰, they must manoeuvre through the social and educational challenges of their new host-country. However, Sara and her father's rooting in Malmö is linked to the legalities of being approved for a permanent residency. The looming threat of a potential residency denial establishes a strong tension throughout a story that is punctuated by cases of everyday confrontations and casual racism.

At the start of the story, Sara shows excitement for visiting the birthplace of her hero Zlatan Ibrahimović. She is an avid football fan and aspires to be like him when she grows up; she even learns new Swedish vocabulary from watching football on television. Football and Ibrahimović become Sara's entrance point to Swedish culture. Sara's father also promises her that next time Zlatan plays in Malmö, they will see the game.

However, both Sara and her father are required to wear masks with the colours of the Swedish flag [Image 32] already upon arriving at the airport. The masks are a metonymic device used by Elftorp to depict the level of affiliation demanded from refugees – not through providing them a space to express their cultural belonging, but through an expectation for assimilation and acculturation.

³⁰ The country of Sara's origin is not mentioned in the story, but it is said that she speaks Arabic.



Image 33. The separation of the statement about 'the ordinary kids' highlights the way not knowing the language disconnects the refugees from the feeling of normal existence within the host-community.

Sara starts attending school together with other masked children. They all learn Swedish language and discuss the meaning behind being Swedish. Through playing football and attending school, Sara meets other migrant kids and becomes a close friend with a masked boy named Ahmed. Their conversations and everyday experiences aid Sara with the new realities of living in Sweden. Those interactions are more supportive to Sara in navigating ordinary situations – like witnessing police violence over another masked person – than the conversations with the Swedish teacher Miss Kerstin that frequently leave Sara confused [Image 33].

During the story, Sara is shown to have recurring nightmares about her father's friend, who was killed back in her home country [Image 34]. Those nightmares allude to the traumatic events from



Image 34. Spread from Sara's recurring traumatic dreams.

the past that have pushed the family to leave and seek refuge. Forgetting is a common coping strategy for dealing with distressful events, as both Nietzsche and Freud have discussed. Nietzsche comments that forgetting is a form of psychic escapism (Nietzsche 2006, p. 35, Nabizadeh 2019 p. 155), while Freud notes that forgetting 'in all cases is proved to be founded on a motive of displeasure' (Freud 1914, p. 52)³¹. Therefore, the memory retention – the mnemonic capacity – is undesirable by the subject. However, apart from suppressing potential traumatic memories, Sara is also required to conceal her looks and identity, which additionally disconnects her from strategies of processing the grief and connecting with her surroundings.

Eventually, Sara's father is informed that his appeal for permanent residence permit was denied, meaning that he and Sara should either return to their home country or go into hiding as undocumented immigrants hoping for another chance to apply for an asylum. Before leaving the country, Sara's father takes her and Ahmed to a football game starring Zlatan Ibrahimović. There, after seeing Sara's closeness to Ahmed, the father decides that uprooting her again is too high of a cost to pay. He informs Sara he has decided they will stay as undocumented migrants and try their luck again with the permit application. The happy news is intensified after Sara sees Ibrahimović score and his team win the game. Yet, on their way out of the stadium, the excitement is shattered after police officers violently detain them for being undocumented. The overwhelming fear during the aggressive arrest restores Sara's memories, so she realises the nightmares were in fact flashbacks and the person killed in them was her real father. The man Sara had come to Sweden with was her father's close friend, who rescued her and pretended to be her father only so that he could help her settle a new life.

³¹ Forgetting as a reaction to trauma, but also as a method of gradually uncovering a story, is also successfully used in *Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon War Story* by Ari Folman and David Polonsky (2009).

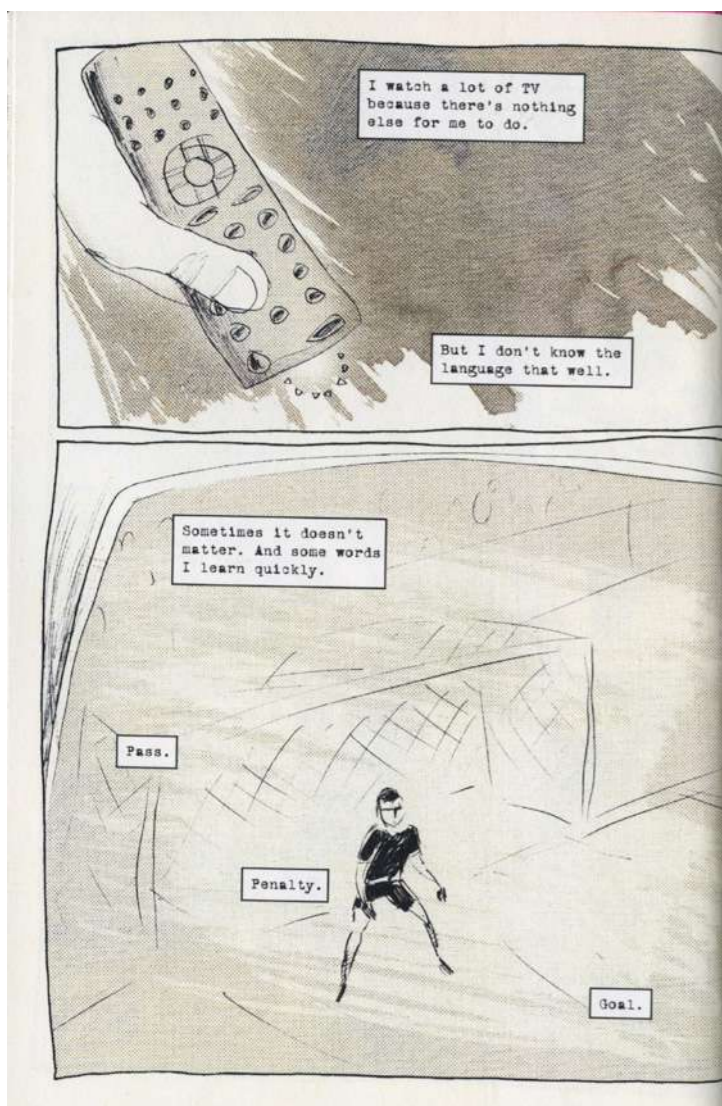


Image 35. Through her interests and hobbies, Sara is engaging with the local culture and language. Football and Zlatan Ibrahimović become her gateway to Sweden.



Image 36. Screenshot from *Flotel Europa* (dir. Tomic 2015). The hotel boat was a temporary centre for Bosnian refugees during the Bosnian War.

The arrest eliminates the need for Sara and her father's friend to wear masks, as they can no longer even pretend to try and fit within the definition of 'being Swedish.' After an unspecified time spent in a detention centre – '[T]hey say it isn't a prison. Call it "storage"' – Sara and her custodian are boarded on a plane back to their home country. The book finishes with Sara having a nice dream about playing football with her father and his friend. At the same time on the last page, we see the plane ascending into the sky, thus visually framing the whole book.

There are many dimensions through which belonging can be explored in *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan*. The book is an interesting exploration of the engagement, imagination, and alignment modes running in parallel. The engagement of Sara is expressed through her everyday interactions with her community of masked migrants. Despite their presumed goal as markers of intended affiliation, the masks separate the migrants from the 'real' Swedes (Elftorp 2014, no pagination). However, the masks help migrants to recognise (Goffman 1959) a community within each other, a recognition which generates positive emotional energy (Wettergren 2015, p. 223). The masks become key symbols that represent the pleasant experiences, especially amongst the kids, who are seen engaging in games and conversation. Apart from the masked migrants, the only Swedish people we see Sara interacting with are Miss Kerstin and the police who are like continuations of

the institutions. Due to that, the unmasked Zlatan plays a role-model in the narrative not only as a successful football player, but as an immigrant who has earned his place in Swedish society and removed his mask.

Another aspect of Sara's difficulty in engaging with the Swedish community is the language barrier. She learns it at school and from TV, but from the beginning she says she does not know 'very much Swedish' (Elftorp 2014, no pagination) [Image 35]. Sara's exchanges in Swedish with Miss Kerstin often ends in confusion, and her conversation with Ahmed and her custodian happen in Arabic. For an individual, expressing their self, emotions, and goals in a certain language is an important dimension of the engagement with their community and belonging. In *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan*, language becomes an entry point into a new society.

The fear of deportation and the opposing feeling of hope threads the emotional journey of Sara and her custodian. As defined by Theodore Kemper (2001, p. 66), hope is the believe that an individual's power and position will improve in the future. The entirety of Elftorp's book is filled with the protagonists' hope for remaining in Sweden and establishing life there, which is in the end fruitless. The denial of residency permit, the violent expulsion, and the continuous subjugation through the masks are expressions of the shame and humiliation encountered by the characters. According to Scheff (1990, p. 71), shame signals threat to the social bonds and, as noted by Wettergren, relates to negative emotional experiences of pain and alarm to the self (2015, p. 223). Wettergren continues expanding on the definition of shame as being the sense of low self-worth 'through the eyes of others' (ibid.), so often the shamed subject tries to repair that relationship through subjugation (ibid.), which in the comics is evident by the mask-wearing.



Image 37. Sara's interaction with Miss Kerstin when the teacher dismisses Zlatan Ibrahimović as not being a 'real Swede.'

Counter to the humiliating processes through which unwanted migrants are subjugated, is the condition of resilience. Björnberg (2013) studies resilience amongst asylum-seeking children in Sweden as a counteraction to humiliation and a key to overcome stress and uncertainty, and to cope through the continuous attacks on the self. Resilience, humiliation, and shame are key emotions that relate to the feelings of belonging. An example of the above arguments in relation to the Balkan migration could also be seen in the documentary movie *Flotel Europa* (dir. Tomic 2015), which shows the life in a giant ship in the canals of Copenhagen used as a temporary accommodation for thousands of asylum seekers from the Bosnian war [Image 36].

Despite the subjugation of the refugees and their eventual humiliation and deportation, *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan* only alludes but does not offer a definition to a 'real Swede' – Zlatan Ibrahimović, for example, is still not seen as a proper Swede by Miss Kirsten, according to the book. In one

exchange between Sara and her teacher [Image 37], Sara mentions Zlatan as an example of a Swedish celebrity. Miss Kerstin's responds with the following:

'Ah, well. Yes, he is Swedish. But does anyone know any real Swedes that are celebrities?' (Elftorp 2014, no pagination)

Mattias Elftorp, as a Swede himself, could be argued has an outsider perspective in the refugees' and migrants' experiences – even if he states that 'the details come from stories I've heard from people around me, mixed with my own observations and experiences' (2014). However, Elftorp has an insider perspective into the viewpoints and attitudes of Swedish people, and, as a narratorial testimony, that is important. Again, in the same note at the end of the book, he claims to understand '[h]ow some teachers express themselves when they mean well but it comes out so wrong' (ibid.). In a similar manner Miss Kerstin's demand for an example of 'real Swedes' leaves Sara perplexed and is the key reason for *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan* to be included as an example in the current thesis text.

Zlatan was born in Sweden to a Muslim Bosnian father and a Catholic Croat mother (Kelly 2013). In the book, he does not have to wear a mask, but that is not enough to make him a 'real Swede' in the eyes of Miss Kerstin. Following Wenger's framework, despite the perceived belonging through alignment (Zlatan is a Swedish citizen who speaks the language and understand the culture code) and engagement (as a football celebrity, he participates in promoting Sweden internationally), he is still not viewed as worthy, because of the arbitrary nature of the imagination mode. The subjective manner of the imagination is rooted in the stereotypes about being a Swede meaning that one needs to be in a certain way. Zlatan, however, does not look like the poster-Swede and has a foreign-sounding name. Migrants strive to become part of the host-country at least as individuals that have access to 'resources that enable them to prove their worth' (Wettergren 2015, p. 242). But even when they do, as in the case of Zlatan, they are still put through a kind of humiliation. According to Wettergren's research on refugees and immigrants in Sweden, this routine long-term reinforcement of humiliation is characteristic particularly in Sweden for the phase in the migrant's life when they are already documented and given residency (ibid.).

4. Practice-Based Research and Analysis

4.1. Process

For this next subchapter, the text will switch the perspective. I will share my personal experience as artist and author behind the practical and theoretical components of the thesis. Through that, I elaborate on my process and highlight main sources and milestones in the creation of the collection *A Suitcase Concretely*.

As noted in the *1.1 Motivations*, I started working on the thesis from a desire to explore in-betweenness through means of documentation. Firstly, the Balkans peninsula intrigued me as a location of research as I am a native to the culture and have an interest in its history and politics. Secondly, I had lived abroad for over ten year and was at the time experiencing a disconnect from both my Bulgarian community and the environment I was constructing for myself in Finland. Therefore, migration was another subject of interest. Lastly, in the last number of years I had been continuously fascinated with comics as an artform to introduce novel ideas and knowledge. Despite not being the anticipated artistic field of research at the start of my master's education, the construction of the thesis topic coincided with my rediscovering for the artform. In summary, I planned the thesis along three main vectors –Balkan studies, migration studies, and comics studies [Image 38].

Image 38. Three main vectors comprising the thesis's theoretical framework.

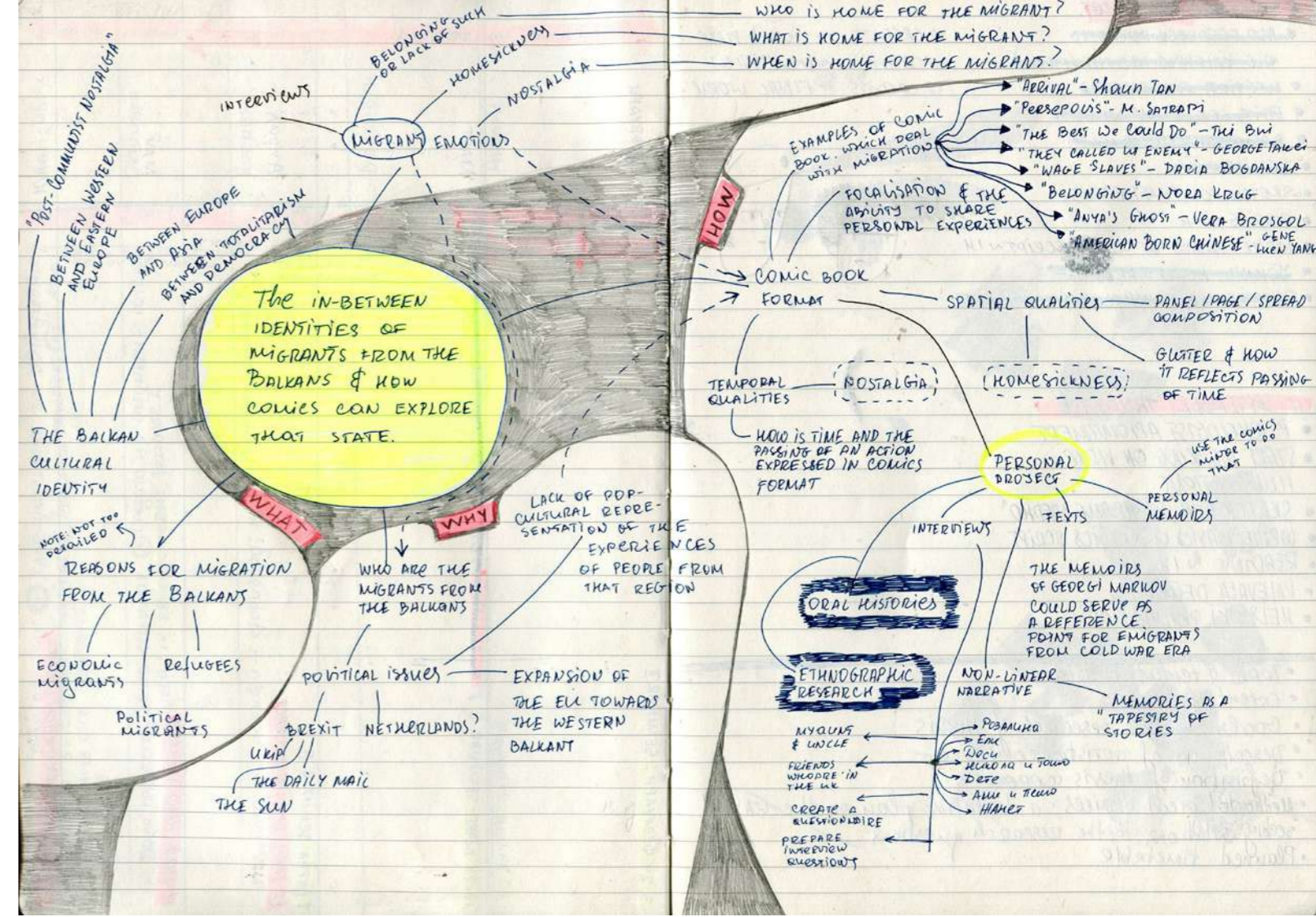
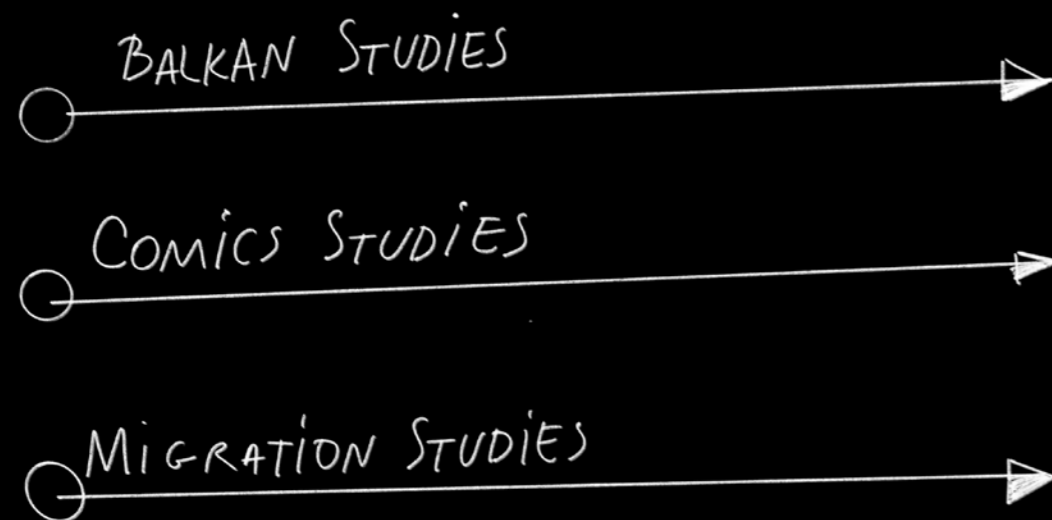


Image 39. Mind-map from my journal.

However, now I needed a point of view that can connect these three vectors of enquiry. The drawing of mind-maps helped me explore the areas of these broad fields of research that I deemed relevant, interesting, and feasible [Image 39]. Creating such topography of ideas provided me with a high-level overview of the scope, which therefore aided me in strategizing approaches towards narrowing down the thesis and identifying relevant methods for research. At the start of the process, I considered including ethnographic research, collecting oral histories, conducting interviews, etc. Yet, that quickly proved unfeasible, especially as I still missed the point of view that would help me identify pertinent strategies for approaching the thesis.

The challenge to my own sense of belonging propelled me to investigate the concept further. After further investigation, I saw the potential for belonging to be the necessary point of view for the thesis. It was a flexible concept, which connected all three research vectors in its general meaning. Firstly, the Balkans notoriously have a problem with verbalising and synthesising their own political and cultural affiliations. Secondly, belonging is also a key conceptual construct within migration studies that, as demonstrated in section 2.3. is being thoroughly investigated by the respective academicians. Lastly, comics on identity, belonging and migration were a booming subgenre (Kauranen & Löytty 2020, p. 74), and comics possesses the lure to not neatly fit into any traditional artform taxonomy [Image 40].

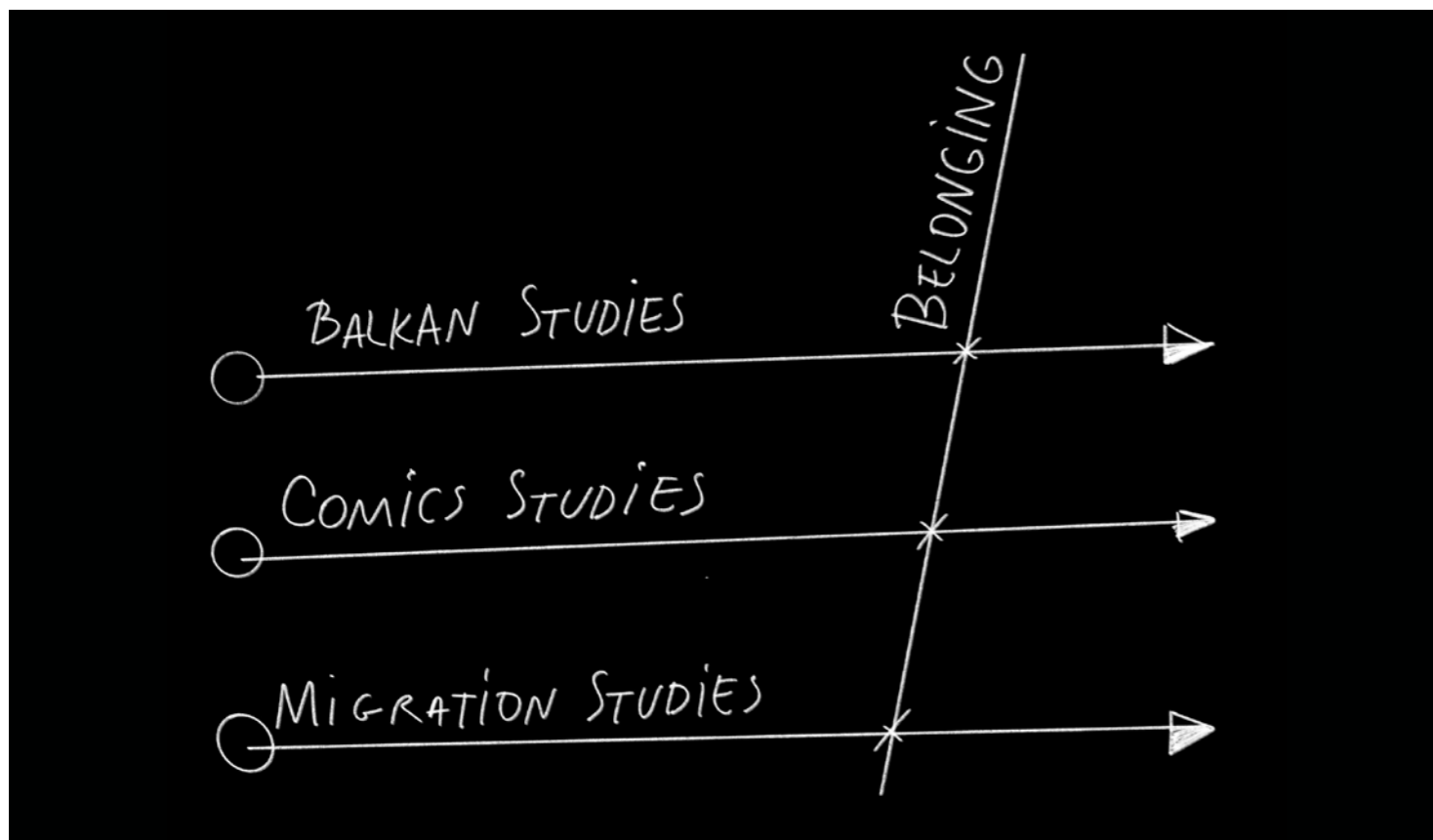


Image 40. Belonging as the viewpoint that connects all three vectors of research.

From then on, I undertook an accumulation of foundational academic knowledge on the Balkans by reading milestone literature such as *Imagining the Balkans* by Maria Todorova (1997), *The Balkans: A Short History* by Mark Mazower (2000), *The Balkans in World History* by Andrew Baruch Wachtel (2008), and *A Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* by Robert Kaplan (1993). *Migration and Identity: Historical, Cultural, and Linguistic Dimensions of Mobility in the Balkans* edited by Petko Hristov (2012) and published by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences provided me with fundamental concepts and history of Balkan migration. I also enrolled into the online course *International Migrations: A Global Issue* taught by Catherine Wihtol de Wenden³², which introduced me to key terminology of migration studies and core history of ideas regarding migration and displacement.

