

03

Bureaucratic
Chameleon:
Shifting identities
on a visa



Methods of Translating

MADE IN JAPAN / FABRIQUÉ AU JAPON / FABRICADO EN JAPÓN

Getting Started

For *methods of translating*, I chose a topic that came to me most instinctively when I saw **the ID card I now use as a bookmark** hanging from my notice board.

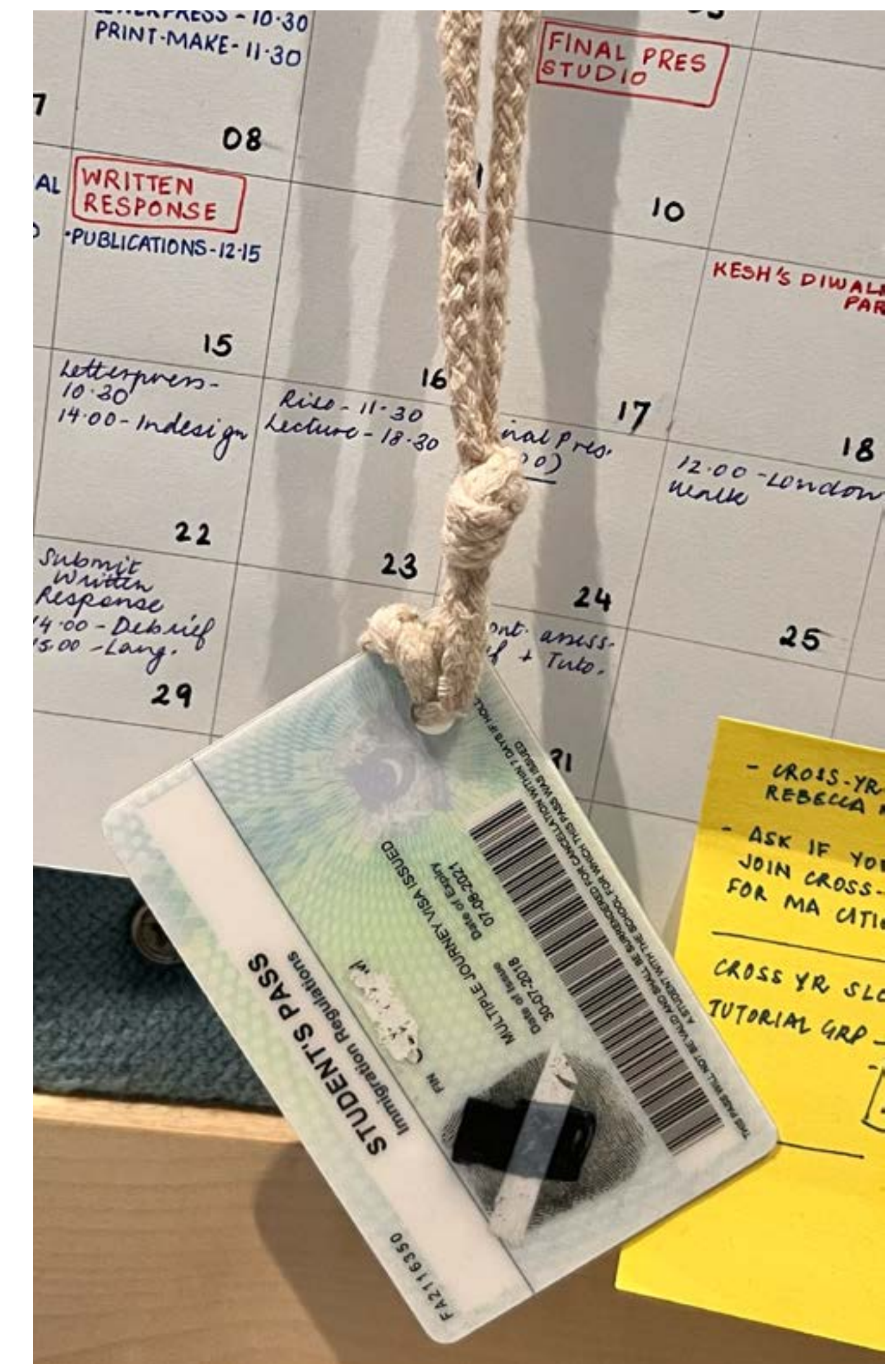
For over 8 years, the ID Card - my residence pass- was secure in my wallet, ready to brandish at any given moment, and **allowing me to reside and contribute in one of the strongest economies in today's world-** but **now that it is past its validity, it has essentially become a relic and a toy.**

For many immigrants, or 'expats' if they are past a certain tax bracket, a visa is the hinge that gives them both freedom and keeps them in a captivity of sorts - gatekeeping movement and immigration and charging exorbitant amount of money to buy access.