I was initially challenged to conduct research on Balkan comics due to the language barrier, the less developed local scenes, and the little available English-language academic literature. To circumnavigate the issue, I contacted Ralf Kauranen³³, José Alaniz³⁴, and Elizabeth Nijdam³⁵, who provided me with advice and referred me to Mihaela Precup's invaluable research on Romanian

³² Catherine Wihtol de Wenden – political scientist, Research Director at the French National Centre for Scientific Research and a senior researcher at the Institute for International Political Studies

³³ Ralf Kauranen – DSocSci and researcher, Literary Studies and Creative Writing, University of Turku.

³⁴ José Alaniz – professor in the Departments of Slavic Languages & Literatures and Cinema & Media Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle, USA.

³⁵ Elizabeth “Biz” Nijdam – lecturer in the Department of Central, Eastern, and Northern European Studies at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada.



Image 41. Photos from the Grassroots Comics workshop led by Sanna Hukkanen and comic artist Johanna Rojola.

comics. The Albanian scene was one of the most difficult to uncover, due to its infancy and lack of wider internet presence. Eventually, I found examples of Albanian comics and information on the Albanian scene after approaching the artist and educator Shpend Bengu responsible for the publishing of the first comics anthology in Albania *Novelat Grafike Shqiptare* (2014).

Before starting the production of the practical component, I participated in a workshop on Grassroots Comics³⁶ (7–8 March 2020) organised by activist Sanna Hukkanen and comic artist Johanna Rojola [Image 41]. The workshop introduced ways to use comics as a platform where individuals without artistic background to express their opinions and stories. My participation in it pushed me to consider involving individual migrants from the Balkans into drawing their experiences of life abroad. That proved unfeasible in the timespan of the thesis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the four-panel strip created during the workshop became my first attempt at expressing observations of my own migrant community [Image 42]. I still believe that involving individuals on grassroots level in the actual process of creation has the potential to reveal interesting dynamics and perspectives.

I conducted several recorded audio interviews with migrants from Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia during the process of conceptualising my practical component. After further deliberation, however, the interviews were not directly used, as that would have required me to conduct research on each country and the specifics of their migration movements. This endeavour exceeded the scope of this thesis project and I decided to leave that approach for potential future research.

³⁶ The workshop was part of the project *Comics and Migration: Belonging, Narration, Activism (Sarjakuva ja siirtolaisuus: kuuluminen, kerronta, aktivismi)* led by the University of Turku and funded by Kone Foundation.

GOING IN CIRCLES

08/03/2020
T20

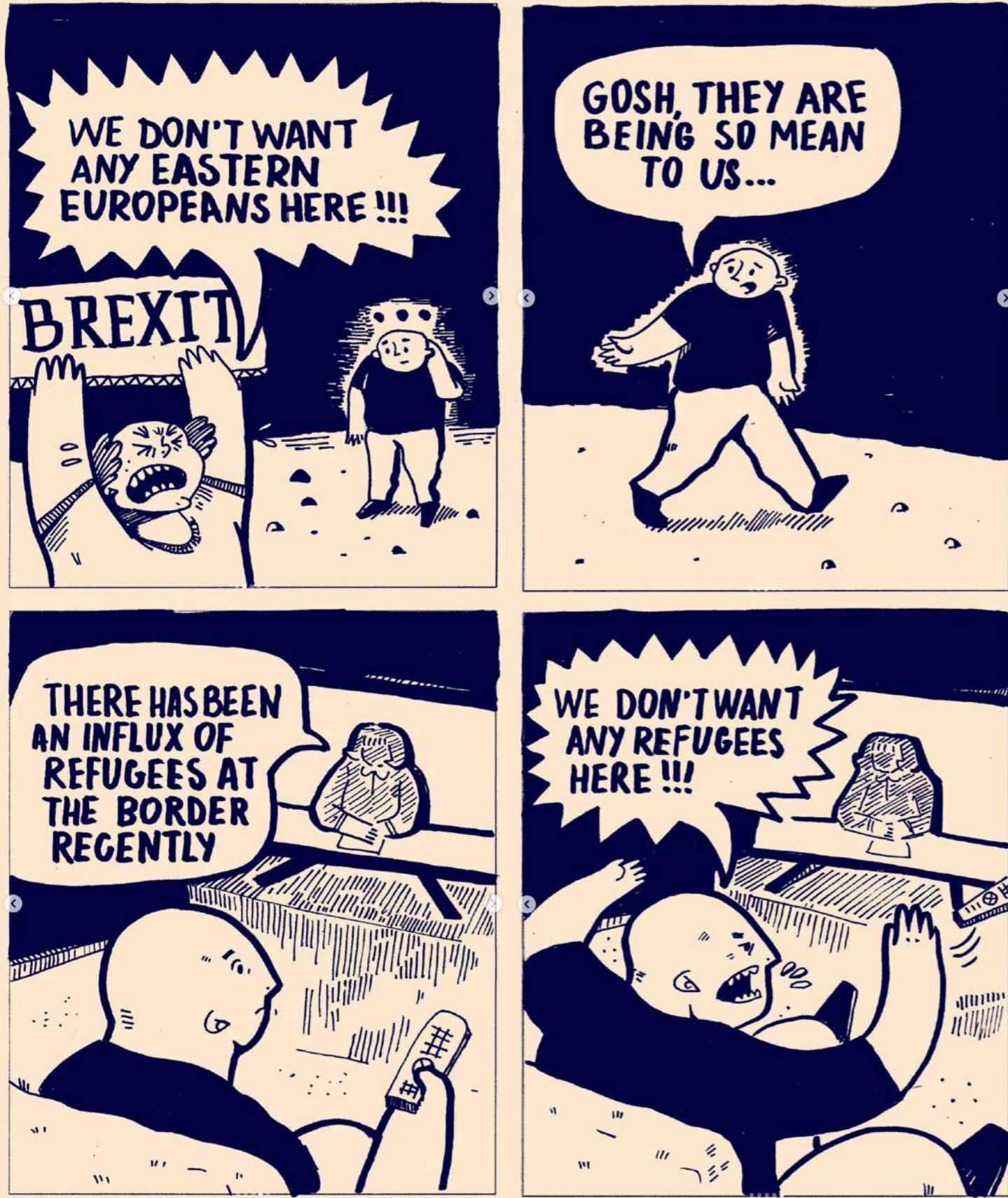


Image 42. The comic strip created during the Grassroots Comics workshop.

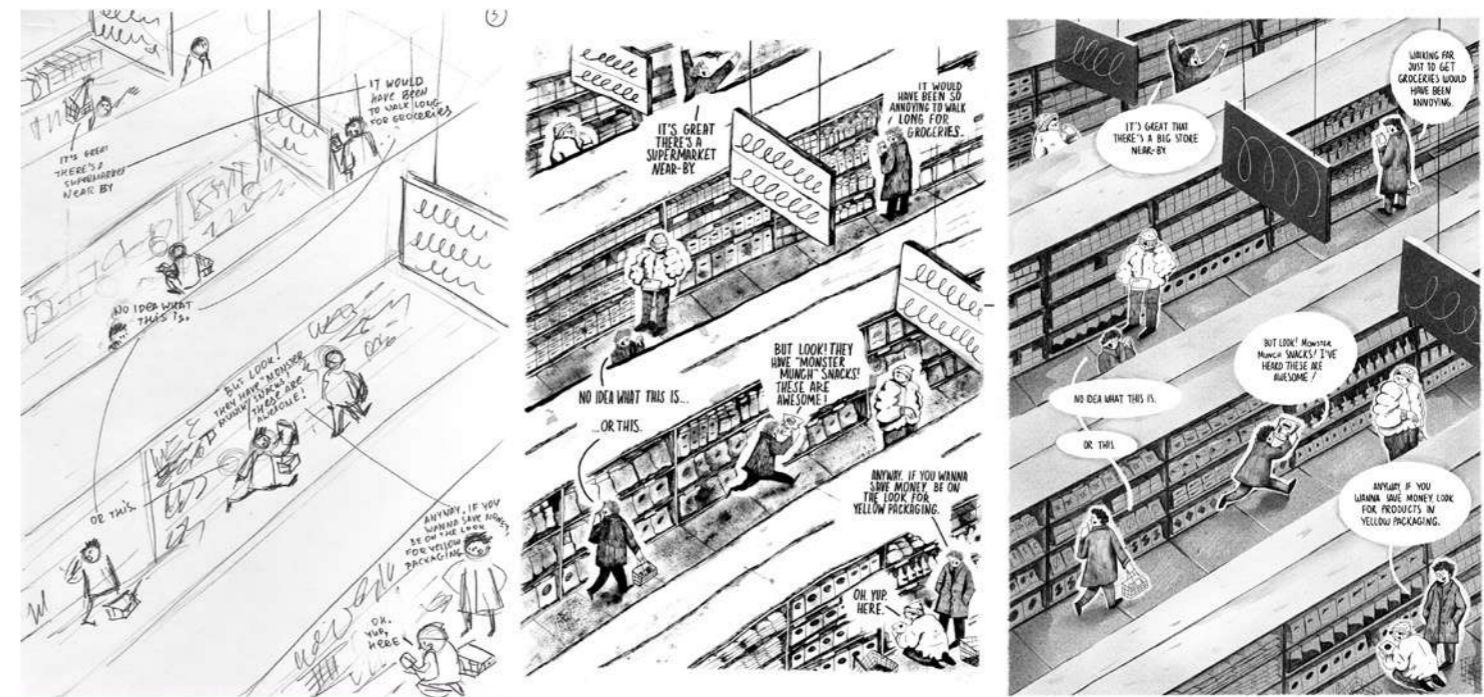


Image 43. Stages of creating a page from the comics Super, Supermarket.

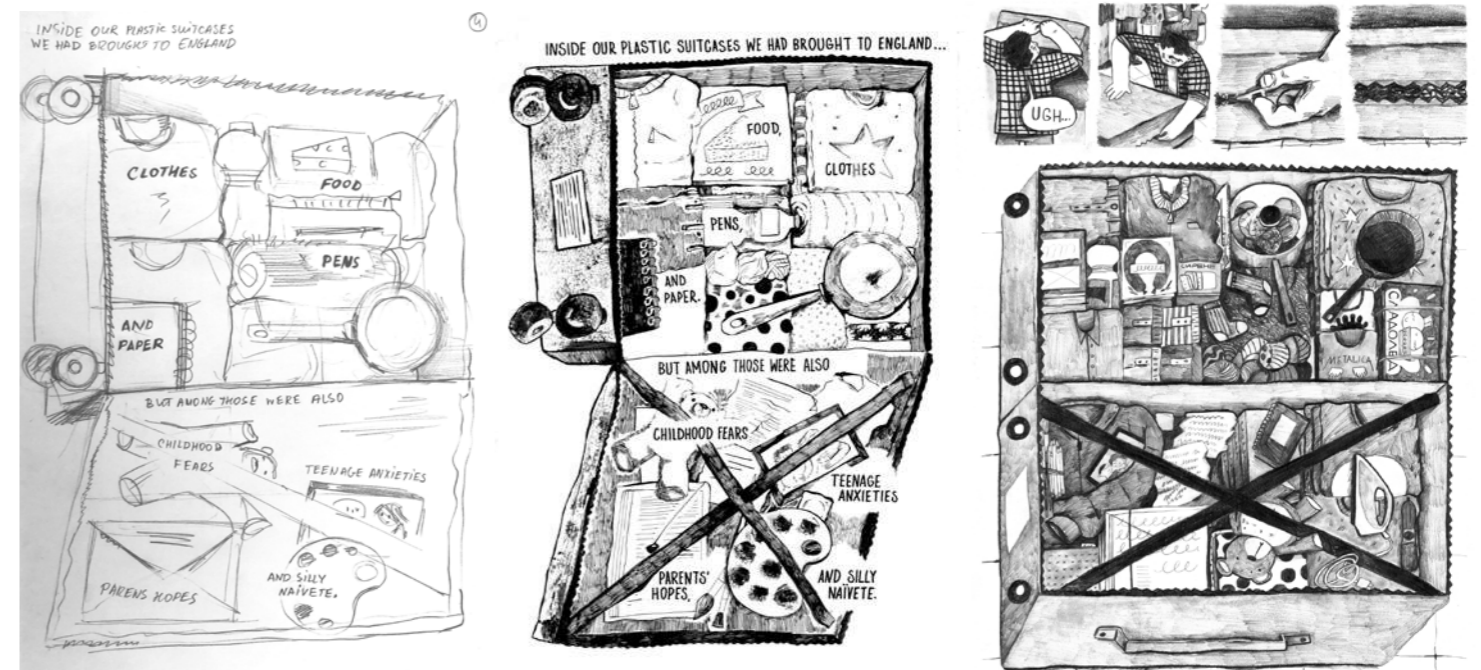


Image 44. Versions of the suitcase scene. The image on the left used to be part of the first version of Super, Supermarket, while the image on the right was re-interpreted for the story Terminal.

I addressed the practical component of thesis as an opportunity to extend my artistic practice and to explore comic art on a deeper level, which led me to write manuscript stories loosely based on my research, first-hand experiences, and conversation. From the overall process, the writing took the longest to complete. In order to construct the plots, I kept a journal for a brief period [Appendix 1], in which I took notes and drafted narratives. Several versions of the comics manuscript were read and critiqued by my thesis advisor Matti Hagelber, who provided feedback on stories that lacked interesting concepts, those that were ready to be illustrated, and those that had potential but needed further improvements. Upon the fifth version of the manuscript, I had established a sufficient outline in order to start storyboarding. The manuscript of the comics can be found in Appendix 2. Eventually, several of the stories were changed or removed from the final practical component deliverable due to scoping considerations.

The first story I created for *A Suitcase Concretely* was *Super, Supermarket*. I wrote and storyboarded it during the 2021 Basics of Comics course at Aalto University. A section of it I drew with ink and pen, however, the technique was later changed to digital as that provided better control over the details [Image 43].

Some pages from *Super, Supermarket* were subsequently removed such as the page with the suitcase, initially storyboarded to be part of this comics story. Upon a later review, it seemed misplaced, but it fit the story *Terminal* well, so I moved it there and re-drew it in pencil [Image 44].

Terminal, *Stuck*, *Pickers & Choosers*, *What Language?*, and *A Perfect Migrant* were first drafted as texts and edited by Matti Hagelberg. Several story ideas were eventually emitted due to concerns of scope. Yet, the pieces removed from this collection will be included in wider collection of stories on the topic, the creation of which has funded by a work grant from Art Promotion Centre Finland (TAIKE).

In terms of execution, I illustrated *Terminal*, *Stuck*, *What Language?*, and *A Perfect Migrant* in varied materials, thus providing a versatile exploration of the interpolation between different narratives and styles. The choice of digital, pencil, ink, and pastel as materials for the different stories was not a pre-meditated decision based on the plots but was an intuitive approach. For the thesis, I deemed it important to show several visual approaches and explore the effect of graphic enunciation of the plots³⁷.

The approach to the comic *Pickers & Choosers* was less linear. Initially, I intended it as a classic comics story such as *Terminal* and *Stuck* (as evidenced by the manuscript in Appendix 2), but it required a more textured rendition and less focus on characters and settings. The collage-like sequence of images and the dialogues happening over a backdrop of agricultural produce provided depth to the tractions of the labour migration paralleled to the 2016 Brexit campaign. The comics did not emerge as a linear result of storyboarding and planning but involved an organic intuitive process. I started working on it as oil pastel renditions of agricultural food related to labour migrants. That was followed by tests with a variety of layouts and element – with and without the newspaper excerpt and dialogues – until the point when I was satisfied with the collage-like aesthetic.

Overall, the process from initial research to completion of the thesis took around two years in parallel with my full-time work. I am, however, happy to continue working on this collection of comics stories until the end of the year with the support of the work grant provided by Taike.

As a note, for the remainder of the theoretical component the perspective will be switched back to impersonal in order to preserve the academic style of the text.

4.2. *A Suitcase Concretely*. Plot Overview

The following subchapter provides plot summaries of the pieces included in the practical component of the thesis. The collection consists of four stories of 10–12 pages each plus two more one-page comic strips.

4.2.1. *Super Supermarket*

Super Supermarket is the first comic story from the collection *A Suitcase Concretely*. The short 12-page comics involves two Bulgarian migrants and their first experiences as students in the British city of Coventry. The story is semi-autobiographical and includes several elements of the author's personal experience of life in the UK. It shifts between the main narrative – a mundane trip to the near-by supermarket – and the introspections of one of the main protagonists.

The comic begins with a full-page illustration of an accommodation house with the main protagonists' silhouettes in its centre and a discussion on any offerings available at the store. This is followed by several pages of introspections about the expat student life in Coventry and a map of the city centre with notes about cheap food stores.

The story shifts to a store visit with the protagonists passing through the aisles and observing new unfamiliar products. The food purchasing is followed by a sequence that shares the job search dynamics amongst migrants. During the document application process, the protagonists are asked a myriad of questions and required to send their actual passports in order to receive the permit for applying for a job³⁸. Even afterwards, the jobs that are available are frequently in the grey sector and paid 'under the table.' Directly following the precarious job marker situation are two pages containing detailed renders of food products and their prices.

Following the products pages is a quick overview of other dynamics encompassing the characters' lives – the illegal sharing of pirated files, the video calls aiming to maintain relationships, the frequent migrant gatherings intent on establishing a fledgeling community of support. The main discussions, however, regularly revolve around food and costs. The protagonists meander around

³⁸ Until 2014 the UK along with several other EU countries had a restriction on work permits concerning the new EU members Bulgaria and Romania.

³⁷ Elaboration on the concept of graphic enunciation (Marion 1993) is shared in Chapter X.

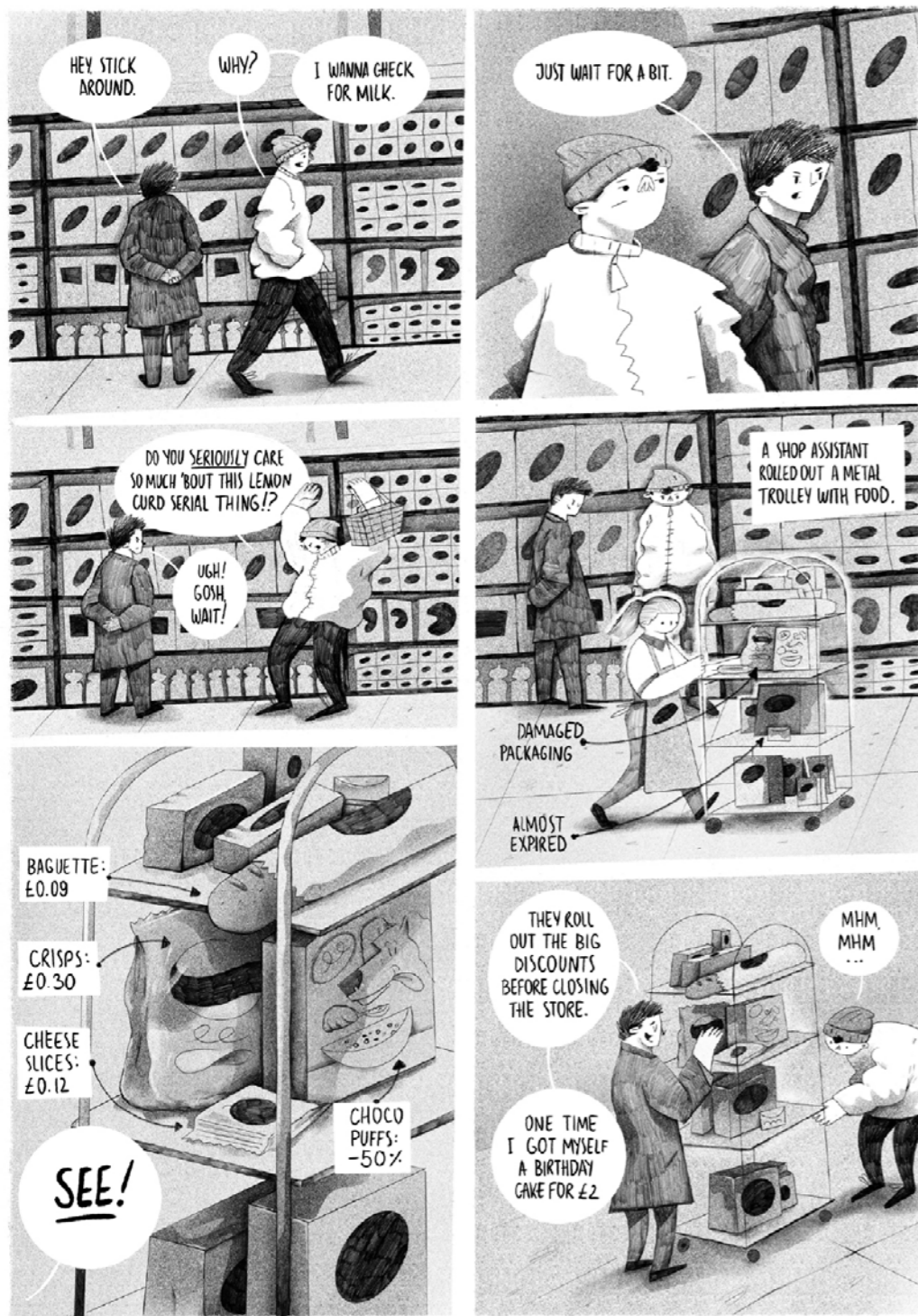


Image 45. The characters of *Super, Supermarket* waiting for the 'big discounts.'

the store aimlessly, waiting for the 'big discounts' to drop at the end of the workday. Then many soon-to-be expired products are highly discounted, so the protagonists end up buying a lot of even unnecessary things ('One time I got myself a birthday cake for £2') [Image 45].

By attempting to maintain connections to their native belonging, the protagonists decide to have a make-shift celebration of their home country's University Day. Buying beer from the store becomes yet another discussion on whether a purchase for a special occasion justifies the higher expense.

However, once they approach the cashier and are ID-checked, the protagonists are denied the beer, because their official ID cards are not accepted by the store. They hit a wall while trying to argue by being told that this is a 'store policy' without any further explanation. The story concludes with the protagonists exiting the store and being left only to drink tea. Despite this being University Day back in their home-country, in the host-country it is simply a normal day and therefore they must continue with their everyday life.

4.2.2. *What Language?*

The first of the two comics stirps included in the collection is *What Language?* It is a six-panel one-page strip about recognition of language and therefore validating a cultural belonging. Anecdotal derived from personal experiences, the mentioning of his Bulgarian nationality is frequently met with confusion regarding the main language spoken in the country. The presumption made about whether people in Bulgaria speak Russian, Turkish, or even German, are extensions of the cultural and psychological areas to which the country (and therefore its people) is being assigned.

4.2.3. *Terminal*

The comics *Terminal* is a story describing the hours prior to the departure when a family sends off their son to study abroad. A semi-autobiographical comic similar to *Super, Supermarket*, the work is stylistically closer to a journal entry and reflects the emotional dynamics of a specific moment.

It begins with a view from the backseat of a car heading to the airport. The traffic sign saying „Аеро-муце“ ['Airport'] indicates Bulgaria to be the place of the story. The boy realizes they have arrived a few hours too early, but that seems to have been his parents' plan all along. Before queueing to leave his baggage, the boy gets into a small argument with his parents due to them constantly checking whether he carries all his documents. Their care, expressed through worry, is an aspect of the relationship the inexperienced protagonist fails to reflect upon during an emotionally intense moment.

However, at the baggage check-in the suitcase shows to be slightly over the weight limit and after the boy is forced to open it, the reader sees its contents. The boy must open his suitcase in front of everyone to reshuffle his belongings and try to reduce the weight [Image 46].

After the baggage has been dropped off, the family spends the next couple of hours at a café providing the boy with last pieces of advice. His father's guidance becomes a background noise to the thoughts and introspections of his son until a quieter moment, when the boy realises his parents mask their fears behind warnings and instructions. Simultaneously, he wishes to just to finish with the prolonged goodbye and pursue the new experience of living abroad. The uncertainties ahead are too big and the faster they are faced, the earlier they will be resolved. The boy finishes his coffee quickly and leaves for the departures' gates.



Image 46. Suitcase and its contents. Scene from Terminal.

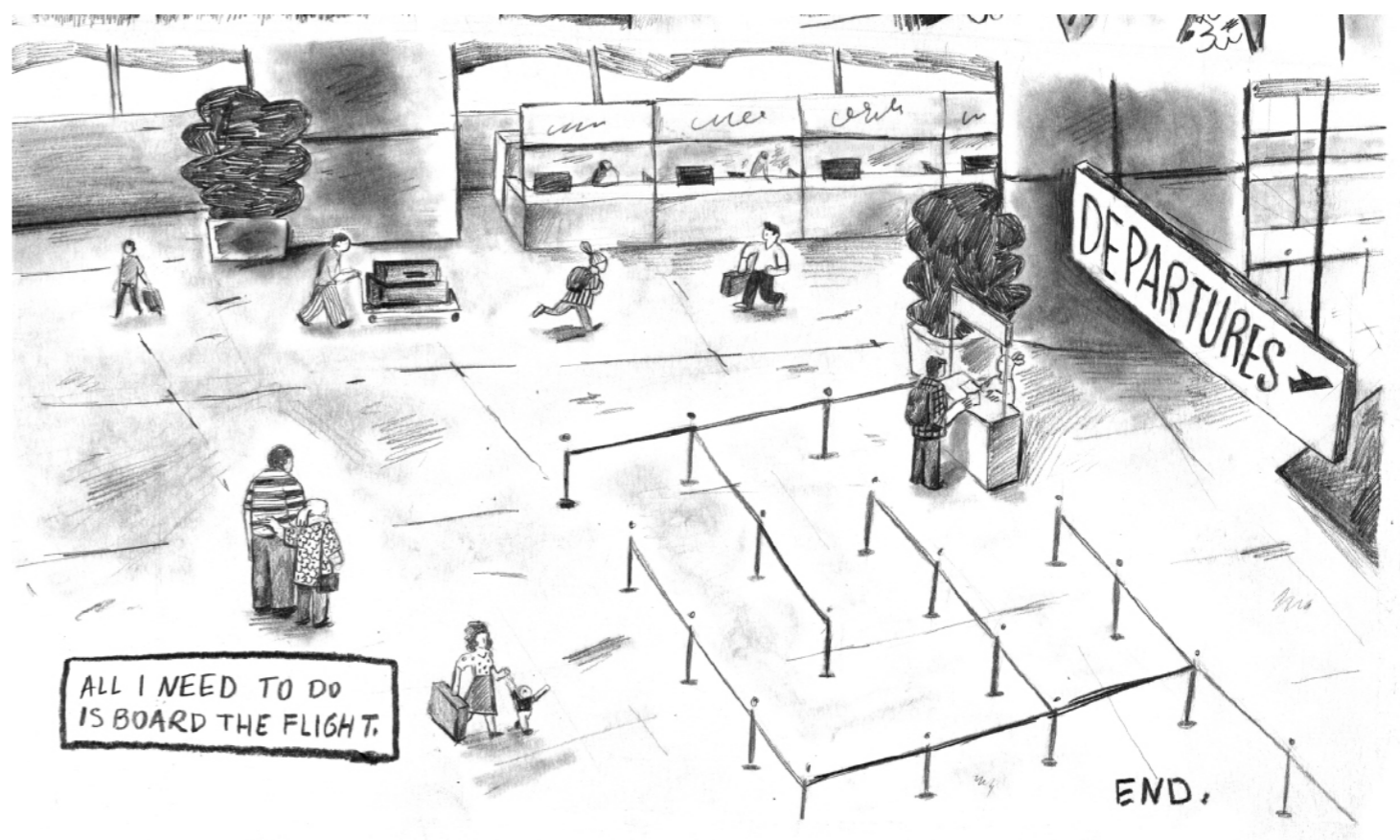


Image 47. Last panel of Terminal reminiscing the labyrinth panel from Super, Supermarket.

A small confrontation occurs between the boy and his mother, as she attempts to give him more food that she has been hiding until now. It erupts into a short argument, yet it is quickly forgotten with an exchange of hugs. The boy continues alone with his parents following his steps from a distance separated by the airport security barrier [Image 47] reminiscent of the labyrinth from the story *Super, Supermarket* [Image 50].

4.2.4. A Perfect Migrant

The strip *A Perfect Migrant* is about what is seen as the ideal East European immigrant according to common anti-immigration media discourse. Frequently, racist imagery is used in articles aiming to scare the readers with dangerous migrants. The use of Romani people to convey danger (Leggio 2019) not only misrepresents the ethnic realities of the migration groups, but also sharpens the racist attitudes against the Romani people. The trope about the perfect immigrant is prominent in migration discourse, as observed in countries such as the USA, where the idea of allowing only high-skilled experts to enter is often used as a rationalisation of tougher migration policies. However, many services and significant part of the agricultural sector are based on immigrant jobs – a condition brought to light especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The one-page experimental comics is a portrayal of some of the contradictions and impossible requirements expected by migrants in order to be considered perfect or worthy of earning their life in the host country.

4.2.5. *Stuck*

Already in the first frame, the story *Stuck* introduces the main girl protagonist trying to remember a certain word while conversing with her grandmother. The grandmother, however, seems to dismiss the girl's inability for verbal expression, criticizing her for forgetting her native language after being abroad 'only for five years.'

The girl's phrase 'It's on the tip of my tongue' drives the story into the direction of magical realism, for then the grandmother asks to check whether the word is genuinely on the tip of the girl's tongue. At first, she finds nothing, however, upon a second inspection, the grandmother sees that the word is not on the tip of her granddaughter's tongue but in fact stuck between her lower back molars.

The girl goes to the kitchen for a toothpick as an attempt to get the word out. The following two pages show an exchange between her and her grandfather, who is at the time solving crossword puzzles at the kitchen table. Without showing much interest, he directs her to the locations of the toothpicks and then asks about a particular word from the puzzle – '...a type of Japanese theatre.' The girl replies that the answer is 'noh', which sounds like the word *no*. The apparent confrontation irks the grandfather, whose response is to bring up the girl's five years of living abroad that have led her to lose respect for the elderly. After being corrected, he ignores his earlier reaction and continues with his crossword.

The girl returns to the room and tells her grandmother the toothpick is of no use and the word remains stuck. This prompts the grandmother to call the family dentist. After a quick exchange, the dentist provides an impromptu appointment. However, after an enquiry from the girl about a possible earlier slot, the grandmother again mentions her granddaughter's five years of living abroad, indirectly shaming her for turning meek.

The following page the girl at the dentist appointment the next day having her teeth examined. In most of the following pages, the dentist monologues telling the girl about another case like hers. The patient at the time had so many 'words, and idioms, and syllables, and morphemes' stuck in his mouth that 'his teeth had gone black.' The dentist had to pull his teeth out, so now he talked oddly, 'mostly gibberish.' The girl's situation, however, is different, and the dentist eventually removes the word. When the girl asks about the removed word, the dentist is unable to read it, so she simply throws it in the bin. On the last panel of the comics, we peek inside the bin where the blob of entangled letters lays over a pile of rubbish.

4.2.6. *Pickers & Choosers*

Pickers & Choosers is an 11-page story depicting the day of a Balkan immigrant following the 2016 Brexit referendum. It intertwines the personal, public, and legal through the collage-like overlaying of internal reflections, media discourse, and the institutional enabling of certain practices.

The story starts from the moment they (gender of the protagonist is undisclosed) wake up and learn the news until they go grocery shopping after work. The plot and dialogue are punctuated by snippets of news and blog articles depicting media and political reactions to migration from Bulgaria and Romania. The first articles are published the same day after the results of the referendum is announced. With the progress of the story, the snippets start displaying titles and images from years back tracking the way the anti-immigrant attitudes have been conveyed overtime. The last page of the story finishes with two snippets from 2020 and the need of the agricultural sector for seasonal workers amidst the COVID pandemic.

These evidence of media and political beliefs about immigration run in parallel to the common day-to-day activities of the protagonist by interjecting the breakfast, mixing with work, and casting a shadow over the groceries purchase. This is not necessarily even evident by the environment where the action occurs but happens as an internal conflict within the main character.

The story does not depict any characters or settings. The illustrations are only of food, much of which processed by migrant labour at some point of its production. Proverbially, asparagus is a demanding food the collection of which heavily relies on migrant labour. Similar is the case with berry pickers that fly annually to West European countries from all over East Europe. Only in recent years the living conditions of many labour migrants have become known in the wider media due to labour migrant clusters becoming super-spreaders of COVID cases in 2020 because of bad living conditions.

4.3. Expressions of the Engagement Mode in *A Suitcase Concretely*

In *Super, Supermarket*, an expression of the engagement mode – the banal activity of going to the grocery shopping – signifies a membership to the characters' community of practice and serves as a main plot driver. Through that activity, the protagonists discover new flavours and novel approaches to food [Image 48], ergo, they engage on a deeper level with the environment. Their financial precarity, however, prohibits a substantial emersion into the local economy: they are left to pick only from the cheapest viable options. Indeed, the prominent space given to kinds of products and their cost over two pages highlights the importance food prices play in the protagonists' lives [Image 49]. The constant compromise between cultural emersion vs. affordability of participation rebuffs the establishment of affiliations. Through economic marginalisation, the characters undergo an ineffective and unfulfilling cultural membership in their host-country. The illustration of the labyrinth and the subsequent captions demonstrate the duality of the characters' demeanour towards their new immigrant life – it is accepted as-is with navigational choices being made daily [Image 50].

Super, Supermarket also involves spatiality as an expression of engagement. Similar to *Fatherland*, the kitchen table represents an allegorical safe space [Image 51, Image 52] with the connecting

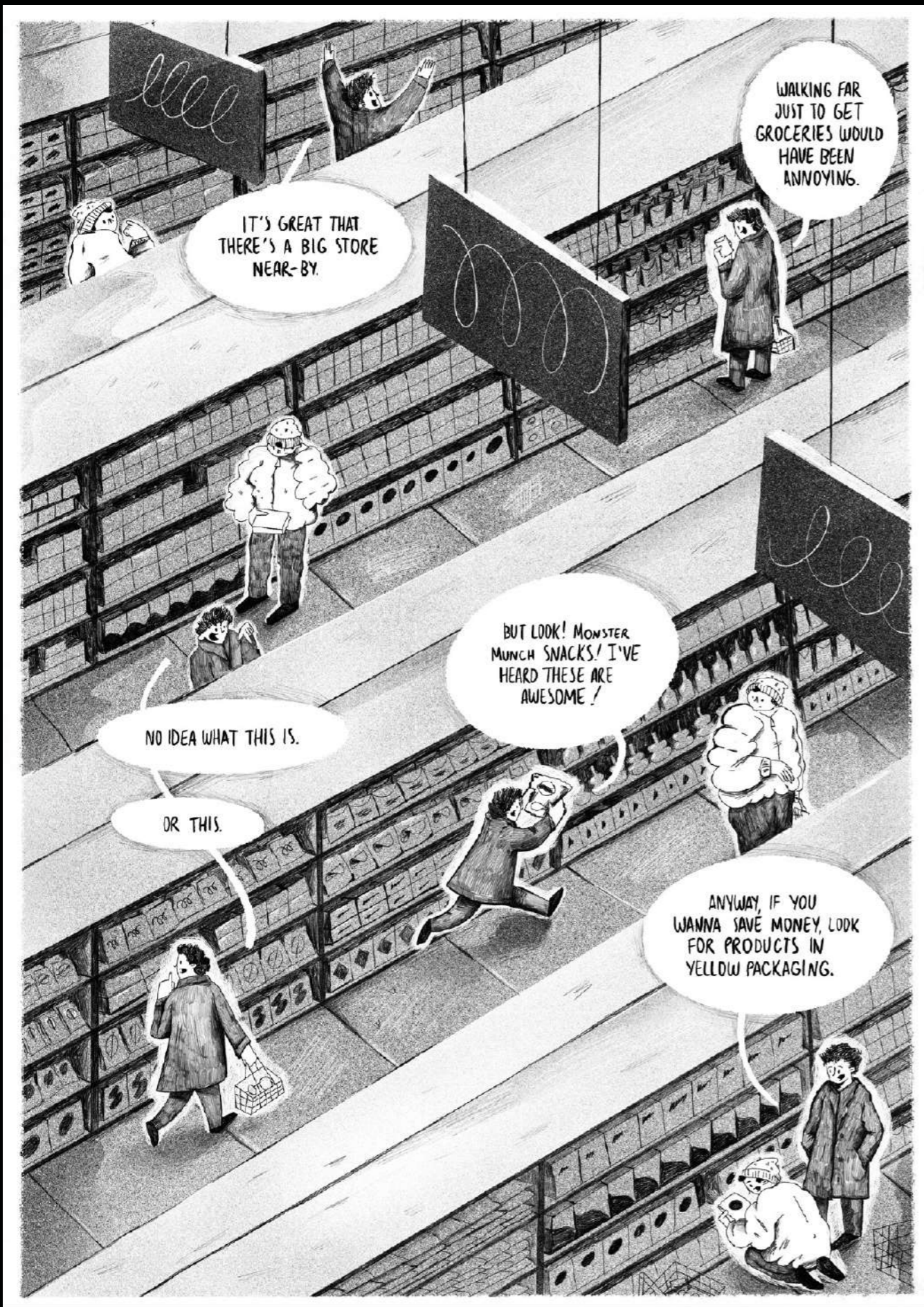


Image 48. A continuous one-panel page from *Super, Supermarket* showing the characters' exploration of the store.



Image 49. Renders of food items and their prices from *Super, Supermarket*.

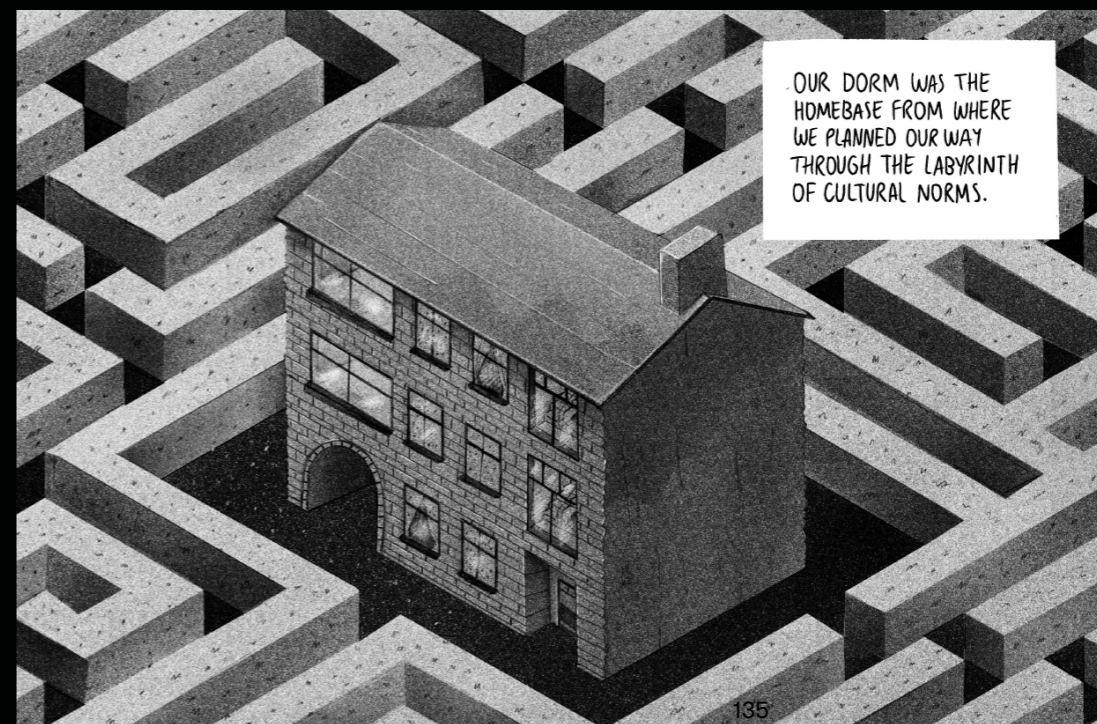


Image 50. Labyrinth panel from *Super, Supermarket*.



Image 51. Panel from *Super, Supermarket* referring to the kitchen table as a safe space for sharing experiences and opinions.

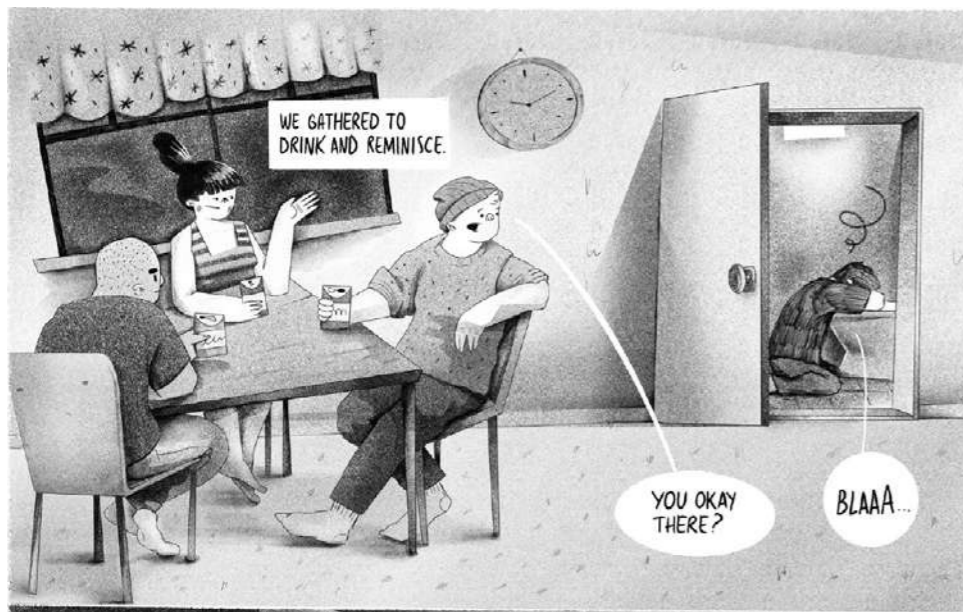


Image 52. Panel from *Super, Supermarket* referring to the kitchen table as a safe space for sharing experiences and opinions.

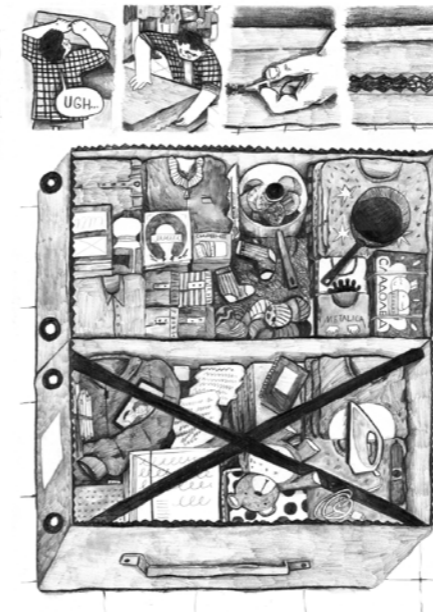


Image 53. The point of view of the suitcase overlaps the focalisation of the reader and the main character of the story.



Image 54. Scene of drinking coffee before the departure. The activity suggests a calm atmosphere, yet that only highlights the tensions between the characters.

thread being the unfamiliarity and instability the characters experience. The outlines of the panels define an intimate yet confined environment that facilitates conversations revealing the emotional realities of the immigrants within an innocuous setting. A residual habit from communist times, the kitchen table becomes the familiar space in the UK where Eastern Europeans reflect upon the everyday challenges without the weight of the established societal structures.

This tension can, however, strengthen the perceived membership to an immigrant's native culture, as evidenced in *Terminal* through the suitcase contents and the mother's continuous need to give home-made food to her son [Image 53]. The depiction of the open suitcase shows the objects necessary for re-settling; it also includes objects with purely sentimental value – the toy, the photograph – or objects that project cultural affiliations – the food. All of those become a tapestry signifying

a cultural affiliation similar to the way 'things German' in Nora Krug's graphic memoir (2018, no pagination) equated collectable symbols of her German affiliation. The lack of clear focalisation in the panel of the suitcase superimposes the perspective of the main character with that of the reader, thus simultaneously revealing the contents and reflecting upon their significance.

Another example of a reinforced native belonging is the scene at the café in *Terminal*. The coffee drinking culture is a remnants of Ottoman legacy all around the Balkans as noted in the case study of *Fatherland*. The disconnect between the boy and his concerned parents occurs over a coffee when the conversation should be easy and informal. However, this moment before the departure is also the time for the protagonist to confront his feelings about leaving [Image 54]. He is in a process of constant re-negotiation of his own psychological belonging, also experiencing a dash of guilt for his restlessness exacerbated further by the interactions with his family. The airport as a transitional space only accentuates these fluctuations of his own affiliations. The last panels of the story, however, reconcile this conflict by accepting the existence of both native and foreign belongings [Image 55].



Image 55. The end of the story resolves the tensions between the home belonging and the desire for a disconnect from it by placing them side by side and not separating them in a dichotomous manner.

Apart from food as a metonym for culture, labour is another angle through which engagement mode of belonging can be analysed. The myriad of intellectual, mechanical, social, and economic relations that underpin labour dynamics construct a multifaceted environment for the creation of meaning and therefore affiliations. Due to its diversity and scope, labour can be a separate thesis study, so this analysis (and *A Suitcase Concretely*) approaches it from a generalist angle.

The application for job permits in *Super, Supermarket* exemplifies the impact of labour on the sense of belonging. It barely reveals the process of performing labour but indicates the effect of non-access to work [Image 56]. The institutional restrictions on performing labour fall into the category of alignment mode, but the inability of an individual to perform the action prevents them from participating in their local community in a productive manner, thus also determining their engagement. It also obstructs the individual from obtaining security that could aid them in the settling process. This angle cannot be dismissed because, as Michael Ignatief suggests, belonging is inexplicably connected to the feeling of safety (2001). Shown in the comic is the partial solu-

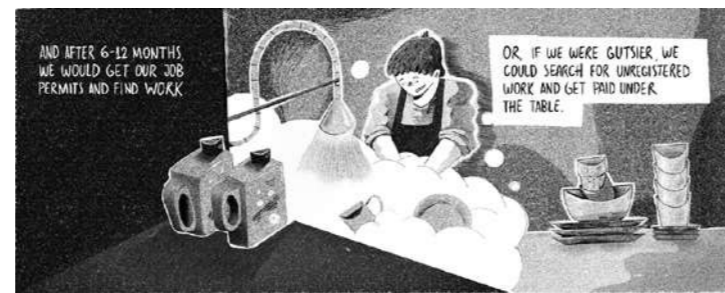


Image 56. The precarity of unregistered work as an option for circumnavigating the labour restrictions.



Image 57. Snippet from a Daily Express front page discussing an almost full majority populous support for banning new migrants together with the newspapers 'Crusade' against Romanians and Bulgarians. The employment of Christian knight imagery to illustrate the newspaper's campaign is a curious detail.

tion of performing unregulated work and being paid 'under the table.' This circumnavigates the restriction and earns the individual the financial means for better access to cultural participations.

Through an entanglement between engagement, alignment, and imagination modes, individuals can also be pressured to perform jobs stereotypically affiliated with group identities, e.g., the proverbial 'Polish plumber' or 'Romanian cleaner' (Alexandrova 2021, no pagination). As one testimony collected by Alexandrova states:

'A cleaner was what Bulgarians and Romanians "were", that was our designated space. This meant that, for wider society, when Eastern Europeans were doing low-skilled jobs they were where they belonged and were therefore accepted.' (Alexandrova 2021, no pagination)



Image 58. The repetition of the composition across the nine panels from *Stuck* signifies the commonality of such interactions.



Image 59. The statement about the forgotten language appears as a literal barrier between the two characters.

These attitudes bind *Pickers & Choosers* to labour as an expression of the engagement mode. The overreliance of Balkan and East European immigrants for food production is negated by the dehumanised store environment, from where end consumers purchase their food. The lack of the agricultural workers' voices additionally establishes them as expendable. Yet, they are still expected to willingly engage in the conditions of perform labour tasks of a particular nature on a day-to-day basis, as per Alexandrova.