While it is now customary for most nations to demand a visa to travel in their territory, **who exactly is benefitting from this system?**

There are many bureaucratic, national and security aspects to the machine that govern and regulate immigration - a lot that remain outside the scope of both this project and the knowledge of the common person - **but its impact, that ripples most disproportionately in the Global South, is an indication of its imbalance of power.**

For *Methods of Translating*, I wanted to **explore the expansion of these clinical bureaucratic systems to the human experience of identities that hinge on documents that are subject to expiration.**



My new bookmark

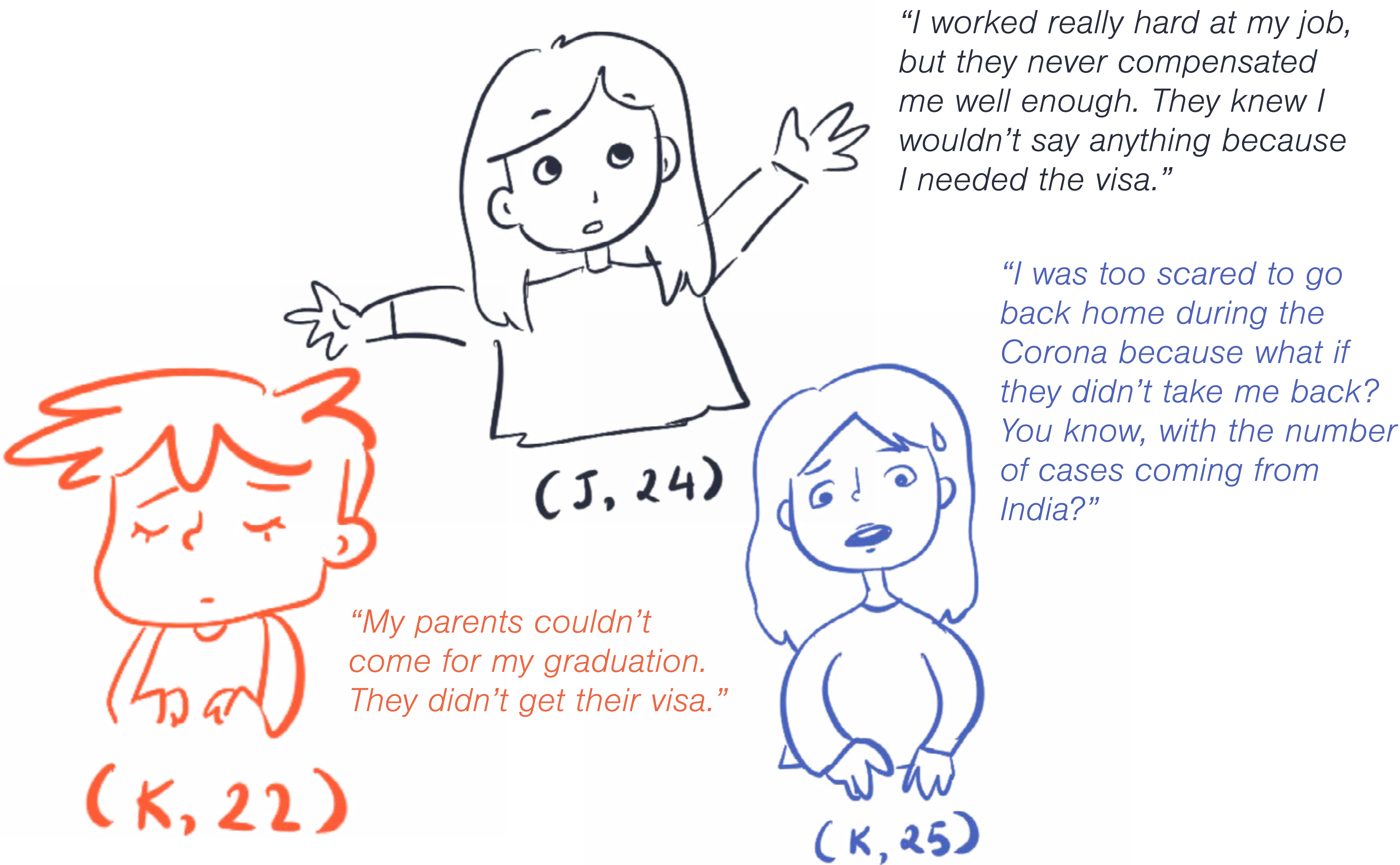
Exploration

To begin this project, I began to **collect personal anecdotes from family and friends** on how much effort in time and money is required to apply for a visa, especially for an American, UK travel or residence visa - including medical and language tests, tickets and more, a lot of which was repetitive as the same requirements persisted for other visas.