Therefore, the hinderance to wider engagement within host-countries can be as impactful to immigrants' sense of belonging as their explicit participation in daily activities. An inability to engage in common activities can be a source of deep anxiety and isolation of certain immigrant groups. Established antagonistic attitudes can be thus weaponised by opportunistic political and media players that wage 'crusades' [Image 57] ([Daily Express 2013](#)) against said migrant groups³⁹.

Through comics, engagement can be explored in an appealing way not only in its dynamic expressions, but also in its mundanity and repetition. By employing a variety of techniques in the laying

³⁹ It should be said that these tactics of defining migrants from other groups in antagonistic frames have been employed by both West and East European countries. Similar attitudes were loudly voiced in Balkan countries during the refugee waves from the Middle East vilifying the refugees, including the activity of civilian units that 'patrolled' the borders ([Dillon & Vaksberg 2016](#)).

out of panels, illustration, text, etc., the comic artist can convey engagement in both its spatial and temporal dimensions. This is exemplified in *Stuck* in the section of the phone conversation between the grandmother and the dentist [Image 58]. The page could have been created as a single illustration, yet the repetition of the panels and composition underpins the commonplaceness of these conversational engagements and the close relationships with that community of practice. That is contrasted against the more pugnacious tone between the grandmother/grandfather and the girl.

Comics can highlight the engagement mode through language by visualising interaction and exchanges between characters ([Wenger 1998](#)). As Wenger notes, language and words are one reification of meaning as they provide a quick and direct way of meaning-creation between engagement participants. *Stuck* is therefore a subversive example in which the girl's inability to fully engage in the culture due to the forgotten word sets an immediate hinderance between her and the community of her home-country. The speech bubble containing the grandmother's first remark ('Abroad for only five years and you forgot your own language') is visualised as a literal barrier between the two characters [Image 59]. From there on, the girl's inability to engage with her grandparents becomes a leitmotif for the first half of the comics with the point being accentuated through a frequent repetition.

The later exchange between the girl and her grandfather further evidences the issue of simple self-expression in the native language [Image 60]. Despite struggling to remember a word in her mother tongue, the girl quickly answers the obscure crossword reference, but that remains misunderstood by her grandfather. The scene shows a sharpened sense of un-belonging and simultaneously builds the main protagonist as a character that might be witty yet disconnected even from her family. This inability for linguistic engagement is shown in its extreme through the



Image 60. The two-page interaction between the girl and her granddad accentuates the tension between native belonging and belonging as a migrant.



Image 61. The character's recognition of their accent as a being a problem echoes the sentiments of Nora Krug's character in *Belonging*.

girl's situational muteness in the second half of the story. Due to the dentist's work, the girl does not have any speech until the 'stuck word' has been removed.

Guilt expressed through language can similarly be observed in the comic *Pickers & Choosers*. The protagonist questions their command of the language and recognises their accent as a problem [Image 61] similarly to Nora Krug in Chapter 2: *Forgotten Songs* in *Belonging* (2018, no pagination). The results of the 2016 Brexit referendum re-affirm the assumed faults of Eastern European migrants. Analogous to Krug, the protagonist from *Pickers & Choosers* can hide behind the whiteness of their skin, however, language then suddenly transforms into the marker of otherness. Thus, both the protagonist in *Pickers & Choosers* and the character of Krug in *Belonging* become increasingly cognisant of their verbal expression. This then is perceived as an issue because the face-to-face communication is so immediate that it affects 'the negotiation of meaning through a process that seems like pure participation' (Wenger 1998, p. 62). As Wenger had noted, conversations 'create shortcuts to communication' by actively engaging interlocutors and maderising their ideas (ibid.). These shortcuts to communication can also result in rapid identification of the participants that do not affiliate with a certain community of practice. The concerns of Krug and of the *Pickers &*

Choosers protagonist about their accents indeed channel worries about their disengagement from the community of practice in their host-countries.

Isolation due to language could be also observed as a subtext of the story *Super, Supermarket*. The protagonists are not seen to interact with non-Bulgarians with the only difference being the last scene with the cashier determined by the necessity of the interaction. Already in the opening page the protagonists are isolated in from the other figures on the windows [Image 62]. Despite their proficiency in English (the protagonists are university students in the UK), they choose to gather with other Bulgarians, as that provides the safety and stability of a familiar community that could help with the navigation in an unfamiliar environment, as per Ignatief (2001). It is also worth noting that in the case of *Super, Supermarket* the readers encounter protagonists less willing to engage with their host-country than the characters in *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan*. However, the protagonists in *Super, Supermarket* are not expected to acculturate or assimilate quickly: at the end of the story, they simply return to their accommodation and are not deported.



Image 62. Already from the first page, the characters from *Super, Supermarket* are isolated in a frame of their own.

Encapsulation over lines of language is a well-documented phenomenon amongst worker groups from Bulgaria in England. Most of the Bulgarian immigrants are low-skilled workers that have a poor knowledge of English (Maeva 2012, p. 318) [Image 63]. Due to that, they end up living ‘in another language’ environment, which inevitably hinders their practical and emotional integration in a new society (Colic-Peisker 2002, p. 149). According to many immigrants, poor knowledge of English is the reason they feel ‘not at home’ and ‘foreign’ in the new country (Espenshade & Fu 1997) with those that know English well usually helping the newcomers (Maeva 2012, p. 318). This language barrier prevents the migrants from expressing themselves and creates issues of ‘economic, social and health nature for Bulgarians [sic]’ (Maeva 2012, p. 317). As Maeva notes, despite living far from home, migrants are ‘constantly in a real or virtual Bulgarian language environment’ through the growing Bulgarian communities especially in big cities like London and Birmingham (2012, p. 320). Furthermore, Bulgarian labour migrants settle within an already established Eastern European worker environment. Eventually, they learn other Slavic languages



Image 63.

like Polish and Russian quicker than English through the everyday interactions at work with other Eastern European peers (2012, p. 321). Another example of that is a study from 2012 by Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska showing low levels of social engagement amongst North Macedonian migrants in Italy (particularly female Muslim migrants) due to their lack of Italian language skills and cultural specificities that prevent them to enrol in Italian language courses⁴⁰ (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2012, p. 135).

The engagement mode of belonging is one of the most multifaceted and immediate to observe within the relation between migrants and their communities of practice. This subchapter included on several expressions of engagement in the comics from *A Suitcase Concretely*. These are the cultural engagement, participation in labour, restriction of engagement, and language, with each of these instances possessing the potential to be a separate study of their own. However, in each of these cases, the reader can see that even if belonging is constantly re-negotiated and re-constructed, it is never fully denied, i.e., the stories avoid a distinct separation between members and non-members through a clear antagonistic polarity that an analysis through the lens of identity would have provided.

4.4. Expressions of the Imagination Mode in *A Suitcase Concretely*

As an artform, comics innately connect to imagination. Artists can identify perceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes by reifying them into creative visualisation. Through creative visualisations of oral histories, memories, and fantasies, the imagination mode can inform a less stereotyped depiction of migration within comics. In the case of the Balkans, that can be an exploration of both the social environment of the host-countries and the vision of migrants for moving there, and the historical narratives that underpin a lot of their meaning-creation.

The magical realism approach to belonging in the story *Stuck* exemplifies the conveying of concepts difficult to reify in the real world. The previous subchapter analysed the way language is expressed through engagement, which is mostly conveyed through mutual actions. However, language can also be viewed as an expression of the imagination mode from a conceptual angle that ontologically signifies belonging. This conceptualisation of language as binding symbol of belonging is invoked in the comics via the literal visualisation of the bundle of words [Image 64]. The story can also be read as a symbol for the limitations of the imagination mode, which rely on preconceived notions, such as the implicit non-negotiable belonging to the native culture. The girl

40 Bielenin-Lenczowska writes: “[Migrant women] do not participate in public life, not only because of their lack of command of the Italian language, but also mostly due to the cultural construction of gender relations known in their country or region of origin. In their native villages, women are not allowed to travel alone or work outside the home (sometimes they can work as teachers, cleaning ladies or nurses). In Italy, they claim, their husbands do not allow them to go to work” (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2012, p. 134).



Image 64. The bundle of letters as a literal visualisation of the entanglement between language and belonging.



Image 65.

protagonist attempts to abide by these prejudices through the ‘unsticking’ of the forgotten word and proving to her grandparents that she still belongs to her home community.

The presence of the imagination mode within *Stuck* can be also observed as part of the protagonist’s self-image as someone living abroad and the prestige – or lack thereof – that it carries within her native belonging. A parallel can be made with a similar dynamic in the Western Part of North Macedonia with its separate class of people called *pechalbari* (roughly translated as *earners* in English). These people enjoy higher status due to the money they have earned through working in Italy and other Western countries. That is constructed through a display of objects like expensive houses and clothes, or through excessive spending in cafes and discos (Bielenin-Lenczowska, p. 136). The ideal self-image they construct from the earned prestige (i.e., imagination mode) is expressed through its everyday display (i.e, engagement mode).

Immaterially, their prestige is shown through mixing of foreign words into the native speech. However, instead of approaching her with awe as the North Macedonian *pechalbari* are by their communities, the girl’s grandparents scold her. They continuously remind the protagonist she has lived abroad only for five years as an argument that she must not forget her home belonging [Image 65].

This interaction between the girl visiting home and the grandparents also explores an angle of gendered inequality of migrant perceptions. As Bielenin-Lenczowska mentions, the prestige of being a *pechalbar* applies mostly to men as a general expression of masculinity – especially young and unmarried men that express prestige through material possessions (2012, p. 136). *Stuck*, however, is a story with a female protagonist confronted with the gender stereotypes of her native environment. A potential alternative production of *Stuck* could follow lines of a male protagonist’s grappling with language and culture, and the way that is being perceived by his community.

Photographs and images also play an important visual role in the imagination of *Stuck*, similar to Krug’s *Belonging* and Bunjevac’s *Fatherland*. In many of the scenes involving interactions between the girl and her grandparents, the walls are covered with photos, paintings, and artefacts that depict religious symbols, family photos, or just generic nature scenes. The protagonist is depicted in one of the panels passing through a corridor with the walls covered in framed photos and paintings [Image 67]. There seem to be wedding photos, graduations, and standard family portraits. The number of Orthodox icons and religious symbols relate to the family’s cultural affiliations and beliefs; there is also a reproduction of the Ivan Shishkin’s and Konstantin Savitsky’s painting *Morning in a Pine Forest* (1889) [Image 66]. This reproduction was widely popular in the Soviet Union cultural space and considered as a kitschy artefact (Mikheev 1996). As if to highlight the ‘only five years living abroad’ accusation of the grandparent, all the images from the background provide the girl with continuous reminders of the cultural affiliations she should be feeling.

Overall, the definitive separation of belonging and unbelonging observed in *Stuck* is an antithesis to the Jones and Krzyżanowski ‘conceptual unpacking’ (2011) of identity into a more borderless model. By reading the comic story through this lens of imagination, it becomes an allegory for the rigidity of the imagination mode. Despite the inherent creativity of the imagination, its overreliance



Image 66. Morning in a Pine Forest by Ivan Shishkin and Konstantin Savitsky painting (1889).



Image 67. The picture in the top left corner echoes the painting Morning in a Pine Forest.



Image 68. The comic strip What Language? from A Suitcase Concretely.

on stereotypes and prejudices can create inflexible environments restricting individual's ability to re-construct their interpretation of belonging and forcing them to tolerate an imposed status quo.

The imagination mode also accesses fantastical ideas about migrant groups constructed by the host-country's communities of practice. This can be observed especially in the strips *What Language?* and *A Perfect Migrant*. *What Language?*⁴¹ shows the limits of imagination that define migrants from smaller communities by grouping them within proximate dominant cultures. For example, the Bulgarian in case is assumed to be part of Russian, Turkish, or German cultural spheres [Image 68], relating directly to the period of Balkan history when the three superpowers – the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire – fought for regional dominance. A century later, it is often that people from the Balkan states are assigned cultural features and stereotypes foreign to them. The changing of the hats with each new suggestion is another manifestation of the stereotypes established by the imagination mode. The iconic types of headwear signify affiliation, yet they are externally imposed, not organically adopted, or constructed by the addressees.

A Perfect Migrant, on the other hand, quite literally summarises imaginary attitudes encompassing the *good migrant* concept [Image 69]. Countries with tightening migration policies commonly argue for access to be granted only to *good* immigrants. Often in the public discourse these are described as highly skilled, well-educated people (Editorial Board 2018), i.e., those that are considered useful by the host-country. However, statistics in the UK, show that 41% of the EU-2⁴² migrants (Fernández-Reino & Rienzo 2022) work in jobs for which they are overqualified, particularly if they have a foreign qualification (Chiswick & Miller 2008). This raises a question whether the focus on well-educated immigrants does not have a PR component to it, or whether it attempts to disguise nationalistic or racist (especially concerning the Romani population) sentiments. Furthermore, as shown in *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan*, the good migrant label is not a goal achieved by career success, but a constantly shifting target frequently encompassing impossible to fulfil criteria. Therefore, that label of a *never good-enough migrant* becomes inescapable. Outside of the scope of this thesis is also the conversation on whether migration communities should be viewed in purely economic terms.

In order to observe some of these dynamics, the comic *Pickers & Choosers* overlays the main character's everyday activities with newspaper snippets of stereotypes and overgeneralisations [Image 70]. These news articles provide a context into the bigger narrative that exists beyond the narrative and the character's activities. The story shows the transformation of marginal attitudes into a predominant discourse through the validation of certain public events – in this case, the Brexit referendum results. Suddenly, the protagonist finds themselves as the subject of a 'crusade' carried out by the host-country [Image 57]. The use of the word 'crusade' addresses the shared images in the West about the righteous fight against the other, established through the numerous narrative reincarnations in popular media and culture. Additionally, the news title *How Romanian Criminals Terrorise Our Streets* juxtaposed next to the 'saucy' photo of Nigella further references the cliché about the women that need to be protected from outsiders [Image 71].

41 The creation of *What Language?* was provoked by several interactions of this kind that I have encountered.

42 The EU-2 members group includes Bulgaria and Romania.

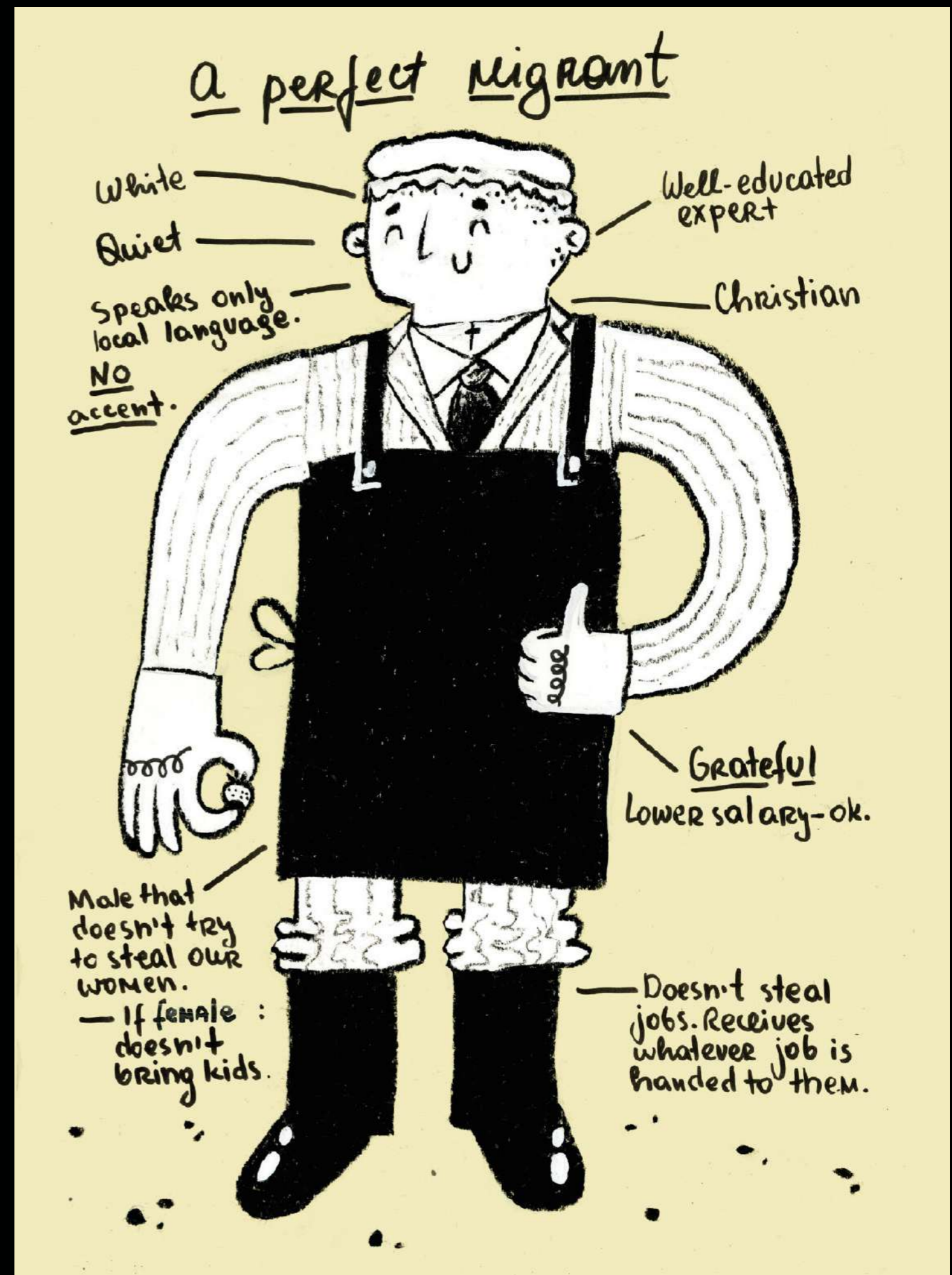


Image 69. The strip *A Perfect Migrant* from *A Suitcase Concretely*.

4.5. Expressions of the Alignment Mode in *A Suitcase Concretely*

Alignment is a precarious mode to explore in comics, but one that has potential for a significant impact. Institutional frameworks, and laws – expressions of alignment – can hardly make for an entertaining content despite their relevance to migration. However, the alignment mode can be transformed into an engaging and entertaining frame if conveyed through stories and illustrations. Plots that reveal belonging through institutional activities and archival documents were already analysed in the case studies on *Belonging* and *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan*. Despite not featuring detailed accounts of these said processes, comics can depict the effect expressions of alignment have on individuals.

Both *Super*, *Supermarket* and *Pickers & Choosers* feature aspects of the alignment mode. In *Super*, *Supermarket*, the job application process [Image 72] becomes an institutionally set barrier for participating into the labour market and it pushes the characters to become part of the shadow economy. The overburdening of forms and documents is visualised quite literally through the character being hidden behind a pile of paper. Furthermore, the requirement that migrants send their passports, places them in a vulnerable position both bureaucratically and psychologically. On the side of its main practical functions (method of identification, crossing borders, etc.), the passport represents a symbol of national affiliation. Migrants are placed in a grey in-between situation by the requirement that they to renounce access to this document for a set period⁴³. Their belonging to the host-country is hindered through the job permit restrictions, but an expression of the belonging to their home-country has been simultaneously revoked.

The job restrictions imposed by some states of the EU and the European Economic Area (EEA)⁴⁴ after the 2007 accession of Bulgaria and Romania into the union affected many of the labour migrants. Most notably, their removal of these restrictions in 2014 after the maximum transitional period fuelled the anti-immigration campaign spearheaded by UKIP. The leader of the party Nigel Farage claimed that a ‘tidal flood’ of migrants is expected after the free labour movement restrictions are lifted and the UK will open itself to 29-million Bulgarians and Romanians⁴⁵ (Savage 2012, Debating Europe 2014). This number, however threatening, consisted of the combined overall populations of both countries – an unrealistic threat by any means.

The end of *Super*, *Supermarket* and the argument about the ID-card [Image 73] is another example of a mundane and banal tension that prevents the characters from engaging in an activity that affirms their belonging to their home culture. Of course, it would be an exaggeration to state that



Image 70. Excerpts from *Pickers & Choosers* from *A Suitcase Concretely*.



Image 71. Excerpt from *Pickers & Choosers* from *A Suitcase Concretely*.

In summary, the imagination mode can be approached in comics from a variety of angles – from the realistic, to the allegorical, to the fantastical. The discursive frame it provides can lead to identifications and investigations of stereotypes, prejudices, and attitudes, as exemplified in *A Suitcase Concretely*. In future developments of this project, the imagination mode can additionally be used to explore the visions and hopes immigrants construct upon embarking on a life abroad.

⁴³ When undergoing the process of job permit application, my passport was withheld for 10 months

⁴⁴ Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK extended their restrictions until the end of the transitional period in 2014 (Schiek, Olivera, Forde, Alberti 2015).

⁴⁵ The original statements have been taken down by UKIP and Nigel Farage from their respective websites. Reliable news media sources such as Sky News and The Times are used as sources for this information.



Image 72. Excerpts from *Super, Supermarket* from *A Suitcase Concretely*.



Image 73. Excerpts from *Super, Supermarket* from *A Suitcase Concretely*.



Image 74. Excerpts from *Pickers & Choosers* from *A Suitcase Concretely*.

this occurrence threatens their belonging, however, it antagonises the characters as they are not allowed to experience their home culture due to an unreasonable restriction.

The archival materials used in *Pickers & Choosers* extend the modes of belonging explored similarly to Krug's and Bunjevac's works. The day-to-day activities of the characters, expression of their engagement mode, confront the imagination mode of the community they inhabit and produce tension that establishes notions of unbelonging. Simultaneously, the last page of the comic blurs the lines of the meaning of belonging that these migrants in the UK construct [Image 74], as their connection to the host-country is in a permanent state of flux due to institutional actions. The alignment mode frame established by the host-country is driven by an uneven distribution of power – indeed, a shortcoming of the alignment mode, as noted by Wenger – and therefore, stable consensus cannot be established. This is particularly represented by the juxtaposed images of the

fresh and the half-eaten pieces of meat, alluding to the 2020 accounts of COVID-19 outbreaks in German slaughterhouses, where East European and Balkan migrants lived and worked in substandard conditions (Synovitz 2020, Mutler 2020).

These points prove that the alignment mode can provide a substantial material for comics experiments despite its seemingly dry nature. The institutional and wider societal structures can frame conflicts within the story that can therefore be paced, visualised, and retold via comics in an engaging and poignant way. The innately impersonal nature of institutions and government processes can be humanised through the display of their effect on migrants' lives, therefore establishing a basis for empathy and better comprehension of the migrants' lived experiences and renegotiations of belonging.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary

Through the history of the 20th and the 21st centuries the Balkans have been slowly transforming from being the *Near East* to becoming *Southeast Europe* (Wachtel 2008, ch. 5). Despite different naming of the region, politicians still talk about the Western Balkans (the non-EU members) and weaponize exclusionary migrant discourse when the topic of the day requires it (as during the Brexit referendum). The thesis is not an argument that the Balkans should be seen as part of the West – that would only establish a different frame of the *us/them* division and would continue an Orientalistic framework of the discourse. Furthermore, the West is not a monolithic and stable concept – its centre has moved several times during history. The thesis is an argument that migrants from the Balkans, and the Balkans themselves, should get involved in an exploration of their own cultural affiliations, everyday activities, and institutional peculiarities as dynamic and shifting belongings. Through the malleable viewpoint of belonging, the communities will be able to distance themselves from notions of *sui generis* uniqueness and victimisation, and simultaneously be able to by-pass the attitudes of that host-communities might display.

In this thesis, I have explored aspects of immigrant belonging through the lens of comics. The text covered three case studies on renowned comics by established artists against Etienne Wenger's framework of belonging modes. The findings of these case studies were interpolated with the practical component of the thesis, the comic story collection *A Suitcase Concretely*, which was further analysed within the Wegner's theoretical frame. The research question that this thesis addressed was: What are ways for depicting feelings of belonging within Balkan immigrant communities through comics? Following is a summary of the analysis carried out through the case studies and the practical component.

Firstly, I proved through the thesis that belonging in comics is possible to be analysed through the engagement, imagination, and alignment modes of belonging. Each of these modes contains its own specific features, however, they can work in parallel within a piece of work, as demonstrated in the comic story *Pickers & Choosers*. Neither mode excludes any of the others and by combining them, the comics artist can achieve a multi-layered meaning-creation and amplification of the message of the story. Appealing and entertaining narratives informed by these theoretical structures, own the potential to establish connections of empathy and interest towards misrepresented or marginalised within the readership.