Besides the cost, there was the mention of the **experience of constantly living under the threat of a deadline and the anxiety of a visa being cancelled** - which is both stressful and sad, as friends and family part ways with lives they have created over the years.

Application (subject to rejection) Est. costs = anywhere between £50 - £1170 depending on where you're applying	£1=₹116
No refund for failed applications	Est. costs anywhere between= ₹2000 to ₹136,262.81
	avg. monthly income (in middle upper class jobs)= <₹200,000 = <£1,179

(Left) Calculation of Visa costs for travel to UK/US for most short term travellers from South Asia



"I worked really hard at my job, but they never compensated me well enough. They knew I wouldn't say anything because I needed the visa."

"I was too scared to go back home during the Corona because what if they didn't take me back? You know, with the number of cases coming from India?"

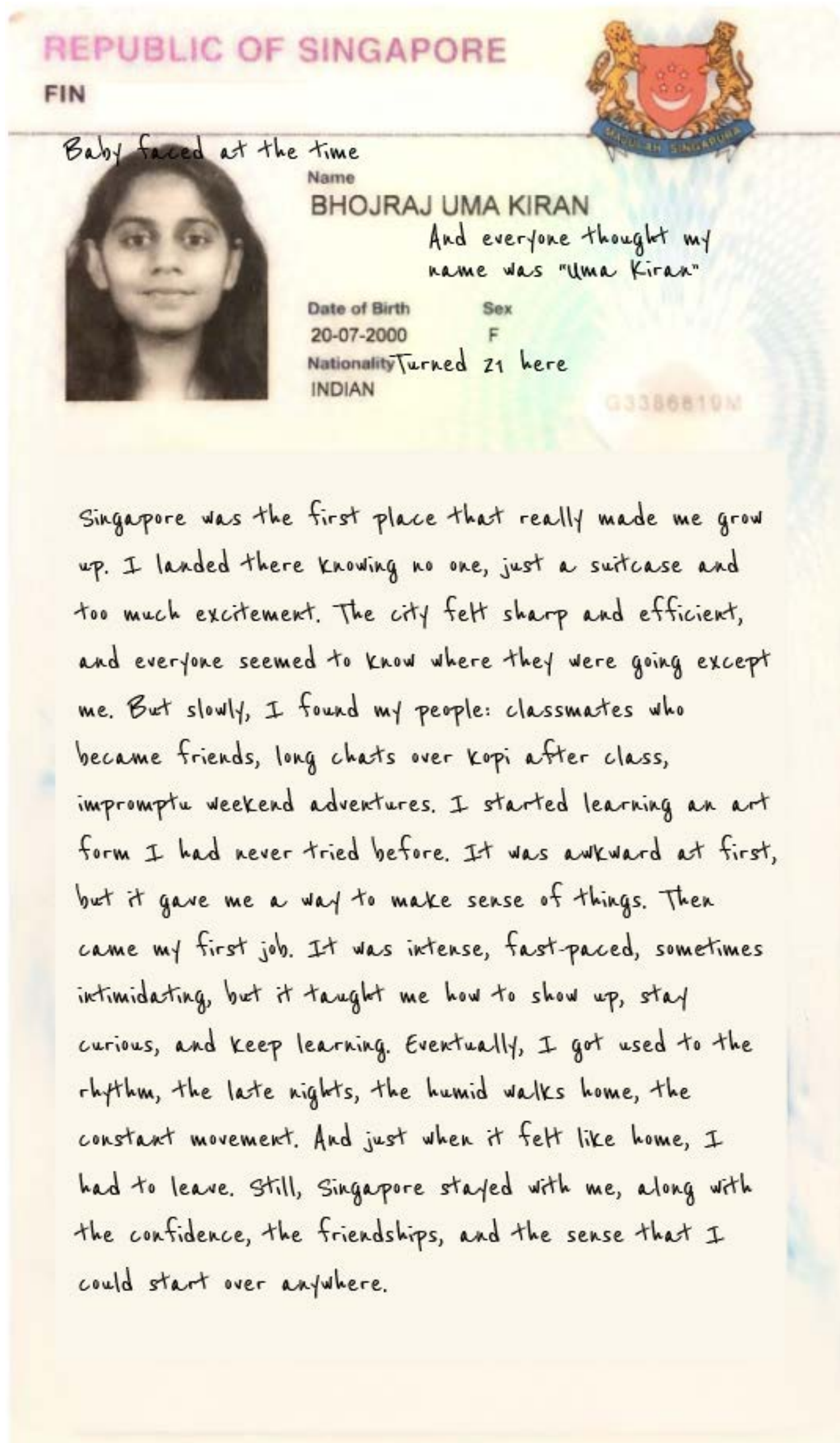
"My parents couldn't come for my graduation. They didn't get their visa."