Secondly, engagement is a mode that can be explored in a myriad of angles. The comics artist can show the characters' belonging to a certain community of practice through engaging them in activities defined by their localisation and temporality. Examples of such engagements are participation in cultural activities, conversations and language, and performance of labour. Another way of expressing engagement is through symbolically or metonymically using iconic objects, which signify specific affiliations to communities of practice. One example is the use *cezve* for coffee-making amongst Balkan immigrants; another example is the food that immigrants of a specific community are bringing with them from their home-country.

Engagement can be explored also through the performativity of language, e.g., writing, talking, partaking in conversations. The immediacy of language in face-to-face interactions is a shorthand to establishing levels of membership to a specific community. This can be effectively displayed within comics through the feature of the artform to juxtapose illustrations and text. Language, as all other expressions of engagements, can be further highlighted through the method of subversion with the comics artist showing tractions within the community membership and therefore underlining the frequent need for re-negotiation of affiliations.

Thirdly, the comics artist can approach belonging through the imagination mode by conveying the visions of shared futures and common histories within a community of practice. The use of comics to re-create these underlying beliefs can be a creative approach to confronting not only the hopes and fears of individuals, but also the preconceived notions that often drive their actions. The imagination mode addresses the stereotypes encountered by immigrants within their host-countries; artists can use the creative freedom that the comics artform provides to visualise and synthesise these stereotypes. The imagination mode provides a vast frame for experimentations on the topic of belonging; simultaneously, it can reveal beliefs and prejudices that underpin certain interactions with and within migration communities.

Lastly, by the alignment mode provides comics artists with a less obvious, but potentially intriguing and impactful frame for analysing belonging. By exploring government institutions, processes, and enterprise-level activities, comics stories can reveal a lot about hegemonic power dynamics and under-represented or marginalised communities. Despite an outwardly dry nature, these expressions of the alignment mode can provide insights into structural dynamics that impact immigrant communities on a personal, relatable, and humanising level.

5.2. Potential for Future Research & Practical Developments

Above are outlined only several of the avenues through which belonging can be explored in comics. The malleability and experimental nature of the artform allows for a myriad of techniques, visual styles, narratives, and approaches. In the case of Balkans migration, *A Suitcase Concretely* only contains several of the many potential stories that I could have written and illustrated, if I had undertaken alternative approaches. Consciously, I did not want to frame the Balkan migration

through the lens of national exceptionalism, as it felt restrictive and dogmatic. For that reason, I have avoided references to national histories, flags, symbols, and costumes, unless employed in a subversive way. A more generalist approach instead made more sense to contribute to the representation and presence of this immigrant group's experience within the comics scene. However, I recognise the Introduction chapter noted the need for cultural specifics. In the future, I wish to further explore this balance of specific stories that simultaneously avoid the stereotypical clichés and exceptionalism viewpoints.

One approach for future explorations of the topic is collecting migrant testimonies. That way, a vaster diversity of experiences can be included from people belonging to different classes, ethnicities, genders, etc., as I realise that by authoring the stories from *A Suitcase Concretely* myself, the experiences included are by nature extremely narrow. Interviews can be conducted from people that are from EU and non-EU countries in order to visualise the way those differences affect communities of outwardly approximate cultural backgrounds. Testimonies can be also collected from labour migrants who engage in annual agricultural jobs – these can provide a valuable insight into their day-to-day life without exposing their identities to any potential repercussions and threatening their livelihood. Thus, a more truthful and engaging retelling can be made of their labour which directly affects our everyday food consumption and relates to power dynamics within the European labour market.

Another approach to subversively examine migration is collecting testimonies and evidence from the home-locations that were left behind. Many of the East European and Balkan countries have experienced vast depopulation – Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia being some of the starkest examples. The visceral effect of that can be seen in the depopulation of whole towns and regions which were once booming with life.

In terms of my own practice, I plan to continue this exploration of Balkan migration at least until the end 2022. A continuation of this project was supplied with a work grant through The Center for the Promotion of the Arts (Taike), which allows me to resume drafting and illustrating stories and cover aspects of Balkan migration that did not find place in this thesis.

Bibliography

- '98% Demand Ban New Migrants' 2013, Daily Express, 1 November, p. 1.
- Ahtinen, L** 2018, *Elias*, Kustantamo S&S, Helsinki, Finland.
- Alexandrova, Y** 2021, *Here to Stay: Eastern Europeans in Britain*, ISBN (International Standard Book Number): 9781913462642, Repeater Books, London, UK.
- Antonsich, M** 2010 'Searching for belonging - An analytical framework', *Geography Compass*, vol. 4, no. 6, pp. 644-659.
- Ashkenazi, O & Dittmar J** 2020, 'Belonging in Auto|Biographical Comics: Narratives of Exile in the German Heimat', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 331-357
- Barker, M** 1989, *Comics: Ideology, Power & The Critics*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.
- Bengu, S** 2001, 'Comic in Albania', *Stripburger*, viewed 3 January 2022, <http://www.ljudmila.org/stripcore/burek2/albania.htm>
- Bengu, S** 2014, *Novelat Grafike Shqiptare*, Ministria e Kulturës, Tirana, Albania.
- Bennett, J** 2014, 'Gifted places: The inalienable nature of belonging in place', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 658-671.
- Bieber, F** 2020. 'Anxious Europe', *The Legacy of Division: East and West after 1989*. CEU Press, Budapest, Hungary.
- Bielenin-Lenczowska, K** 2012, 'Keeping Feet in Two Worlds? Everyday Experiences of Female Migrants from Macedonia to Italy', in P Hristov (ed.) *Migration and Identity: Historical, Cultural and Linguistic Dimensions of Mobility in the Balkans*, Paradigma Press, pp. 130-141.
- Björnberg, U** 2013, 'Caught between a Troubled Past and an Uncertain Future: The Well-Being of Asylum-Seeking Children in Sweden', in A M Mínguez (ed.) *Family Well-Being: European Perspectives*, Springer, London, UK.
- Blanchet, P** 2019, 'Graphic Narratives: Representations of Refugeehood in the Form of Illustration', *The Migration Conference 2019 Book of Abstracts and Programme*, 7th Migration Conference, 18-20 June 2019, University of Bari, Bari, Italy.
- Blickle, P** 2002, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland*, Camden House, New York, USA.
- Boatright, M** 2010, 'Graphic Journeys: Graphic Novels' Representations of Immigrant Experiences', *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 53, no. 6, pp 468-476.
- Bogdanska, D** 2019, *Wage Slaves*, Conundrum International, UK.
- Bonifazi, C & Mamolo, M** 2004 'Past and current trends of Balkan migrations', *Espace populations sociétés*, vol. 3, pp. 519 - 531.
- Borcila, A** 2015, *American Representations of Post-Communism: Television, Travel Sites, and Post-Cold War Narratives*, Routledge, London, UK.
- Brosgol, V** 2011, *Anya's Ghost*, Square Fish, New York, USA.
- Bui, T** 2017, *The Best We Could Do*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, USA.
- Brković, Č** 2009, 'Floating Signifiers. Negotiations of the National on the Internet Forum Café del Montenegro', *Comparative Southeast European Studies*, vol. 57, no. 1, pp. 55-69.
- Brunnbauer, U** 2012 'Labour Migration and Transnationalism in the Balkans. A Historical Perspective', in P Hristov (ed.) *Migration and Identity: Historical, Cultural and Linguistic Dimensions of Mobility in the Balkans*, Paradigma Press, pp. 11-24.
- Bunjevac, N** 2014, *Fatherland: A Family History*, Liverlight, New York, USA.

- Central Register of Foreigners** 2022, 'Foreign population by place of birth and selected citizenships', *Statistische Bundesamt*, viewed 13 April 2022, <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Population/Migration-Integration/Tables/foreigner-place-of-birth.html>
- Chiswick, B R & Miller, P W** 2008, 'Why is the payoff to schooling smaller for immigrants?', *Labour Economics*, vol. 15, no. 6, pp. 1317-1340.
- Christensen, L** 2006, 'Graphic global conflict: Graphic novels in the high school social studies classroom', *Social Studies*, vol. 97, no. 6, 227-230.
- Christie, A** 1975, *The Secret of Chimneys*, Dell, New York, USA.
- Chute, H** 2008, 'Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative,' *PMLA*, vol. 123, no. 2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Chute, H** 2016, *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Clewell, T** 2020, 'Beyond Graphic Memoir: Visualizing Third-Generation German Cultural Identity in Nora Krug's "Belonging"', *American Imago*, vol. 77, no. 3, pp. 459-496.
- Croatian Government** n.d., 'Croatian diaspora in Chile', *e-Gradani Informacije i usluge*, Croatia.
- De Windt, H** 1907, 'Through Savage Europe, Being the Narrative of a Journey (undertaken as Special Correspondent of the "Westminster Gazette")', *Throughout the Balkan States and European Russia*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, UK.
- Debating Europe** 2014, 'Where is the "tidal flood" of Bulgarian and Romanian immigrants?', *Debating Europe*, viewed on 18 April 2022, <https://www.debatingeurope.eu/2014/02/26/waves-bulgarian-romanian-immigrants/>
- Dillon, C & Vaksberg, T** 2016, 'Vigilante groups out to 'hunt' for migrants in Bulgaria', *Deutsche Welle*, 14 April, viewed 20 April 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/vigilante-groups-out-to-hunt-for-migrants-in-bulgaria/a-19186870>
- Editorial Board** 2018, 'Opinion: Trump says he wants better-educated immigrants. His plan does the opposite', *Washington Post*, 4 February, viewed on 18 April 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trump-says-he-wants-better-educated-immigrants-his-plan-does-the-opposite/2018/02/04/254d47e0-079c-11e8-b48c-b07fea957bd5_story.html
- Elftorp, M** 2014, *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan*, Seriefrämjandet (Tusen Serier) & Wormgod, Sweden.
- Fear, J & Lerner, P** 2016, 'Behind the Screens: Immigrants, Emigres and Exiles in Mid Twentieth-Century Los Angeles', *Jewish Culture and History*, vol. 17, no. 1-2, pp. 1-21.
- Fernández-Reino, M & Rienzo, C** 2022, 'Migrants in the UK Labour Market: An Overview', *The Migration Observatory*, viewed 1 April 2022, <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-labour-market-an-overview/>
- Freud, S** 1914, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, The MacMillan Company, New York, USA.
- Gemünden, G** 2014, *Continental Strangers: German Exile Cinema, 1933-1951*, Columbia UP, New York, USA.
- Gaudreault, A** 2009, *From Plato to Lumière: Narration and Monstration in Literature and Cinema*, Toronto University Press, Toronto, Canada.
- Goffman, E** 1959, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Anchor Books, New York, USA.
- Helsel, P** 2018, 'Comics and in-Between Kids: Immigration-Themed Graphic Novels as a Resource for Second-Generation Adolescents', *Pastoral Psychology*, vol. 67, no. 1.
- Hoare, M A** 2013, *Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- Hockenos, P** 2003, *Homeland Calling. Exile Patriotism and the Balkan Wars*, Cornell University Press, New York, USA.
- Huot, S, Dodson, B & Rudman, D L** 2014 'Negotiating belonging following migration: Exploring the relationship between place and identity in Francophone minority communities', *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien*, vol. 58, no. 3, pp. 329-340.
- Ignatief, M** 2001, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA.
- Istituto Nazionale di Statistica** 2021, *Resident foreigners on 1st January - Citizenship*, viewed 14 April 2022, <http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?QueryId=19675&lang=en>
- James, D** 2015, 'Drawn Out of the Gutters: Nina Bunjevac's Fatherland, a Collaborative Memory', *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 527-532.
- Jones, P & Krzyzanowski, M** 2011 'Identity, belonging and migration: Beyond constructing "others"', in Delanty, G, Jones, PR, and Wodak, R (eds.) *Identity, Belonging and Migration*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, UK.
- Kaplan, R** 1993 *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, Picador, New York.
- Kauranen, L & Löytty, O** 2020, 'The Imaginary North in Finnish Comics on Migration', *Nordlit*, no. 46, pp. 73-94.
- Kelly, P** 2013, 'Driven by resentment the mind of Zlatan', *Irish Examiner*, web log post, viewed 6 April 2022, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/sport/soccer/arid-20225747.html>
- Kemper, T D** 2001 'A Structural Approach to Social Movement Emotions', in Goodwin, J, Jasper, JM, & Polletta, F (eds.) *Passionate Politics—Emotions and Social Movements*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, USA.
- Kiyama, H Y** 1998, *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco 1904-1924*, Stone Bridge Press, USA.
- Konstantin Dikov** 2007, *You are in Bulgaria!*, online video, viewed 10 April 2020, https://youtu.be/_W8DNStF3TE
- Krasteva, A** 2012 'Balkan Migrations: Types and Trends', in P Hristov (ed.) *Migration and Identity: Historical, Cultural and Linguistic Dimensions of Mobility in the Balkans*, Paradigma Press, pp. 87-95.
- Krug, N** 2018, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home*, Scribner, USA.
- Kuhlman, M & Alaniz, J** 2020, *Comics of the New Europe: Reflections and Intersections*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, Belgium.
- Kubert, J** 1996, *Fax from Sarajevo: A Story of Survival*, Dark Horse Comics, Milwaukee, USA.
- Lave, J & Wenger, E** 1991, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Lavin, M** 1998, *Comic books and graphic novels for libraries: What to buy*, *Serials Review*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 31-46.
- Lee, F (dir)** 2017, *God's Own Country*, motion picture, British Film Institute, UK.
- Leggio, D V** 2019, 'Modern-Day Fagins', 'Gaudy Mansions' and 'Increasing Numbers': Narratives on Roma Migrants in the Build-Up to the British EU Referendum', in T Magazzini & S Piemontese (eds.), *Constructing Roma Migrants. European Narratives and Local Governance*, Springer Open, New York, USA, pp. 69-88.
- Lähdesmäki, T, Saresma, T, Hiltunen, K, Jäntti, S, Sääsikilähti, N, Vallius, A, & Ahvenjärvi, K** 2016 'Fluidity and flexibility of "belonging": Uses of the concept in contemporary research', *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 59, no. 3, pp. 233-247.
- Maleva, M** 2012, 'Language as a Border: the Case of Bulgarian Emigrants in the United Kingdom', in P Hristov (ed.) *Migration and Identity: Historical, Cultural and Linguistic Dimensions of Mobility in the Balkans*, Paradigma Press, pp. 312-325.
- Marcu, S** 2014, 'Geography of belonging: Nostalgic attachment, transnational home and global mobility among Romanian immigrants in Spain', *Journal of Cultural Geography*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 326-345.
- Markov, G** 1990, *Започни репортажи за България*, Profizdat, Sofia, Bulgaria.
- McCloud, S** 1993, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, HarperCollins, New York, USA.
- Megaton, O (dir)** 2012, *Taken 2*, motion picture, 20th Century Fox, France, USA, Turkey, UK.
- Mikheev, A** 1996, "МакКультура", *Иностранная литература*, vol. 1, <https://magazines.gorky.media/inostran/1996/1/makkultura.html>
- Mikkonen, K** 2017, *Narratology of Comic Art*, Routledge, London, UK.

- Minas, Estado de** 2019, 'Dilma Jane Silva, mãe de Dilma Rousseff, morre em BH aos 95 anos', *Estado de Minas*, viewed 14 April 2022, https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2019/07/13/interna_politica,1069452/mae-dilma-morre.shtml
- Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones** 2020, 'Estadística de residentes extranjeros en España', *Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración*, viewed 15 April 2022, https://extranjeros.inclusion.gob.es/ficheros/estadisticas/operaciones/con-certificado/202012/Principales_resultados_residentes.pdf
- Monroe, S R (dir)** 2013, *I Spit on Your Grave*, motion picture, Anchor Bay Films, USA.
- Moore, J (dir)** 2001, *Behind Enemy Lines*, motion picture, 20th Century Fox, USA.
- Morel, P (dir)** 2008, *Taken*, motion picture, 20th Century Fox, France.
- Mutler, A** 2020, 'Romanian Migrants Get COVID-19 As Pandemic Exposes Bad Conditions For East European Workers', *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, 30 May 2020, viewed 13 March 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/romanian-migrants-get-covid-19-as-pandemic-exposes-bad-conditions-for-east-european-workers/30643195.html>
- Nabizadeh, G** 2019, *Representation and Memory in Graphic Novels*, Routledge, London, UK.
- Newgarden, S** 2019, 'Superman, a refugee's success story', *International Rescue Committee*, web log post, viewed 29 March 2022, <https://www.rescue.org/article/superman-refugees-success-story>
- Nietzsche, F** 2006, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. C Diethe, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Nita, D & Ciubotariu, A** 2010, *Istoria benzii desenate românești: 1891-2010*, Vellant, Bucharest, Romania.
- Nyysölä, S & Vieruaho, A** 2016, *24 päivää*, Pohjoinen kustannustoiminta, Helsinki, Finland.
- Obrovčić, D** 2020, 'Filial Estrangement and Figurative Mourning in the Work of Nina Bunjevac', in Kuhlman, M & Alaniz, J (eds.) *Comics of the New Europe: Reflections and Intersections*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, Belgium.
- OECD** 2019, 'Numbers and locations of Romanian emigrants', *Talent Abroad: A Review of Romanian Emigrants*, OECD Publishing, Paris, France.
- Office of National Statistics** 2021, *July 2020 to June 2021 edition of this dataset*, viewed on 1 April 2022, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/populationoftheunitedkingdombycountryofbirthandnationality> – *January 2019 to December 2019 edition of this dataset*, viewed on 1 April 2022, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/populationoftheunitedkingdombycountryofbirthandnationality> – *January to December 2006 edition of this dataset*, viewed on 1 April 2022, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/populationoftheunitedkingdombycountryofbirthandnationality>
- Pekar, H & Roberson, H** 2007, *Macedonia*, Random House, New York, USA.
- Precup, M** 2015, 'The Image of the Foreigner in Historical Romanian Comics under Ceausescu's Dictatorship', in Ayaka, C & Hague, I (eds.) *Representing Multiculturalism in Comics and Graphic Novels*, Routledge, London, pp. 96–110
– 2020, 'Everyday Life in Brynjar Ábel Bandlien's "Strimb Living" and Andreea Chirică's "The Year of the Pioneer"', in Kuhlman, M & Alaniz, J (eds.) *Comics of the New Europe: Reflections and Intersections*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, Belgium.
- Probyn, E** 1996, *Outside Belongings*, Routledge, London.
- Quena, A** 1984, 'Tafë Kusuri', *Rilindja*, Prishtina, Kosovo.
- Repe, B** 1992, 'Das Besondere am "Titoismus" - seine Gewaltherrschaft und sein Zerfall', *Aufrisse*, vol. 13, pp. 27–32.
- Richter, H** 2016, *Mitä sä täällä teet? Tarinoita maahantulosta*, Voima Kustannus, Helsinki, Finland.
- Rifkind, C** 2017, 'Refugee Comics and Migration Topographies', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 648–654.
- 2018, 'Spotlight on Migrant and Refugee Comics', *Extra Inks*, web log post, viewed 10 March 2022, <http://extra-inks.comicssociety.org/2018/07/08/spotlight-on-migrant-and-refugee-comics/>
- Sacco, J** 2000, *Safe Area Gorazde*, Fantagraphics, Seattle, USA.
– 2003, *The Fixer: A Story from Sarajevo*, Drawn & Quarterly, Montreal, Canada.
- Said, E** 1978, *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York, USA.
- Satrapi, M** 2003, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, Pantheon, New York, USA.
– 2004, *Persepolis: The Story of a Return*, Pantheon, New York, USA.
- Savage, M** 2012, 'Farage seizes threat of new mass migration to widen UKIP's appeal', *The Times*, viewed on 18 April 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/farage-seizes-threat-of-new-mass-migration-to-widen-ukips-appeal-tbn597vptnr>
- Schiek, D, Olivera, L, Forde, C, & Alberti, G** 2015, 'EU Social and Labour Rights and EU Internal Market Law', *Directorate General for Internal Policies. Policy Department A: Economic and Scientific Policy*, European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium.
- Schwab, G** 2010, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, Columbia University Press, New York, USA.
- Shepard, R (dir)** 2007, *The Hunting Party*, motion picture, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA.
- Sicakkan, H & Lithman, Y** 2005 'Politics of identity, modes of belonging and citizenship: An overview of conceptual and theoretical challenges', in Sicakkan, H & Lithman, Y (eds.) *Changing the Basis of Citizenship in the Modern State. Political Theory and the Politics of Diversity*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, USA.
- Senate Committee on the Judiciary** 1955, 'Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency', *Interim Report*, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.
- Scheff, T J** 1990, *Microsociology. Discourse, Emotion, and Social Structure*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, USA.
- Schulten, K & Gonchar, M** 2018, 'From Superheroes to Syrian Refugees: Teaching Comics and Graphic Novels with Resources from The New York Times', *New York Times*, web log post, viewed 10 March 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/17/learning/lesson-plans/from-superheroes-to-syrian-refugees-teaching-comics-and-graphic-novels-with-resources-from-the-new-york-times.html>
- Spiegelman, A** 1996, *The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, Penguin Book, New York, USA.
- Staykov, A** 2013 *Кратка история на българския комикс*, Kibeas, Sofia, Bulgaria.
- Stevenson-Moessner, J** 2014, *Portable roots: Transplanting the bicultural child*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge, UK.
- Suárez-Orozco, C & Suárez-Orozco, M** 2001, *Children of immigration*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, USA.
- Synovitz, R** 2020, 'COVID-19 Outbreak Among Romanian, Bulgarian Workers Threatens Germany's Lockdown Strategy', *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, 22 June 2020, viewed 13 March 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/coronavirus-outbreak-threatens-germany-s-local-lockdown-strategy/30684736.html>
- Takei, G, Eisinger, J & Scott, S** 2019, *They Called Us Enemy*, Top Shelf Productions, USA.
- Tan, S** 2006, *The Arrival*, Hachette Australia, Australia.
- Todorova, M** 1997, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford University Press, USA.
- Tokić, R** 2012, 'Identitätenbildung im Internet – Die makedonische Diaspora als transnationales Netzwerk', in U Brunnbauer, K Novinšćak & C Voss (eds.), *Migrationen aus, in und nach Südosteuropa: Aktuelle und historische Perspektiven*, Munich, Germany.
- Tomic, V (dir)** 2015, *Flotel Europa*, documentary picture, Uzrok, Denmark, Serbia.
- Tremain, R** 2007, *The Road Home*, Chatto and Windus, London, UK.
- Vucinich, W** 2007, *Memoirs of My Childhood in Yugoslavia*, The Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, Palo Alto, California, USA.
- Wachtel, A B** 2008, *The Balkans in World History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.

- Wallman, S** 2014, 'At Work Inside Our Detention Centres: A Guard's Story', *The Global Mail*, viewed 12 April 2020, <http://tgm-serco.patarmstrong.net.au/>
- Wenger, E** 1998, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Wettergren, Å** 2015, 'Protecting the self Against Shame and Humiliation: Unwanted Migrants' Emotional Careers', in Kleres, J & Albrecht, Y (eds.) *Die Ambivalenz der Gefühle. Über die verbindende und widersprüchliche Sozialität von Emotionen*, Springer VS, Germany.
- Williams, R** 1985, *Keywords: The Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Oxford University Press, New York, USA.
- Yang, G L** 2006, *American Born Chinese*, First Second Books, New York, USA.
- Yeomans, R** 2012, *Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941–1945*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburg, USA.
- Yuval-Davis, N** 2006 'Belonging and the Politics of Belonging', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 197-2014.
- Zograf, A** 2007, *Regards from Serbia*, Top Shelf Productions, USA.
- Zürcher, E** 2017, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 4th edn, I.B.Tauris, London, UK.

List of Images

- Image 1. Kiyama, H Y 1998, *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco 1904–1924*, online image, viewed 19 April 2022, <https://hamiltoncs.org/lit328/page/35/>
- Image 2a. New York Public Library's Collections, 1902-1913, online image, viewed 19 April 2022, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/ellis-island-millions-immigrants-united-states-america>
- Image 2b. Tan, S 2006, *The Arrival*, Hachette Australia, Australia, page from the book, no pagination.
- Image 3. Zograf, A 2007, *Regards from Serbia*, page from the book, no pagination.
- Image 4. Quena, A 1984, 'Tafë Kusuri', Rilindja, online image, viewed 30 March 2022, <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/developing-a-comic-subculture/>
- Image 5. Ujkashi, A 2014, 'Toka që s' e lshan arin', *Novela Grafike Shqiptare*, S. Bengu (ed.).
- Image 6. Tanase, V, Barna, V 1980, *Burebista*, panel from a comic book, sourced from Precup, M 2015, 'The Image of the Foreigner in Historical Romanian Comics under Ceausescu's Dictatorship', in Ayaka, C & Hague, I (eds.) *Representing Multiculturalism in Comics and Graphic Novels*, Routledge, London, pp. 96–110
- Image 7. Alexiev, R 1936 'Вотъ что значитъ революция', *Щурець*, caricature, online image, viewed 3 April 2022, <https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/obshtestvo/balgarskijat-karikaturist-rajko-aleksiev-prebit-do-smart-prez-1944-g.html>
- Image 8a. Maleev, A 2021, *Moon Knight #3*, Marvel, variant cover, online image, viewed 3 April 2022, <https://forbiddenplanet.com/338665-moon-knight-3-alex-maleev-variant-set/>
- Image 8b. Kalvachev, V 2019, *The Batman Who Laughs #5*, variant cover, online image, viewed 3 April 2022, <https://store.darkcellarcomics.com/products/the-batman-who-laughs-5-variant>
- Image 9a. Stanimirov, P n.a. *Звукът на цигулката*, page from a book, online image, viewed 3 April 2022, <https://medium.com/adcom-creatives/wacom-day-5-%D0%B2%D1%8A%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%Bo-%D0%BA%D1%8A%D0%BC-%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%8A%D1%80-%D1%81%D1%82%D0%Bo%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2-89c23bef7969>
- Image 9b. Naneva, D 2019, illustration, online image, viewed 2 April 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BvZW47QF6Cg/>
- Image 9c. Pramatarov, B 2017, *A Short Story About Communication*, online image, viewed 3 April 2022, <https://www.bulgarian-illustration.com/predstavjame-boris-pramatarov/>
- Image 10a. Sacco, J 2000, *Safe Area Gorazde*, Fantagraphics, cover, online image, viewed 3 April 2022, <https://www.penguin.com.au/books/safe-area-gorazde-9780224080897>
- Image 10b. Sacco, J 2000, *Safe Area Gorazde*, Fantagraphics, cover, online image, viewed 3 April 2022, <https://theslingsandarrows.com/safe-area-gorazde/>
- Image 11a. Kubert, J 1996, *Fax from Sarajevo: A Story of Survival*, Dark Horse Comics, Milwaukee, USA, image from book, p. 47.
- Image 11b. Pekar, H & Roberson, H 2007, *Macedonia*, Random House, New York, USA, p. 33, image from book.
- Image 12. Raven-Hill, L 1912, 'The Boiling Point', *Punch*, cartoon, online image, viewed 24 March 2022, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Balkan_troubles1.jpg
- Image 13. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2022, graphic based on Wenger, Etienne 1998, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, p. 174.

Image 14. Bunjevac, N 2014, *Fatherland: A Family History*, Liverlight, New York, USA, panel from book, no pagination.

Image 15. Bunjevac, N 2014, *Fatherland: A Family History*, Liverlight, New York, USA, book page, no pagination.

Image 16. Bunjevac, N 2014, *Fatherland: A Family History*, Liverlight, New York, USA, book page, no pagination.

Image 17. Bunjevac, N 2014, *Fatherland: A Family History*, Liverlight, New York, USA, book page, no pagination.

Image 18. Bunjevac, N 2014, *Fatherland: A Family History*, Liverlight, New York, USA, book page, no pagination.

Image 19. Bunjevac, N 2014, *Fatherland: A Family History*, Liverlight, New York, USA, book page, no pagination.

Image 20. Bunjevac, N 2014, *Fatherland: A Family History*, Liverlight, New York, USA, book page, no pagination.

Image 21a. Bunjevac, N 2014, *Fatherland: A Family History*, Liverlight, New York, USA, book page, no pagination.

Image 21b. Image 2b. Tan, S 2006, *The Arrival*, Hachette Australia, Australia, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 22. Krug, N 2018, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home*, Scribner, USA, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 23. Krug, N 2018, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home*, Scribner, USA, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 24. Krug, N 2018, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home*, Scribner, USA, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 25. Krug, N 2018, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home*, Scribner, USA, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 26. Krug, N 2018, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home*, Scribner, USA, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 27. Krug, N 2018, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home*, Scribner, USA, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 28. Krug, N 2018, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home*, Scribner, USA, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 29. Krug, N 2018, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home*, Scribner, USA, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 30. Krug, N 2018, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home*, Scribner, USA, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 31. Krug, N 2018, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home*, Scribner, USA, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 32. Elftorp, M 2014, *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan, Seriefrämjandet (Tusen Serier) & Wormgod*, Sweden, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 33. Elftorp, M 2014, *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan, Seriefrämjandet (Tusen Serier) & Wormgod*, Sweden, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 34. Elftorp, M 2014, *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan, Seriefrämjandet (Tusen Serier) & Wormgod*, Sweden, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 35. Elftorp, M 2014, *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan, Seriefrämjandet (Tusen Serier) & Wormgod*, Sweden, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 36. Tomic, V (dir) 2015, *Flotel Europa*, documentary picture, Uzrok, Denmark, Serbia, screenshot from movie.

Image 37. Elftorp, M 2014, *Me & My Daddy & Zlatan, Seriefrämjandet (Tusen Serier) & Wormgod*, Sweden, page from the book, no pagination.

Image 38. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2022, graphic.

Image 39. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2022, journal pages.

Image 40. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2022, graphic.

Image 41. World Comics 2020, Grassroots Comics Workshop, photos from workshop participation, online images, https://www.instagram.com/p/B_AXUdjHE4/

Image 42. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2022, comics.

Image 43. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Super, Supermarket', *A Suitcase Concretely*, process images.

Image 44. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Terminal', *A Suitcase Concretely*, process images.

Image 45. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Super, Supermarket', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 46. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Terminal', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 47. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Terminal', *A Suitcase Concretely*, panel from book, no pagination.

Image 48. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Super, Supermarket', *A Suitcase Concretely*, panel from book, no pagination.

Image 49. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Super, Supermarket', *A Suitcase Concretely*, panel from book, no pagination.

Image 50. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Super, Supermarket', *A Suitcase Concretely*, panel from book, no pagination.

Image 51. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Super, Supermarket', *A Suitcase Concretely*, panel from book, no pagination.

Image 52. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Super, Supermarket', *A Suitcase Concretely*, panel from book, no pagination.

Image 53. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Terminal', *A Suitcase Concretely*, panel from book, no pagination.

Image 54. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Terminal', *A Suitcase Concretely*, image from book, no pagination.

Image 55. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Terminal', *A Suitcase Concretely*, image from book, no pagination.

Image 56. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Super, Supermarket', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 57. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Pickers & Choosers', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 58. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Stuck', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 59. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Stuck', *A Suitcase Concretely*, panel from book, no pagination.

Image 60. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Stuck', *A Suitcase Concretely*, pages from book, no pagination.

Image 61. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Pickers & Choosers', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 62. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Super, Supermarket', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 63. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Super, Supermarket', *A Suitcase Concretely*, panels from book, no pagination.

Image 64. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Stuck', *A Suitcase Concretely*, panel from book, no pagination.

Image 65. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Stuck', *A Suitcase Concretely*, pages from book, no pagination.

Image 66. Shishkin, I & Savitsky, K 1889, Morning in a Pine Forest, painting, online image, viewed 1 April 2022, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shishkin,_Ivan_-_Morning_in_a_Pine_Forest.jpg

Image 67. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Stuck', *A Suitcase Concretely*, panel from book, no pagination.

Image 68. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'What Language?', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 69. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'A Perfect Migrant', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 70. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Pickers & Choosers', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 71. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Pickers & Choosers', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 72. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Super, Supermarket', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 73. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Super, Supermarket', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Image 74. Georgiev, T [thesis author] 2021, 'Pickers & Choosers', *A Suitcase Concretely*, page from book, no pagination.

Appendix 1

Appendix 1 contains notes from my project journal where I have examined some early memories of migration, approaches to the thesis and ideas for comics stories.

21/05/2020

То етеск "DIASPORA DYNAMICS"

24/05/2020

- Искам да създам комикс от около 40 страници, който да е по-личен, отколкото фактологично представяне на имиграцията и родната култура на имигранта.
- Как отношението на имигранта към родната култура се променя във времето? Използване на комикс формата за разглеждане на темпоралното развитие на тези чувства

Трябва да потърся повече информация за документирани в комикс формат и какви са възможностите за интервенция.

Анализ на комикси като "Arrival", "Best We Could Do", "They Called Us Enemy".

Все още не съм сигурен дали искам да разгледам различни типове имиграция като отделни теми.

27/05/2020

Днес разговарях с Мати за ритмичността на работата. Беше твърд, когато ме посъветва да започна да "действам" вместо да "мисля" само. Мисля, че работата ми в момента ме натоварва толкова, че е трудно да потяна в още едно море на неопределеността, каквато е и ритмичността на работата. Особено, когато това изисква позитивизъм и вяра в себе си, каквото нямам в момента в излизък.

Но пак беше полезно да поговоря с Мати. Вероятно ще пиша за собствения преживявания и формата на историята ще е откъс

24/05/2020

• I want to create a comics of about 40 pages, which is a more personal than factological representation of migration and the native culture of the immigrant.

• How to immigrants notions towards their native culture change over time? Use of the comics format to explore the temporal shifts in those feelings.

I need to find more information about documentation through comics and what are the possibilities for intervention. Analysis of comics such as "[The] Arrival", "[The] Best We Could Do", "They Called Us Enemy".

I'm still not sure whether I want to look at different types of immigration as separate themes.

27/05/2020

Today I spoke with Matti about my thesis work. He was write to advice me to start "acting" instead of only "thinking". I feel like my day job is pressuring me so much that it's difficult to dive into the ocean of uncertainty that the thesis project is. Especially when that requires a positive attitude and believing i myself, which I don't have at the moment.

However, it was still useful to speak with Matti. I will probably end up writing about my own experiences and the format of the story will be close to...

до този на "Fun Home" на Алисън Бешдел. В другия си мемоар - този за майка ѝ - Бешдел споменава нещо, което резонира: ~~е~~ една лична история може да бъде ~~така~~ извлечена с толкова много детайли, че всъщност да бъде възприета общо-човешки. Мисля, че в моя случай може да е подобно; Матти спомена как всички сме премигранци или сме имали в семейството ~~мигранти~~ и тези истории за дома и корените могат да бъдат широко разбрани.

Мога ли да потърся подобни истории в моето семейство и да потърся чрез тях личните отговори (макар да не съм сигурен какви са въпросите ми...) (Но мога да разговарям с ① пеля ми и калеко ми, които близо 25 години вече живеят в Чунбинга; ② баба ми и дядо ми и за техните родители, които са дошли от Гръцко; ③ дядо ми и чичо му, които са били в Италия из-вестно време.

Това вероятно обаче ще се случи чак в края на юли месец. Междуременно, мога да опитам да събера своите спомени някак си.

Добра бележка от Матти беше връзката с езика и как забравяме да го използваме, когато сме далеч от родната дърнава. В моя случай, определено го използвах много повече, когато бях сред българите в Ковънтри, отколкото сега, когато говоря български общо-взето един час на седмица. И ~~когато~~ в България ми отнема няколко дни докато свикна и започна да говоря правилно.

Продължавам да си мисля и за историята на това какво хората са предполагали за

... the one of Alison Bechdel's "Fun Home." In her other memoir about her mother, Bechdel mentions something that resonates with me: one personal story can be full of so much detail that it ends up actually becoming quite general. I feel like this can be the case with my project; Matti mentioned that we have all experienced or have had family members who have experienced migration and these stories about home and roots can resonate on a wider level.

Can I find similar stories within my family that would help me seek out the personal answers (despite not knowing what my questions are...)? But I can speak with 1. my aunt and uncle who have lived abroad for nearly 25 years; 2. my grandma and grandad about their own parents which have come to my hometown from what is now Greece; 3. my [other] grandad whose uncle has lived in Italy for a time.

This will, however, happen maybe at the end of July. Meanwhile, I can try to collect my own memories.

A good note from Matti was the relation to language and the way we forget to use it, when we are away from our native country. In my case, I definitely spoke Bulgarian more when I was among the Bulgarians in Coventry than now when I speak Bulgarian maybe for an hour per week. And when I'm in Bulgaria it takes me a few days to get used to the language switch and start speaking correctly again.

I continue to think about...

миграцията на птиците. И че е била такава мистерия с хилядолетия. Това е въпрос, който в общи линии сме разгадали и приемаме сега-вря, но човешката миграция е все още мистерия за нас – не как се случва, а какво да правим с нея. И сега се си даде лятото. Птиците се чувстват така всяка зима? А дали се чувстват като гости, когато се приберат у дома? Кое е дом всъщност за тях – тук или там?

Опитвам се да си спомня, когато пеля ми и калето ми напуснаха България през 1997 г. и само помня, че бяхме у баба ми и че имаше далечно възмущение, което усещах, но не разбирах и съответно игнорирах по детски. Помня откъслечно писма, откъслечни обандания, че ми носеха със барбекю, за които не бяхме и чували тогава...

В детското съзнание миграцията е свързана само с предмети – какво има там, което го няма тук. Не мисля, че тогава съм се судил за език или култура, или менталитет. Не съм сигурен дали тези концепции значеха нещо за мен. Та ранно името ми на държавата все не ми говореха нищо.

... the migration of birds. And that for millenia it was such a mystery. It's a question that we've already found and accepted the answers to, but human migration is still a mystery to us – not how it happens, but what to do with it. And with ourselves. Do swallows feel that way every winter? And do they feel like guests when they return home? Which is actually their home – Here or There?

I'm trying to remember the time when my aunt and uncle left Bulgaria in 1997 and the only thing I remember is that I was visiting my grandparents then and I felt a distant excitement that I didn't understand and therefore ignored in a child-like manner. I sparcely remember letter, phone calls, that my aunt and uncle brought me a package of BBQ sauce that I had never tried before.

In my own childhood mind, migrations is connected only with objects – what exists there that we cannot find here. I don't think I considered language or culture or mentality. I'm not sure if any of those concepts meant anything for me. Even the names of countries meant nothing to me at the time.

02/06/2020

Ideas for the thesis comic (Notes & thoughts)

- Start with the part about the scientific misuses about migration of birds.
- First personal contact w/ migration - when my aunt & uncle emigrated to the UK and then to Ireland.
- My move to the UK - year 1
 - The Bulgarian community in Coventry
 - "Fucking Bulgarians" and living in a house with other nation-mates → speaking our language as a way of "marking our territory", though it ended up becoming deeply disrespectful; at the same time we were able to go out, get drunk and socialise because of money &. There was a type of power dynamics and territorialism

at play and we were unconsciously participating in this kind of theatre. I don't know what it was for the British, but for us it felt like a way of preserving the connection to home, and the "us" and "them" separation, despite it being absolutely fictional.

- I remember when we discovered the Arab store, which was selling Bulgarian food - now I wonder why we were so excited. It almost felt like a feels as it was some performativity of the national identity.
- Passport → no passport. Sending that off for the work permit

① The first two years at university:
Staying in the bubble

② What is my relation to the world? What is nation, culture, language and what do they mean to me → the following years & working at IBM (maybe not mentioning the workplace?)

③ Brexit, moving, where am I right now? → barely keeping in touch w/ any country-mates.

05/06/2020

"How to Be an Antiracist" - IBRAHIM X. KENDI

CHAPTER 5: "ETHNICITY"

"THE REASON resides in the circumstance of human migration. Not all individuals migrate, but those who do, in what's called 'immigrant self-selection', are typically individuals w/ an exceptional internal drive for material success and/or they possess exceptional external resources. Generally speaking individual Black and Latinx and Asian and Middle Eastern and European immigrants are uniquely

05/06/2020

"How to Be an Antiracist" - IBRAHIM X. KENDI

CHAPTER 5: "ETHNICITY"

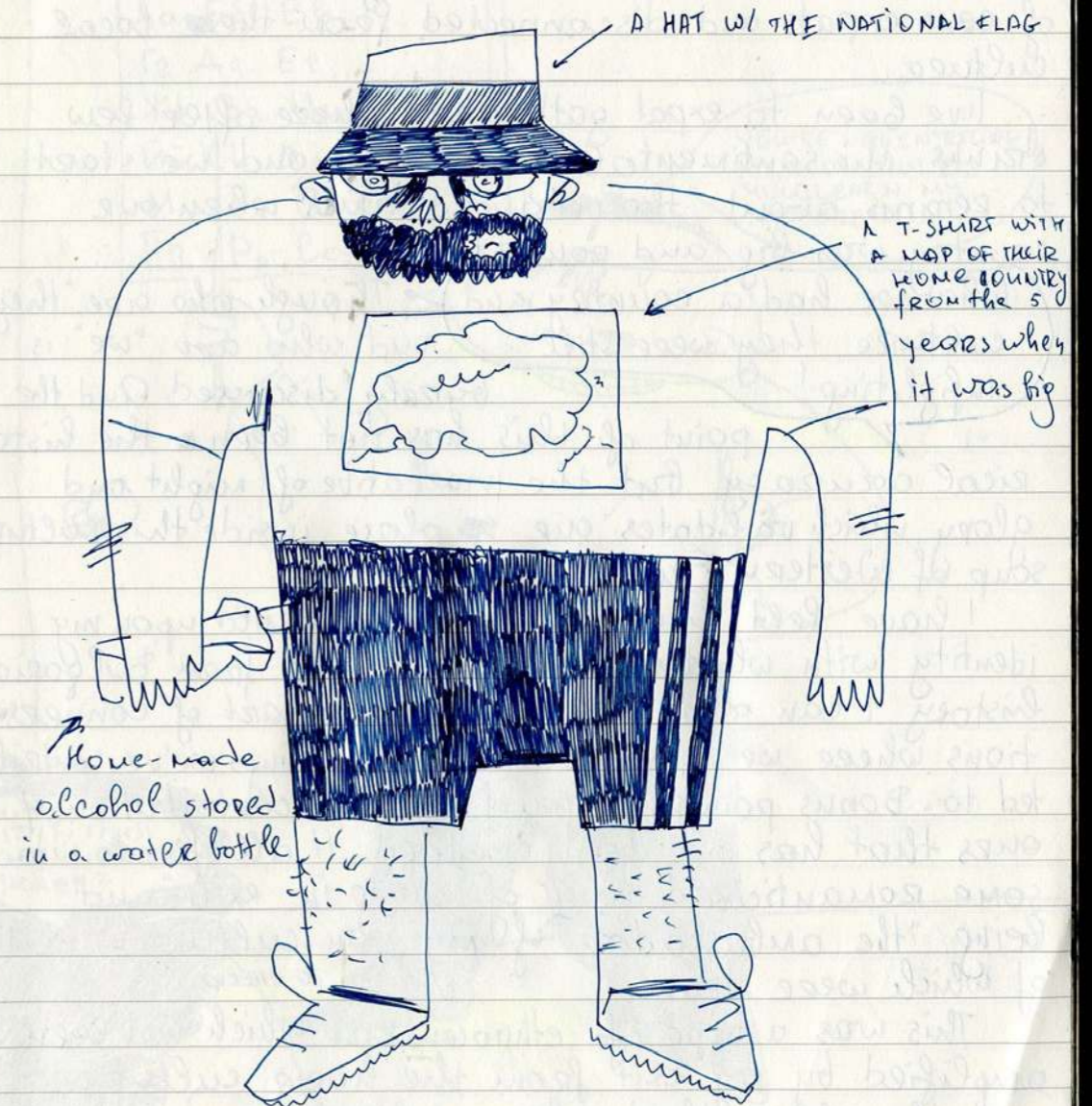
"THE reason resides in the circumstance of human migration. Not all individuals migrate, but those who do, in what's called 'immigrant self-selection', are typically individuals w/ an exceptional internal drive for material success and/or they possess exceptional external resources. Generally speaking individual Black and Latinx and Asian and Middle Eastern and European immigrants are uniquely

resilient and resourceful - not because they are Nigerian or Cuban or Japanese or Saudi Arabian or German but because they are immigrants. In fact immigrants and migrants of all races tend to be more resilient and resourceful when compared w/ the natives of their own countries and the natives of their new countries. Sociologists call this the "migrant advantage".



What kind of immigrant do you want to be?
Pick your own adventure!

A. The hyper nationalist



First sketches for A Perfect Migrant

It's more often than not that immigrants go through such a period when they are clingy to their national identity. In some people around me that was quite prominent and this is the stage where they felt more comfortable - connected deeply w/ their community of ~~expats~~ expats and disconnected from their local culture.

I've been to expat gatherings where after few drinks the sentimentality shows up and we start to reminis about "the good old times" when our country was big and powerful.

When we had a country and culture, they were still infighting! → Though who are "they" and who are "we" is barely discussed. And the point of this has not been the historical accuracy, but the narrative of might and glory, which validates our place inside this cultural soup of Western Europe.

I have felt like that trying to build upon my identity with whatever grain of glory from Bulgarian history I can also reclaim. I've been part of conversations where we compete to list all things we've contributed to. Bonus points if you find some contribution of ours that has not been credited. It all fed into some romanticized sense of "living in exile" and being "the ambassador of my own culture" - neither of which were true.

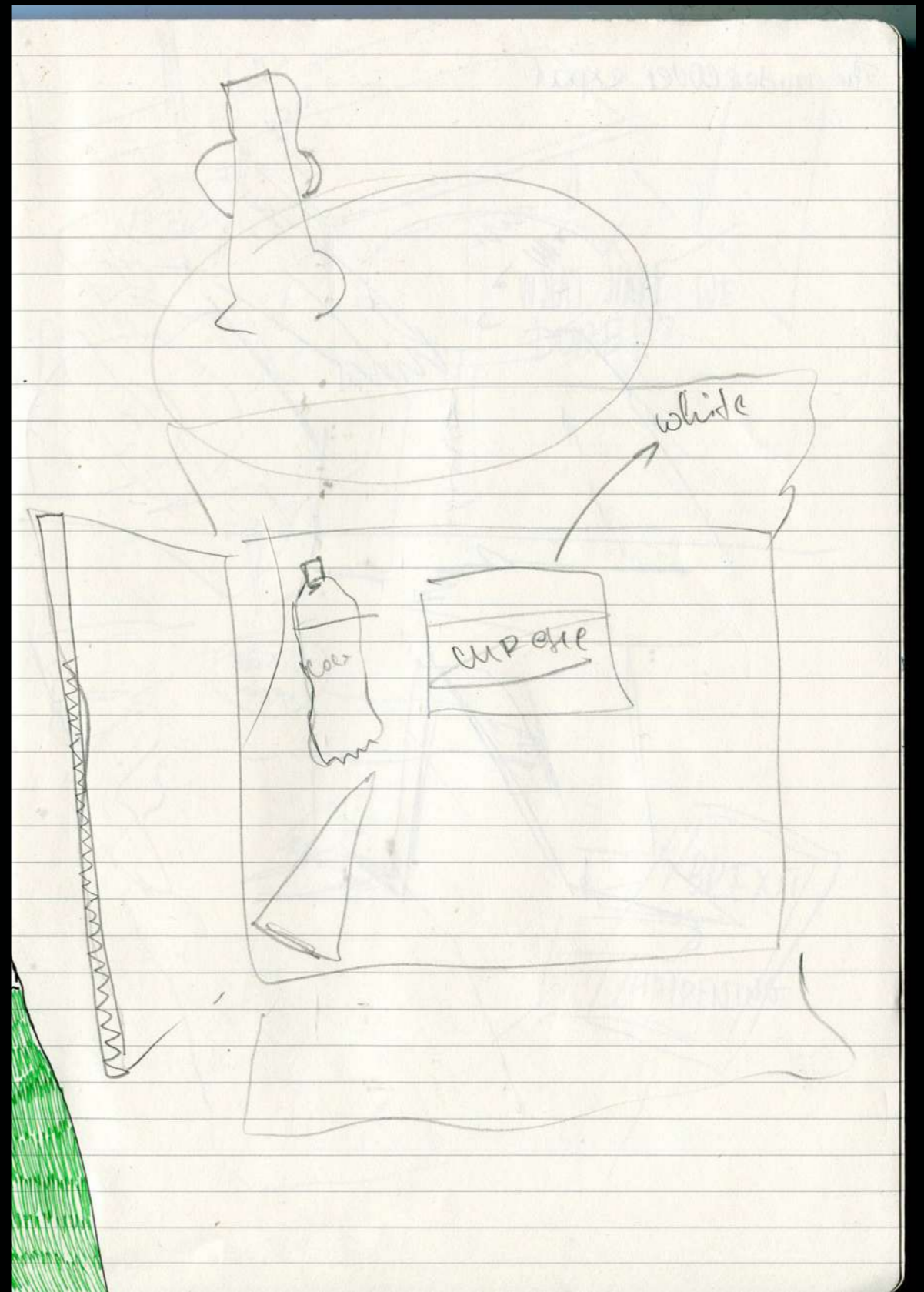
This was a type of **ethnocentrism** which had been amplified by my exit from the home culture and the fact that where I lived there was a big diaspora of Bulgarians who shared the same sentiment.