I referenced **"Visa inequalities:...‘You are not supposed to be here’"** by **Devran Gülel** to advance my understanding of the geopolitical reality this topic - and he furthers the point of 'Visa processes serving as tools of systemic exclusion that disproportionately affect Global South scholars and cause financial, psychological and temporal burdens.'

While he speaks mostly for academic exchange, **it is also experience and cultural exchange that suffers at the hands of privilege hierarchies created by geopolitics.**

Experiments

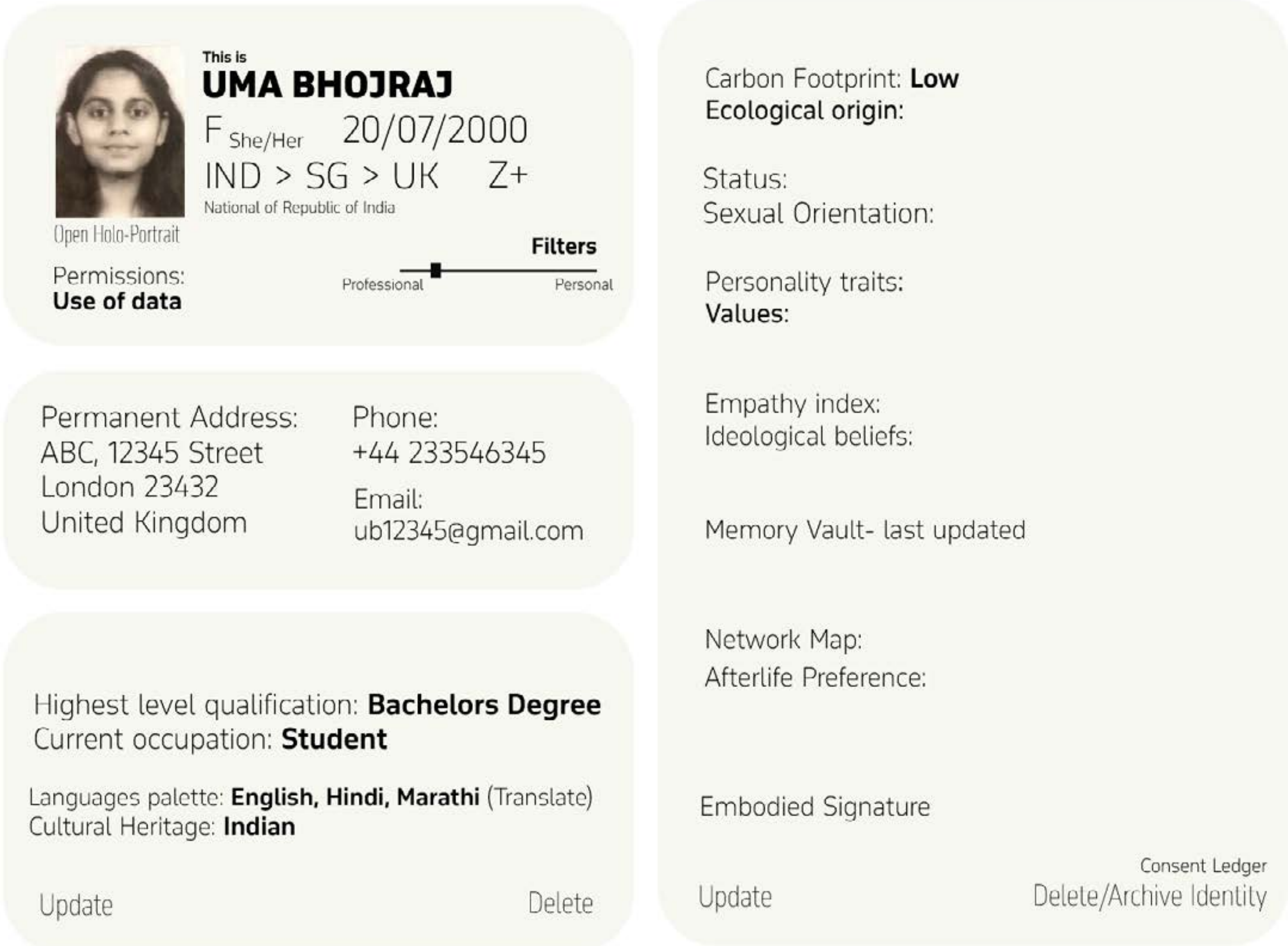
To translate the “static” bureaucracy into the fluid “human” identity - I tried the following experiments:



(Top) Experiment 1: The IC / Visa extends into a longer document, that reveals a personal anecdote about each ID card.

(Right) Experiment 2: The Speculative IC has all levels of filters so the identity can remain fluid as it is transported from one person to another.

1 How do you substantiate this document IC/ID Card? **The identity card is reductive. It has very little information and far too much power.** One of the first experiments was to create ID Card/ IC that is an elaboration of the smaller, standard one, which encapsulates and archives the *human* experiences that card allows.



2 As a piece of **speculative design**, what would an **all-encompassing IC look like?** Would it contain nationality? Age? Sex? Languages? This experiment teased the idea of **identity being inexhaustible.**

This card aimed to give maximum control to the person who the card to belonged to, instead of their place of origin, and transfer power to the person from the regime.

3 When the passport is not strong enough, even for short term travel visit, **the visa application of certain nations demand personal information that almost feels invasive.**

Citizenship becomes capitalist property (you can buy it and save yourself the troubles of the proletariat), and **the passport becomes brand identity.**

In this experiment, **I wanted to create a full “general” / “first world” Visa application, annotating the file as I go with personal notes as I go.** I wanted to create an application that encapsulates the perfect* resident.

*(short-term)



(Top) Experiment 3: A filled Visa Application with annotations on the personal burdens while going through the process - while recaptioning the documents with the subtext they carry (see: Passport and Degree)

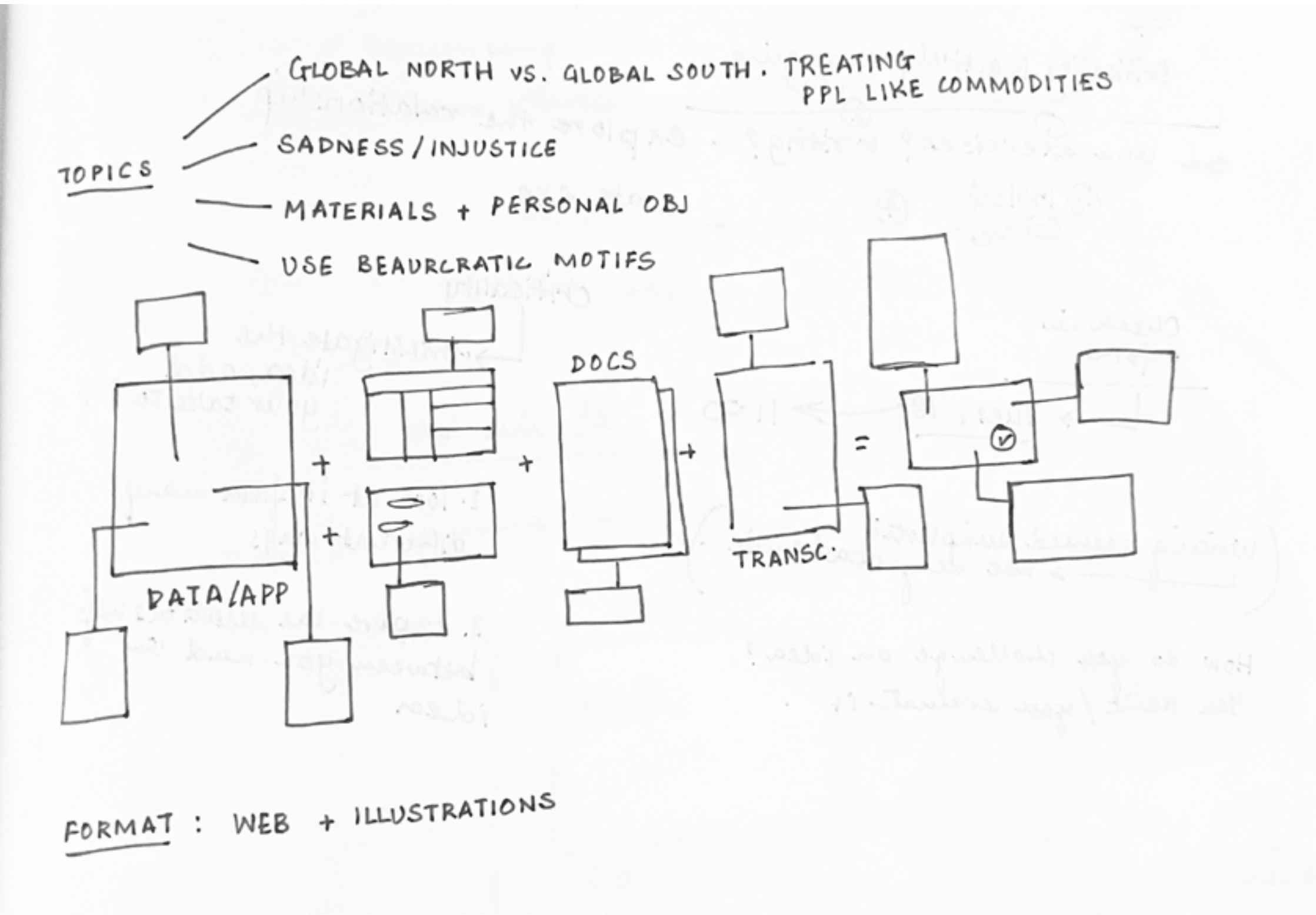
Up Next

A lot of what I wanted to express **was the injustice of being dehumanised by bureaucratic and immigration systems - especially in the treatment of the Global North when it brings in people from the Global South,** so I decided to merge the materials with the personal and create an interface allows to expand that diminished identity - almost a mix of all three experiments.