I was bringing with me food from Bulgaria,

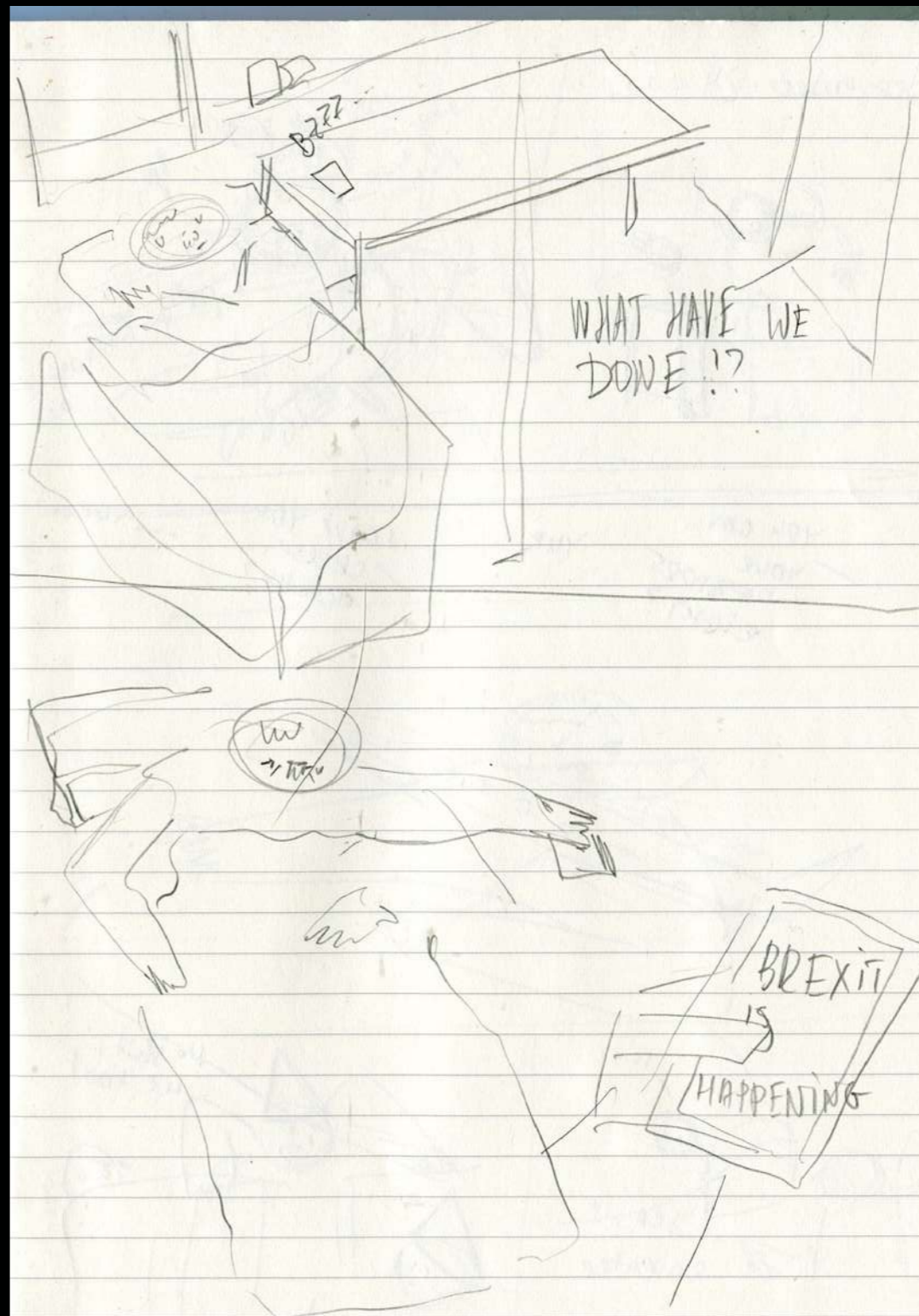
we had Bulgarian alcohol for the parties. We spoke the language constantly, didn't mix much with the British. We were looking to craft our own weird narrow but highly branded space.



There was a balancing feeling however. My sense of national pride was reinforced also by my feeling of always being behind. I had come from a country seen as a failure by many; I did not know ^{the intricacies of} what the UK education system was really about. I couldn't go out to party - I just didn't have the money for that. Heck, with the other Bulgarians around me we had an informal competition about who will find cheaper deals! My computer was loud and slow in comparison to the MacBooks & iPods of my peers. And that made me feel bitter. Maybe that was why by the end of uni my closest friends were other immigrants & students from ex-socialist countries - there were those sentiments that were uniting us. Also the jokes about communism.

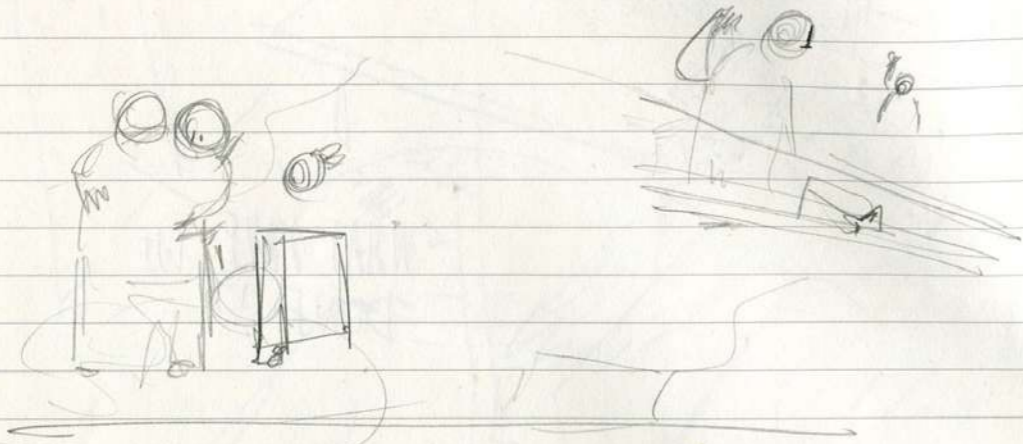


The undercover expat



Initially, *Pickers & Choosers* was suppose to be a classic comic narrative.

September 24

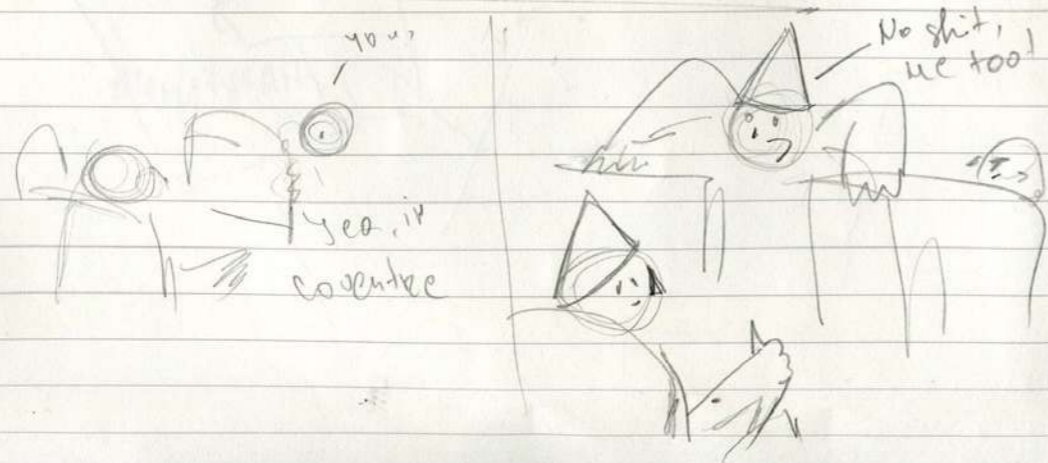
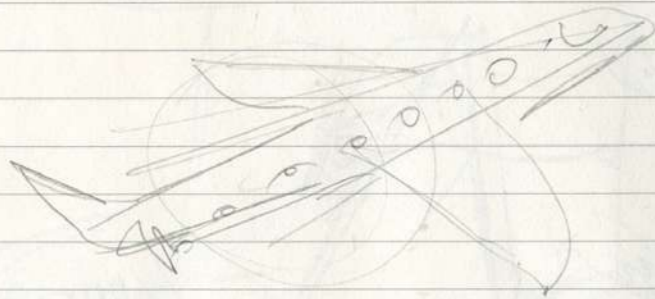


YOU GOT
YOUR
PASSPORT
RIGHT?

YUP

I GAVE YOU
CHEESE,
RIGHT?

... PUP...



YUP

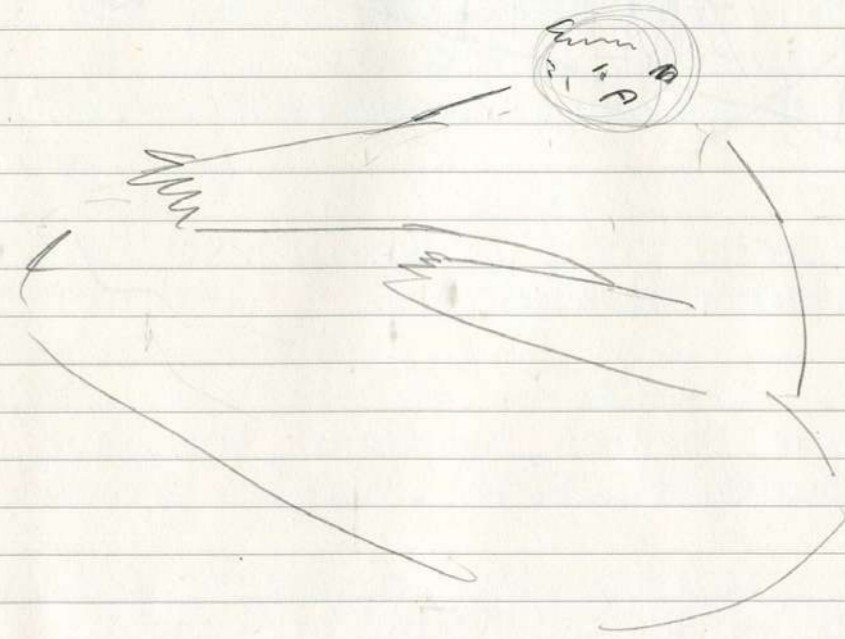
Yea, it
coventree

No shit,
we too!



Come to say
goodbye to your
aunt &
uncle!

5-year old
me



Places I have lived

● Bulgaria (1992 — 2011)

① → "ILARION MAKARIEPOLSKI" 70
where my family lived with
my GRANDPARENTS

② → "Rodopi" 64
where we moved with MY PARENTS
AND BROTHER WHEN I WAS 8.

②.1 → 3 MONTHS SPENT IN SOFIA

● The UK

③ → HOLYHEAD ROAD, COVENTRY

④ → MELVILLE ROAD, COVENTRY

⑤ → THE WINCHESTER UNIVERSITY DORM FOR
1 MONTH ONLY BEFORE I LEFT TO THE USA

⑥ → WESTMAN ROAD, WINCHESTER

⑦ → OAKWOOD ROAD, CHANDLER'S ROAD

● The USA

⑧ → ONE HOTEL ROOM IN AUSTIN, TEXAS
FOR THREE MONTHS.

● Chile

⑨ → FUERTE OVEJUNA, SANTIAGO, FOR
5 MONTHS.

● FINLAND

⑩ → LAKEI during my ERASMUS EXCHANGE

⑪ → OTANIEMI

⑫ → KUMPULA

⑬ → MUNKKIVUORI

① This is where my childhood was spent. The whole experience is not so much a story, but a tapestry of some memory snippets - both good and bad. The monolithic structure of the building and the quirky layout are more interesting than a mundane childhood.

③ HOLYHEAD ROAD

- Jessica Abel & Matt Madden
'Drawing Words & Writing Pictures' / 'Mastering Comics'
- To use india ink, not ~~come to~~ fountain pen ink
- LYNDIA BARRY - "What It Is"
- "Making Comics"

① Entrance → sentence, memory... How to get into the story

② Scrips

③ Sketching

④ Storyboard → START W/ STORYBOARD THAT'S NOT TIED TO A PAGE COMPOSITION

⑤ Page composition

⑥ Pencil drawings → PENCILS SHOULDN'T BE TOO SOFT. LESS THAN 3B PENCILS

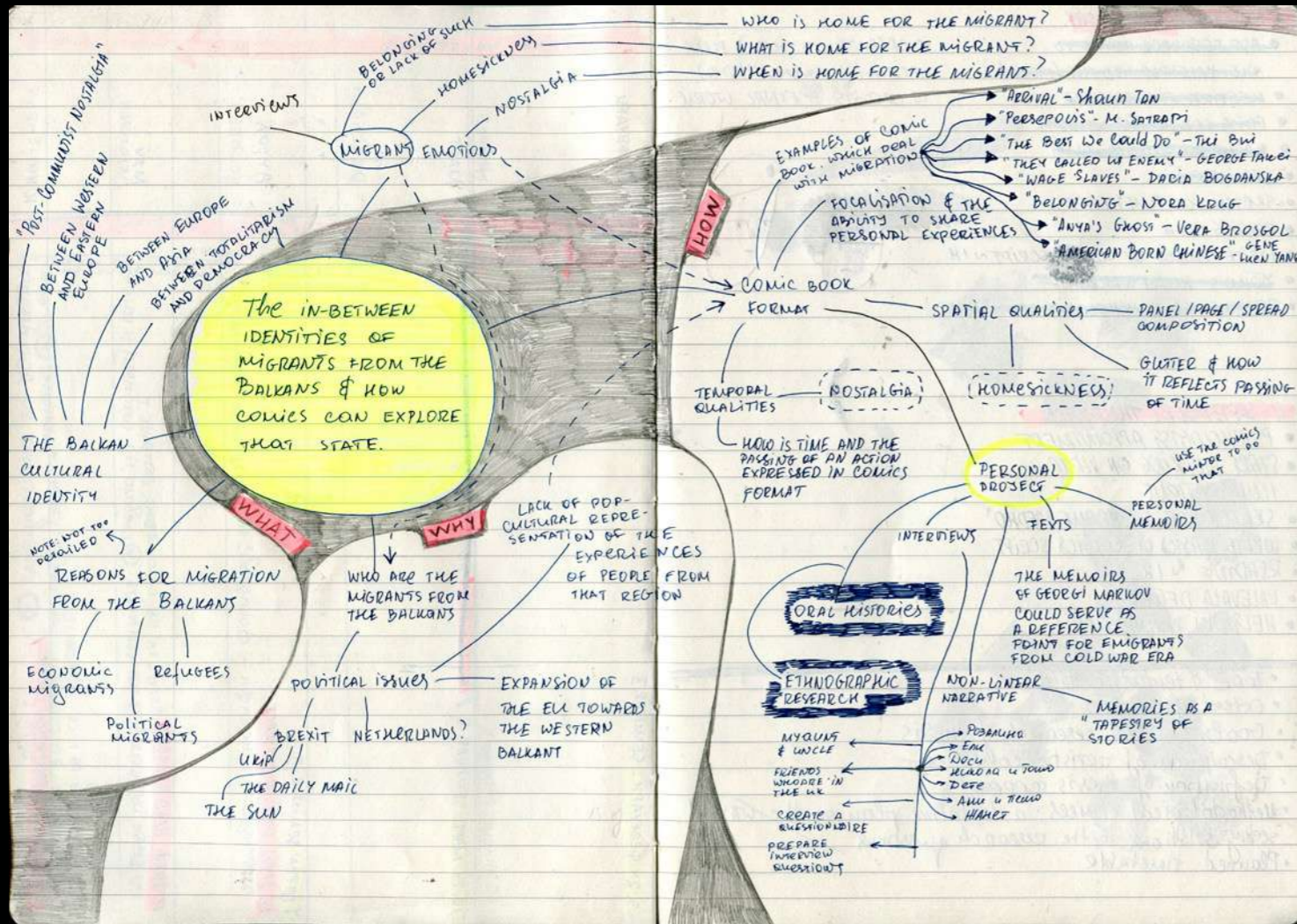
⑦ Inking

⑧ Scanning → 1200 DPI, GREYSCALE, BITMAP

- system of how to make ends meet as a student. → CAN BE MORE FRAGMENTED

- The indian restaurant, buffet
↳ just dialog / pictures & speech

MONDAY → SIMILAR AS TODAY
④ WRITING



23/11/2020 FOR YEARS I'VE BEEN AVOIDING POETRY AS I BELIEVED I COULDN'T CONCENTRATE ENOUGH TO READ AND FEEL IT. YET, IT IS DIFFICULT TO READ AND FEEL WHEN MUSIC IS BOOMING IN YOUR EARS, NO? I JUST READ JAMES BALDWIN FOR THE FIRST TIME. HIS COLLECTION - "JIMMY'S BLUES" (1983)

IMAGINATION
IMAGINATION
CREATES THE SITUATION,
AND, THEN, THE SITUATION
CREATES IMAGINATION.

IT MAY, OF COURSE,
BE THE OTHER WAY AROUND:
COLUMBUS WAS DISCOVERED
BY WHAT HE FOUND.

DEATH IS EASY

IT IS DREADFUL TO BE
SO VIOLENTLY DISPERSED.
TO DARE HOPE FOR NOTHING,
AND YET DARE TO HOPE.
TO KNOW THAT HOPING
AND NOT HOPING
ARE BOTH CRIMINAL ENDEAVOURS,
AND, YES, TO PLAY ONE'S CARD.

24/11/2020 "I CAN'T REMEMBER THAT WORD, GRANDMA, HOW DO YOU SAY THAT IN BULGARIAN?"
"OH COME ON, YOU'VE LIVED ABROAD FOR FIVE YEARS AND YOU FORGET YOUR LANGUAGE!"
"NO, I GENUINELY CAN'T REMEMBER HOW THIS WORD WAS PRONOUNCED."
"STOP PRETENDING!"
"HONESTLY, IT'S ON THE TIP OF MY TONGUE..."
"OPEN YOUR MOUTH, THEN."
"AAAA..."
"Humm, boy, I see NOTHING ON THE TIP OF YOUR TONGUE. YOU SURE? SURE IT'S THERE?"
"IT'S SOMEWHERE THERE, I CAN FEEL IT."
"Humm... ALRIGHT, OPEN YOUR MOUTH AGAIN, WE NEED TO FIND THAT WORD. OH! BOY! IT'S NOT ON THE TIP OF YOUR TONGUE, WHY ARE YOU LYING TO YOUR GRANDMA!"
"Wfene ih it?"
"IT'S STUCK BETWEEN YOUR TEETH... Go check in the toilet if we have some TOOTHPICKS. you see between"

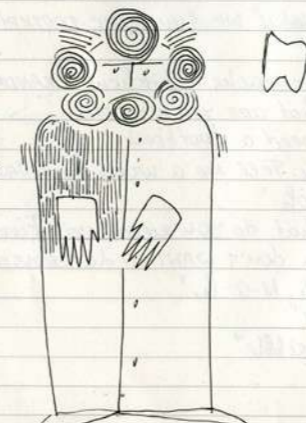
Boy walks to kitchen. GRANDMA:
"What are you boy doing?"
"I need a toothpick."
"Mm. Tell me a word for a Japanese theatre. 3 letters."
"Noh."
"What do you mean 'no'? Five years abroad and you don't WANT to do crosswords!"
"Noh. N-O-H."
"Oh."
scribble

"It doesn't go out"
"What?"
"Grandma, it's properly stuck there."
"You sure you CAN'T just remember the word?"
"If I could, I would. It's stuck way back between my teeth."

"I'll phone my dentist friend."
"Hello, yeah. Yeah, it's for him! Yeah, he just arrived back! Yes, yes, we're proud, yes, lil' forward greetings."
"Oh alrighty, she can see you tomorrow at 10am."
"But what should I do by tomorrow?"
"Well, avoid saying it."
"It bothers me though..."
"Five years abroad and you forgot how to be even a bit stoic" (should change that)

The next morning:
"Teo?"
"Here"

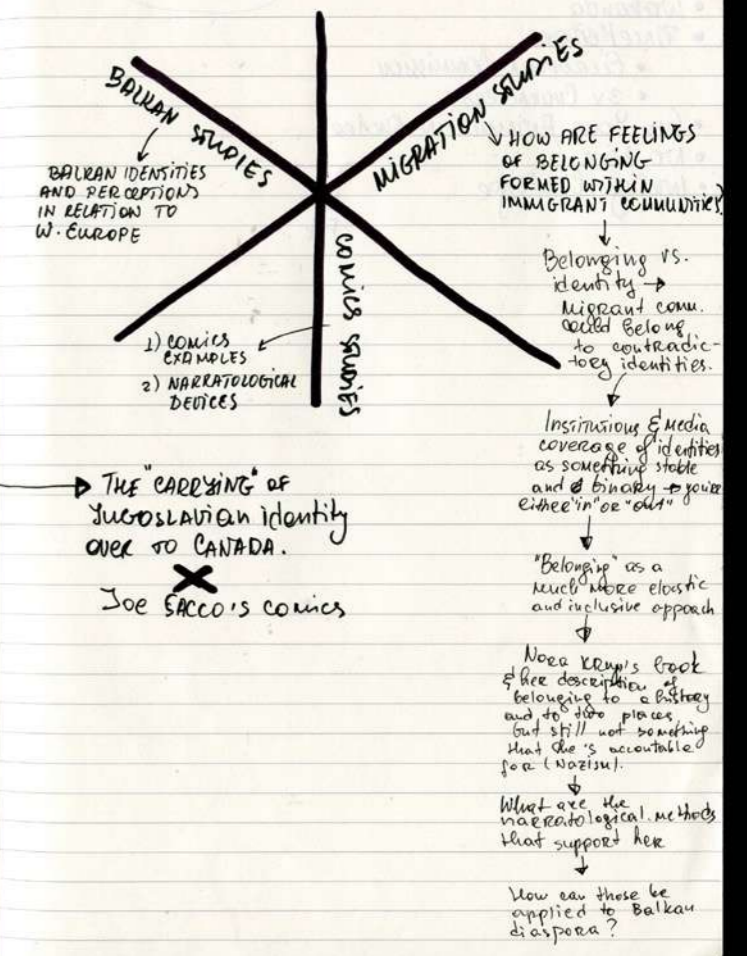
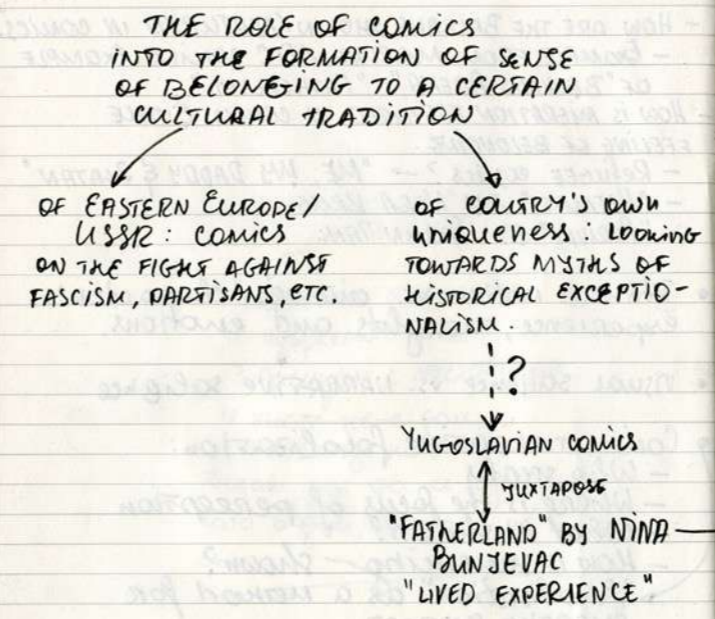
"Humm, yeah, it's stuck rather badly. Might open a hole get infected even"
"What?"
"You might not be able to speak out then."
"Ahh all?"
"Yes... But good news is I can take it out!"



Bzzt, Bzzt, Bzzt!
Spit
*I spit out the word "blood" into the dentist's sink.
"Ah, here it is! The little bascal"
"What's he worth then?"
"What?"
"The word - what was it?"
"I can't tell - all the letters are cluttered rather jumbled into this tiny mess of letters"
"Oh..."
"Yeah, so I'll just throw it out here"
"Clean up and you're ready to go"
"Can I have it?" "Should I take it?"
"Nah, it's just rubbish, I'll throw it out, don't worry."
"Oh... Okay then!"
"Alright, say hi to your grandma! Who's next?"
"Next?"
All that speed happening over a visual of the bin with the jumbled letters scattered

По некоега замисълвам
с шъркелите и се
Завръщам с местовицете,
и нито не е дом,
навсякога носи своя
багаж, за да се чувстван
като ^{в дома} в дома, нѣдего и да
спра.

- HOW ARE THE BALKANS SHOWN / FEATURED IN COMICS.
 - EXAMPLE FROM MARVEL / DC COMICS. EXAMPLE OF "BALKANS ARENA". "FATHERLAND"
- HOW IS IMMIGRATION FEATURED IN COMICS & THE FEELING OF BELONGING
 - REFUGEE COMICS? → "ME, MY DADDY & ZLATAN"
 - "HEMAT" BY NORA KRUG
 - "ARRIPI" BY SHAWN TAN
- Physical motion vs. author's / character's experience, thoughts and emotions.
- Visual salience vs. NARRATIVE salience
- Comics narrative focalization:
 - Who speaks
 - Where is the focus of perception
 - What is shown?
 - How is something shown?
 → "focalisation" as a method for empathy support.
- What a character sees vs. what is being shown in a spec. image.
 - ↓
 - NARRATOR
 - PERCEPTUAL ORIENTATION + COGNITIVE ORIENTATION
 - FOCALISER
- "THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE SPACES."
- "IMAGINING THE BALKANS", 133



Appendix 2

Manuscript

001. Terminal 1

Sofia Airport, 2011

The asphalt in front of the car trembles. Looks like the road is flooded. I think we're getting closer to the water, but there are no splashes from under the tyres. The end of September carries the last mirages of summer heat. How can it be this warm this early in the morning? We're letting the wind in through the car windows, but together with it come also the fumes of hot rubber and petrol.

"I think I know a guy from security. I'll go check if he could help me find a parking spot." My dad pulls up close to the airport entrance so I can unload my suitcase and then disappears to find the "guy". Inside the airport my mom and I try to find the luggage drop-off desk.

<Calling passengers for plane 143-567 to Berlin Tegel Airport, boarding will start in 30 minutes.>

"I told you that we'll arrive too early... The flight isn't for another two hours."

"That's okay, just leave your luggage now and we can have a coffee all together."

"Sure, sure..." The last thing I want so early in the morning is to small-talk and receive a lecture about what I should be careful about once I arrive in a country none of us has visited before. The coffee sounds like a good idea, though.

My dad shows up.

<Last call for passengers for plane 562-128 to Amsterdam. The boarding will close in five minutes.>

I queue up in front of the desk while sensing my parents' scrutiny behind my back. It feels like a test: one misstep and I'll be pulled back into the nest. In my late teens my family finds me old enough to live abroad, yet too young to be a functioning adult.

"Sorry, your suitcase is over the weight limit." the woman behind the desk reminds me with a rehearsed smile that she's unwilling to compromise with that extra kilo of clothing.

I step aside and open the suitcase on the airport floor. It contains clothes, towels, food, underwear, medicine. (At home, my parents decided to go through the uncomfortable interaction of giving me a box of condoms because "you never know".) There are also a few books, a small boiling pot, memorabilia, an old artefact from childhood, nostalgia, melancholy, homesickness, longing. It contains excitement, adventure, restlessness, ambition. It's a bundle of emotions, usually in the form of dust, daydream, sentimentality and one new shirt.

My mom comes behind me and starts inspecting the luggage.

"What if I leave the towel?" I suggest.

"No, keep the towel, you'll need it... Why do you have this book with you, will you really read it?!"

"Mom, leave my books! We've been through this already."

The rest of the passengers observe us, but without judgement or curiosity. Passengers fiddling about with their luggage is a common sight.

After I'm done, I bring the suitcase back to the scale.

"How about now?"

"Yes, now it is fine. Here is your boarding pass. Have a nice flight!"

I get back to my parents and we go for a coffee. An hour passes.

"I think I'll be heading off..." I wanna get the formalities over and just be by myself. I need stillness and alone-time.

Dad: "You have your passport, right?"

Me: "Yeah, of course."

Dad: "I have a fanny pack somewhere in the car. You should take it, if you wanna carry your money and documents around. Always have your docs with you. Trust no one."

My dad almost whispers the last sentence with his ever-present suspicion.

"Please, no... You know I'm not gonna wear that."

My mom delicately intervenes and tries to shift the conversation.

"Take this, I made you some pastries. Here's also a box with the cake that your grandma made for you."

"Please, I barely have any space in my rucksack..."

"Take this pack of cheese as well."

"I can find enough cheese in England!"

"You know it's not the same!.. Oh! I found a KitKat. You want a KitKat? You can snack on the way."

"Stop it! I don't want anything!!"

"Okay, well..."

"Stay safe."

"Call us when you get there."

"I will."

The lady at the passport check is uncommonly polite. The escalator takes uncommonly long. The queue at the hand-luggage check-up is uncommonly short.

The security guard is silent and stern. No, I don't have any liquids in my rucksack. Yes, I've removed my belt. Okay, I'll take off my shoes.

I get handed back my rucksack. First time alone at an airport. Glass, steel, noise, light, shuffling, running.

A neutral place in neutral time, which goes everywhere and where you're always late.

002. Super superstore

Coventry, England. 2011

Storyboard: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_RCCDpmsEeclW3NbdNOTwshiCZPz8o2c/view?usp=sharing

More Bulgarian students lived in my dorm “Holyhead” than just me. There were many others in Coventry who had accepted the steel and concrete structures of the post-industrial English city as home. We had a community where familiar words and phrases made our heavy uncertainty lighter.

“Any good offers today?”

“No, not really. Still the £1 pizzas from last week. BUT! They’ve raised the price of the instant noodles – used to be 11p, now it’s 16.”

“So?”

“It’s almost a 50% increase, that’s a lot!”

“Well...”

“It adds up eventually!”

The house gatherings in the narrow kitchens of the terraced houses were the space where both disappointments and excitements were expressed. Split between different districts of the city, connected by histories and routines. After a drink or two, the sentimentality pours out and we reminisce about “the good old times” when “our country was big and powerful”. Sometime during the 9th century, few of us probably remembered it.

The gatherings involved the mandatory national cuisine and rakia. The alcohol was usually home made from the leftover grapes or from plums or any other fruit. Produced by someone’s father and packaged in a 2 l Coca-Cola bottle. Honestly, I never liked the taste. I liked the sentiment it carried. I don’t know how much of the others actually enjoyed drinking that. But we enjoyed our company – talking about the second-hand furniture we’ve found or the discounts we’ve discovered.

“It’s great we have such a big store close by, it would have been hell if we had to walk a lot to get food!”

“No idea what this is. Or this. Custard sounds tasty but I’ve never had it. But look: Monster Munch snacks! These are great!

“Anyway, if you want to save money, be on the look for food in yellow packaging.”

“Oh. Yup. Here. Seems like those are on the lowest shelves.”

On the streets and halls of the university campus we talked about paperwork – all the documents required for work permits were a puzzle that took our collective effort to put in place. Big questionnaires had to be filled out (“What do they mean by ‘Have you participated in a genocide?’”, “What do you think, has anyone put Yes to that?”); papers had to be collected from institutions; and passports had to be mailed to a government office. All that in the hope that we’ll be approved and given a “Yellow paper” – that permit that would bring us one step closer to finding a part-time job. Or, if we were more gutsy, we could just look for an unregistered job and get paid under the table.

Can of spaghetti: £0.15

White toast bread: £0.47 for a pack

Turkey ham pack: £1

Can of baked beans: £0.26

Microwave lasagne: £0.66

Bottle of ketchup: £0.21 (stopped buying that after several months because it tasted like mostly like vinegar with colouring)

Instant noodles: £0.22

Can of chicken in white sauce: £0.78

Cheese: £0.43

Packs of 20 sausages for £1. They taste horrible. “Do you think that if I poke it with the fork, this one will wiggle its tail and run away?”

We exchanged illegally downloaded films and torrented music. We had break-ups on Skype. We had those gatherings to chat and reminisce. We threw up in the toilets either because of alcohol or because of homesickness. We were constantly on the look for food offers, yet we also tried to experience university life in its fullest.

“Wait around.”

“Why? I wanna check if they have any milk.”

“No. Wait around.”

“Do you seriously care that much about this lemon curd?!”

“WAIT.”

<The store assistant rolls out the metal shelf with the discount products.>

Baguette: 9p.

Choco Puffs with a ripped cardboard box but intact bag: 50% off.

Cheese slices: 12 p.

Crisps: 30 p.

“See! Around 21:45, they roll out the big discounts. Once I got a birthday cake once for £2.”

Holyhead was the homebase from where we planned our way through this labyrinth of new cultural norms. In the evenings, while drinking bitter English tea in the kitchen with my Bulgairan housemates, we skewed our impressions through jokes, curses and anecdotes.

We never hated it. We never truly loved it. We just navigated and that process of growing up was fascinating.

“Hey, it’s 8 of December today. It’s University Day back home, all the students are out celebrating. Should we do something?”

“Maybe some beers from the store?”

“There’s some Stella on offer, but it’s still more expensive than the Carlsberg. What about Carling?”

“That tastes like piss, come on. Have some standards.”

“Carlsberg it is then! Ah, letting our hair down finally!”

At the cashier:

“May I see your ID sir?”

”Sure.”

“Sorry, sir, we don’t accept that”
“Wait, how come? It’s a valid ID card”
“Sorry sir.”
“But I can travel with it! What if my friend buys the beer”
“No sir, he’s with you”
“We literally cross borders with this”
“Sorry sir.”
“UGH! Keep the beers then!”
“So.. wanna have tea?..”
“Yeah, whatever.”

003. Curry Kerfuffle

Winchester, England. 2015.

It was the day just after Christmas when I returned to the shared house in Winchester. The moment when I stepped in, I heard from the upper floor G. and her boyfriend arguing and him dumping her. The guy stormed out through the entrance door and the house went quiet. I was tiptoeing around my room pretending as if I hadn’t been eavesdropping on their quarrel.

I heard steps and G. walked downstairs pretending as if nothing had happened.

“Hey, uhm... Wanna grab some lunch?” she uttered.

I didn’t, actually. I just wanted to lie in bed quietly after the train journey from Bristol and to play back the passing year with all its excitement and regrets.

“Sure, alright. Yeah. Let’s go.” Her boyfriend had just broken up with her, she could have probably done with some distraction.

“Nice! How about the near-by Indian place?”

The Indian restaurant was dark and covered in red and purpur. The atmosphere was heavy, but quiet – as it was the day after Christmas Day, there were literally zero customers at the time when we walked in. Everyone was still with their families and it was puzzling for me why the place was open at all. There was an apathetic waiter who was dozing off on the counter and probably sulking quietly about his pointless day at work. He jumped up in amazement when we walked in surprised there was someone looking to have a meal at an Indian restaurant at that time.

“Teo, I think I’ll have a glass of white wine!”

“I’m okay with just beer, I think...”

“What about the buffet, should we get that? Let’s pay for the buffet. Can we have the buffet, please?” I wanted to get over with the comforting small talk and get back to bed but it was already early afternoon and I had skipped lunch, so a meal seemed like a good idea.

The waiter didn’t know English that well, but he understood what we ordered

“So, did you go to Bulgaria last week?”

“Nah, I just visited some friends in Bristol. I couldn’t take time off from work, my contract started recently...”

“What language do you speak in Bulgaria?”

“Sorry?”

“Do you speak Russian there?”

“Uhm, no...”

“Turkish?”

“No, no...”

“How about German, are you one of those European countries that speaks German?”

“What, no. We speak Bulgarian there.”

“Well, look at that. I had no idea that this language existed. Oh, here’s the wine!”

The waiter came back with our drinks and noted he’ll have the food prepared shortly.

“He was a douchebag, you know?”

“What?”

“My ex, the one you heard me arguing with. He was a douchebag.”

“He could have helped a bit with the dishwashing” – I was mumbling and trying to find a way to argue with me taking her side better.

“He hated Poppy as well!”

“Did he...” – I wondered where this was going.

“He hasn’t touched me. He was just a prick. Food is coming!”

The waiter laid in front of us platters of different types of curry sauces, rice, naan and bhaji. The buffet was pretty much everything from the kitchen warmed up and laid out on the massive round table. Instead of the buffet sitting out the whole day while they were no customers, the chef had decided to store everything in the kitchen and take it out when there were people coming in.

“May I have another glass of wine please? Teo, should I just get a whole bottle? I think I might be okay with a whole bottle, do you want some wine as well? No? Alright, suit yourself. Excuse me? Waiter! Can I ask something?”

So, I got one glass of wine already, right? And now I got this second one?”

“Yes.”

“Could you just bring me a whole bottle of wine and just take out the price of these two glasses.”

“Sorry?”

“Just bring another bottle. And deduct the price of the wine I’ve already had.”

“I.. G., I don’t think this is how it works...” She was getting a bit tipsy already.

“What do you mean, it makes perfect sense!”

“It doesn’t though..”

“Whatever, that’s fine. I can just buy a bottle from the store, it would be cheaper anyway. Actually, I’m quite full already. Excuse me, can we just get the rest of the buffet as a takeaway?”

“What??” Both me and the waiter were staring at her puzzled. “No, uhm... I cannot do that...” – the waiter seemed confused.

“We paid for the buffet and there’s some left, can’t we just take it for home.”

“G, that’s not how a buffet works...”

“No, no... I cannot... it does not work this way...” The waiter was scrambling for words.

“Just take the platters, put the food in boxes and give them to us. Actually, can you bring some boxes? We can pack the food here ourselves.”

My face was moving from the sight of her pouring curry sauce and rice into plastic boxes and the waiter’s confused face. He was clearly annoyed that he didn’t know English enough to stand his ground, yet couldn’t be bothered to get into an argument during a pointless workshift like this one.

We paid our bill, I mumbled “Happy holidays” not really expecting a response from the waiter and we walked out with bags of Indian food in our hands. This was our food and dinner for the upcoming week.

I went back to the restaurant only one more time after that. The same waiter was there again on shift.

“Hey, sorry for the mess last time...”

He just waved his hand, “Ah, it is fine. You are not English? You do not sound English.”

“No, no, not at all. I’m Bulgarian.”

“Haah! I am Romanian!”

“Hah, neighbours, huh!? So... how come an Indian restaurant?”

“Well, it is work, no?”

“Haha, sure, it’s work.”

004. Pickers & Choosers

24 June, 2016

“UGH. What have we done?!” I hear P.’s exclamation from the corridor, where she’s addressing no one in particular. I stepped out of my room and saw her walking down the stairs while the rest of the housemates were fiddling around preparing for work and restlessly discussing the news.

“We’re Out! After 43 years UK freed from shackles of EU.”

– Daily Mail, Fri, June 24, 2016

People started gathering in the kitchen and making tea, coffee and breakfast. “Hey, I’m out of Greek yogurt, can I borrow yours?”

“Well, then what’s gonna happen to next year’s trip to Spain?!”

“Chill, nothing will kick in that quickly.”

“P. will we need visas?”

“I know as much as you do, why are you asking me this!”

“You know, this had nothing to do with migrants.”

“A lot of people had other reasons to vote Leave.”

“People still would like to go on vacation abroad, this won’t go through.”

“See EU Later! Britain walking to an EU exit”

– The Sun, Fri, June 24, 2016

Car doors closed and we headed down the road. The radio was blasting the latest news, “directly from 10 Downing Street where the prime minister David Cameron has handed in his resignation”.

“Oh boiii, shit it going doowwwwn.”

“Man, the way you speak, I can’t tell if you’re excited or stressed...”

“Kind both, you know. It’s not that often when you live through historical moments. I mean, the whole thing is rubbish, but one day I’ll surely be telling my grandkids ‘bout this.”

<Now our show continues with our guest the singer Sean Paul, whose GRANDMA lives in Coventry... CAN YOU BELIE...> *Click*

“Historic Day for Britain.”

– Daily Express, Fri, June 24, 2016

I entered the studio. My friend A. was already there:

“Man, I’m sorry we’re such a silly country” he said when he saw me.

“It’s alright” I waved with a hand though inside I felt a whirlpool of frustration and confusion and fear. I start scrolling through social media, indulging in other people’s reactions. The bubble is thick and I see only outrage, shock and surprise.

All of a sudden I see a post by one of my colleagues, saying that she hopes Brussels will stop telling her country what to do and how to act. I’m expecting her to walk through the office door any moment now. She never does, she’s on a sick leave that week. Later, she deletes the post.

“Britain is full up and fed up. Today join your Daily Express Crusade to stop new flood of Romanian and Bulgarian migrants” – Daily Express, Thu, Oct 31, 2013

I got an email – promotion from a flight company: £1.00 flight to 50 locations in Europe! I open it just to skim through my options. “Haha, you’re already looking for an exit plan, huh?” – the colleague behind me jokes. We exchange bitter chuckles.

“98% demand ban new migrants”

– Daily Express, Fri, Nov 1, 2013

Random clicking around the computer full day. “No point in checking the news websites, it’s more of the same.”

“How Romanian Criminals Terrorize Our Streets”

– Daily Express, Wed, Feb 27, 2013

Car doors click, we’re heading back from work.

“Can you drop me off here? I’ll pick some food from the store and walk home..”

The light is red, but there are no cars passing. Should I cross? Could someone see me and think “here they are, coming here, breaking our laws”?

I let a guy enter the store before me. Statistically, according to the media maps, he seems to fall into the demography that supported the leave.

I grabbed some cheese and bread and a bottle of wine. I left the bottle of wine back. Don't want the shop assistant to think I drink a lot. I don't drink a lot. I drink rarely. But she doesn't know that. She just sees me while I'm buying wine.

"Sold out! Flights and buses full as Romanians and Bulgarians head for the UK."

– Daily Mail, Mon, 30 December 2013

Should I let this old lady go in front of me on the queue?

Did she want me around this country?

Did she vote for Leave because she didn't want people like me around?

What are people like me?

Here's the shop assistant, smiling at everyone, civil and well-mannered.

"That would be £5.25, love. Would you like a bag?"

Should I respond politely?

Should I show my disappointment or my angst?

No. Keep your mouth shut boy, don't respond. Just pay.

"Okay, love, alright. Have a nice evening!"

What if I thank her back in the wrong way?

What if my accent comes out too strong?

What if my pronunciation is incorrect?

My words, my traitors.

– Finishes with a sequence of the character walking back home. A bit more of the scenery of the place. –

005. Stuck

"I can't remember the word... Geez, how do you say that..?"

"Oh come on!"

"But you know what I mean, right?"

"Abroad for five years and you already forgot your language..."

"Grandma, I genuinely can't remember!"

"Stop pretending!"

"Honestly! It's on the tip of my tongue... "

"Well, open your mouth then."

"Aaaa..."

"Hmm... Honey, I see nothing on the tip of your tongue. Just saliva and bits of the burek you had for breakfast."

"You sure? Sure it's not there? Should be somewhere there, I feel it."

"Hmm... Alright then. Open your mouth again, we need to find that word. Oh! Hey... Hey! Why are you lying to me? It's not on the tip of your tongue."

"Wfewe ith it?"

"It's stuck there in the back. Go check if we have any toothpicks."

Girl walks to the kitchen. Grandfather has his newspaper laid out on the table, solving a crossword.

"Whadda ya lookin for?"

"I need a toothpick."

"Lower left drawer... Give me a word for a Japanese theatre."

"How many letters?"

"Three."

"Noh."

"Whaddaya mean 'NO'?! Five years abroad and you think you're a little miss big shot, not doing crosswords with your grandpa!"

"NOH. N-O-H. Japanese theatre."

"Oh..." – the grandad scribbles while the girl walks away.

"It's not going out."

"Wfath?"

"It's properly stuck there, honey. Is it bothering you a lot?"

"Of course it is! A word between my teeth, geez..."

"You sure that you can't just remember it?"

"If I could, I would!"

"Should I call the dentist? Nah, nah, don't protest! I'll just give her a quick ring. Hello? Hello, Ludmila?... Shush there, young lady! Hello Ludmila? Yes, yes it's me... Yes, she's here, visiting for the summer!.. How is your husband there, did he have the knee surgery?..."

"Alright, she had an opening for tomorrow after lunch. I guess, you just have to keep your chin up until then."

"Sure she can't just pluck it out for 5 mins today?"

"Shush now! Five years abroad and you forgot to be even a little bit resilient!"

"Yup, it's stuck rather badly there. See? Of course you can't haha. But yeah, it's stuck between your lower back molars. I can see the word there, a few ascenders and terminals are showing up."

Unused bits

001. Dragana from Serbia

Note: I would like to have a bit more experimental layout. But necessarily the artwork following the text, but showing a different aspect of what is being retold or focusing on a really specific detail. A slightly more impressionistic approach (I hope that doesn't sound too posh).

Note: This is from a conversation I had with a Serbian friend. I want to have a follow-up call with her and learn more about where she lived, what she carried with her, etc. during that period when she had to travel every other month between Belgium and Serbia. I'm thinking that this could be a nice exercise of trying to tell the visual part of the story only through images of flying, planes and airports.

“So, how was it when you moved to Brussels?”

“Well, you know, because I'm Serbian, I'm not allowed to just move wherever I want in Europe. I stayed for a few months in Belgium, then I had to go back to Serbia, then fly back to Belgium... And with my boyfriend we had this strange relationship where I was half the time there, half the time away.

“So, if you're going to Belgium from Serbia without a visa, you have a set number of days during the year when you can be there and for a certain length of time. So I had to keep a calendar and count how many days I have spent there because the border police always got them wrong. I have been counting those in front of them at the airport taking them through months of my stays and travels and trying to get them to understand I still have few days to spend there.

“And with accommodation – one time I rented a place for a month, one time I stayed at my boyfriend's place. It was neither here nor there.

“But then, when I got accepted into university, I managed to get a permit to live there permanently and I haven't been doing that much ever since.”

002. Theories of Bird Migration

Aristotle had three theories about migration of birds:

His first theory was migration and he was spot on there.

His second theory was transmutation – birds transform into other birds depending on the season. There were swallows in summer which transformed into robins in winter.

As a third theory, he proposed hibernation – that some birds were hiding and sleeping through the cold seasons.

This third idea stuck around until the 17th century. The predominant theory was that swallows hibernate underwater just like fish. But there was the dapper 17-century physicist and educator Charles Morton. He was against the theory of hibernation and proponent of the migration theory. “Of course birds cannot live underwater like fish, that is just plain silly!” According to him, the answer was obvious – clearly, migration birds flew to the moon every autumn to escape the coldest months.

*A Suitcase Concretely: Exploration
of Balkan Immigrants' In-Between
Belonging Through the Lens
of Comics*

Teo Georgiev

Supervisor: Arja Karhumaa

Advisor: Matti Hagelberg

Master of Arts Thesis

Visual Narrative

Visual Communication Design

School of Design, Arts and Architecture

Aalto University 2022