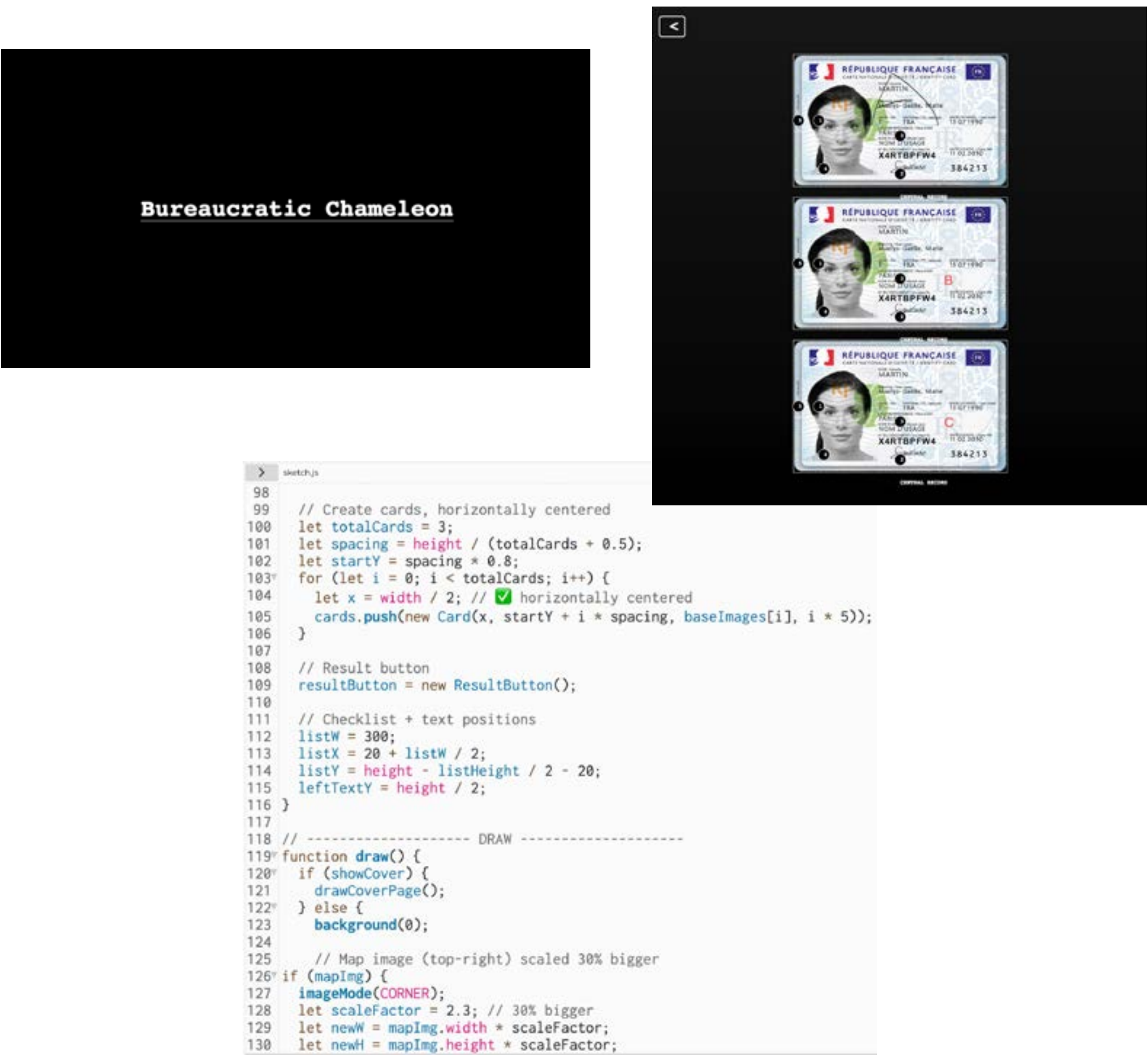
Process

Government websites often are notoriously glitchy, and almost obsolete in the way they are designed. But a lot of the process also depends on the spazzy, glitchy websites - **I wanted to replicate the jankiness of the interactions, so I used ai to help me write a rudimentary code for my interactive document to create 3 cards laid together.** The interactions would then open handpainted illustration popups (arguably one of the most “human” way of expression).

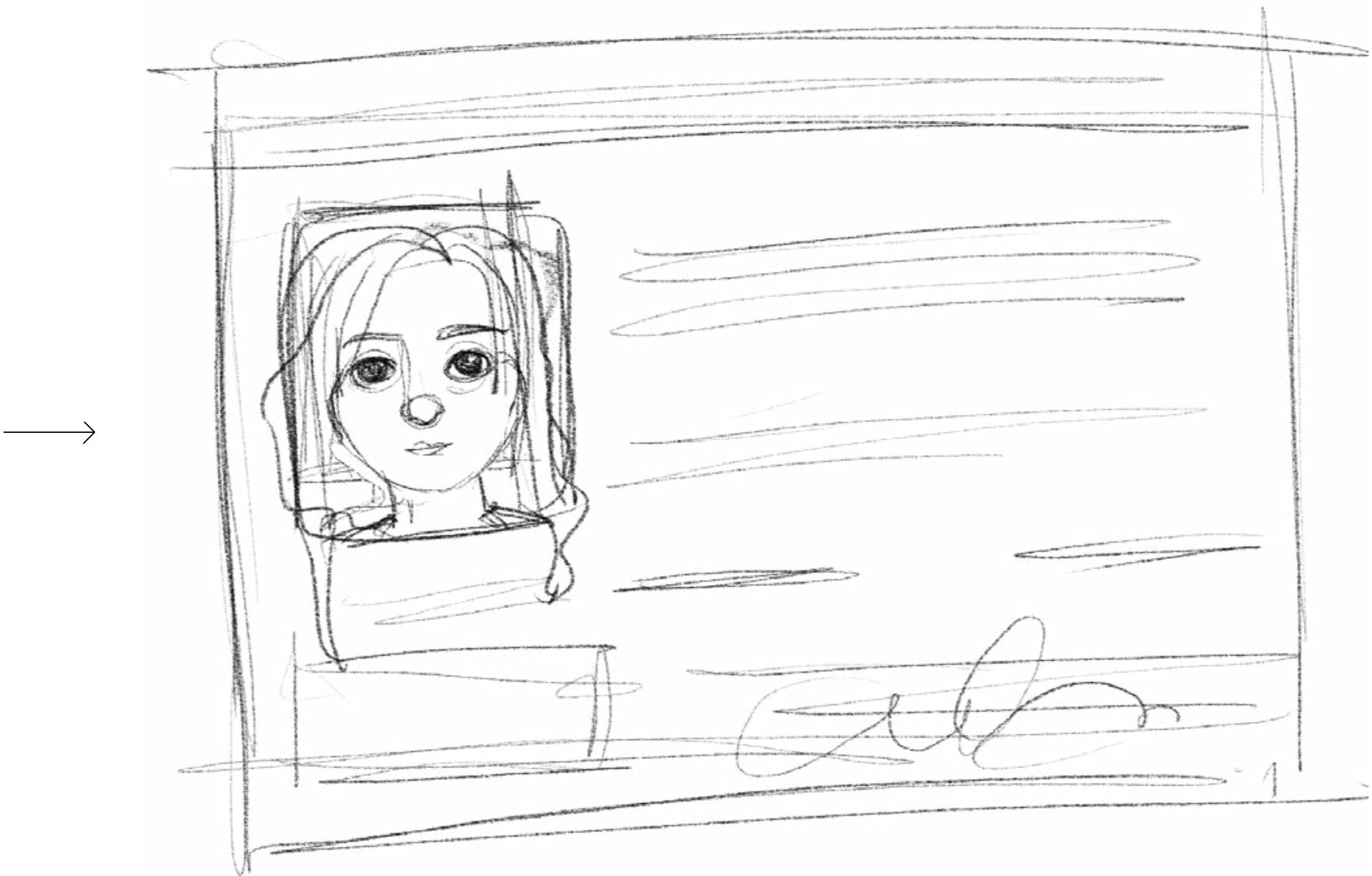
One of my references was this brilliant game recommended by one of my groupmates, called **Papers, Please**. It is a puzzle simulation video game created by indie game developer Lucas Pope. The game was set in the Dystopian Arstotzka and the player is the immigration inspector controlling the flow of people entering the country. The aesthetics and tone of the game **rouses empathy by demonstrating the cruel act of immobilising the flow of people in a war-ridden nation**- it helped me place my juxtaposition of bureaucracy versus humanity.



(Top) The original layout plan for the website, with documents laid one beside the other, each of which would expand in pop-ups when clicked.

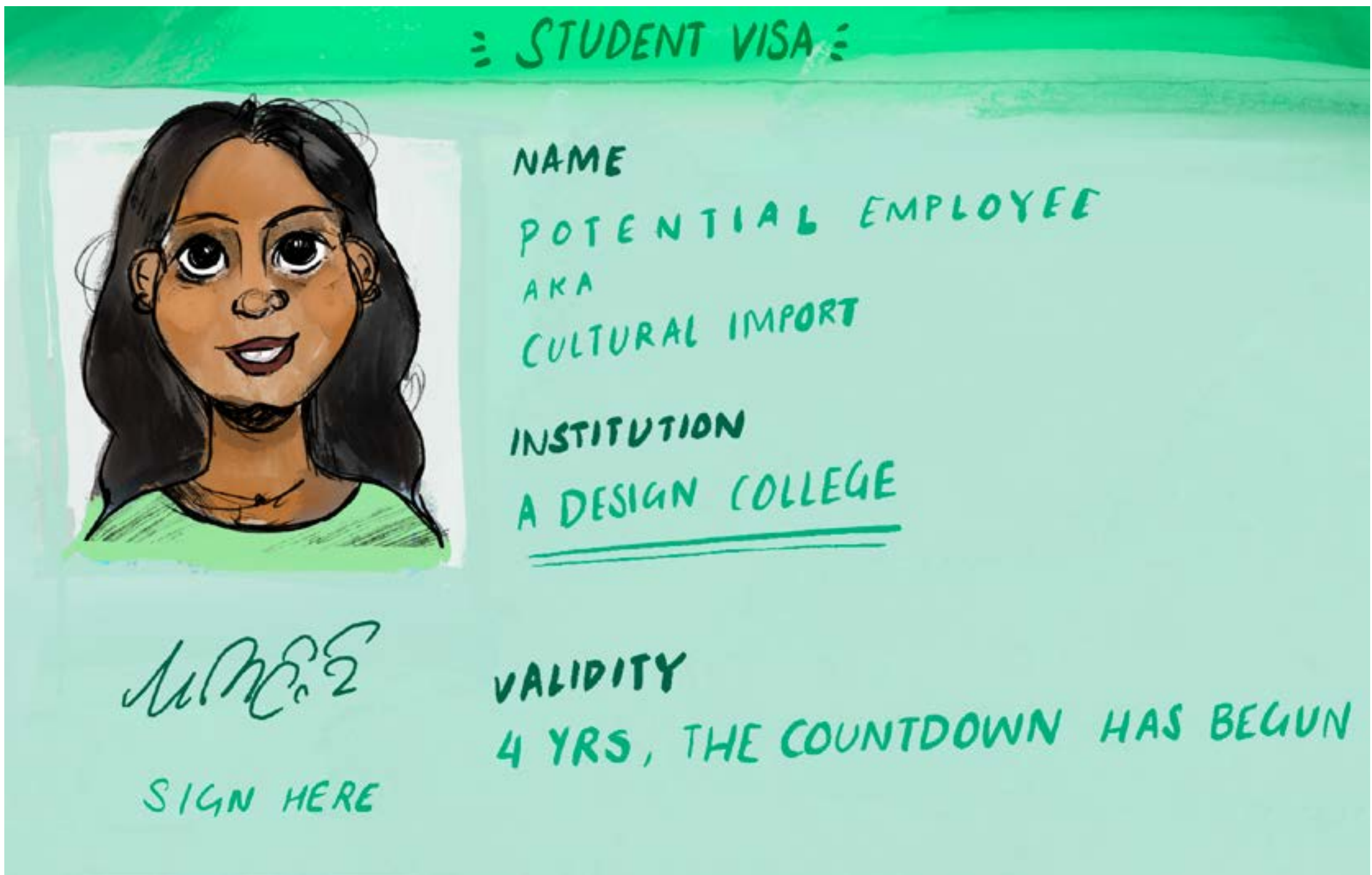
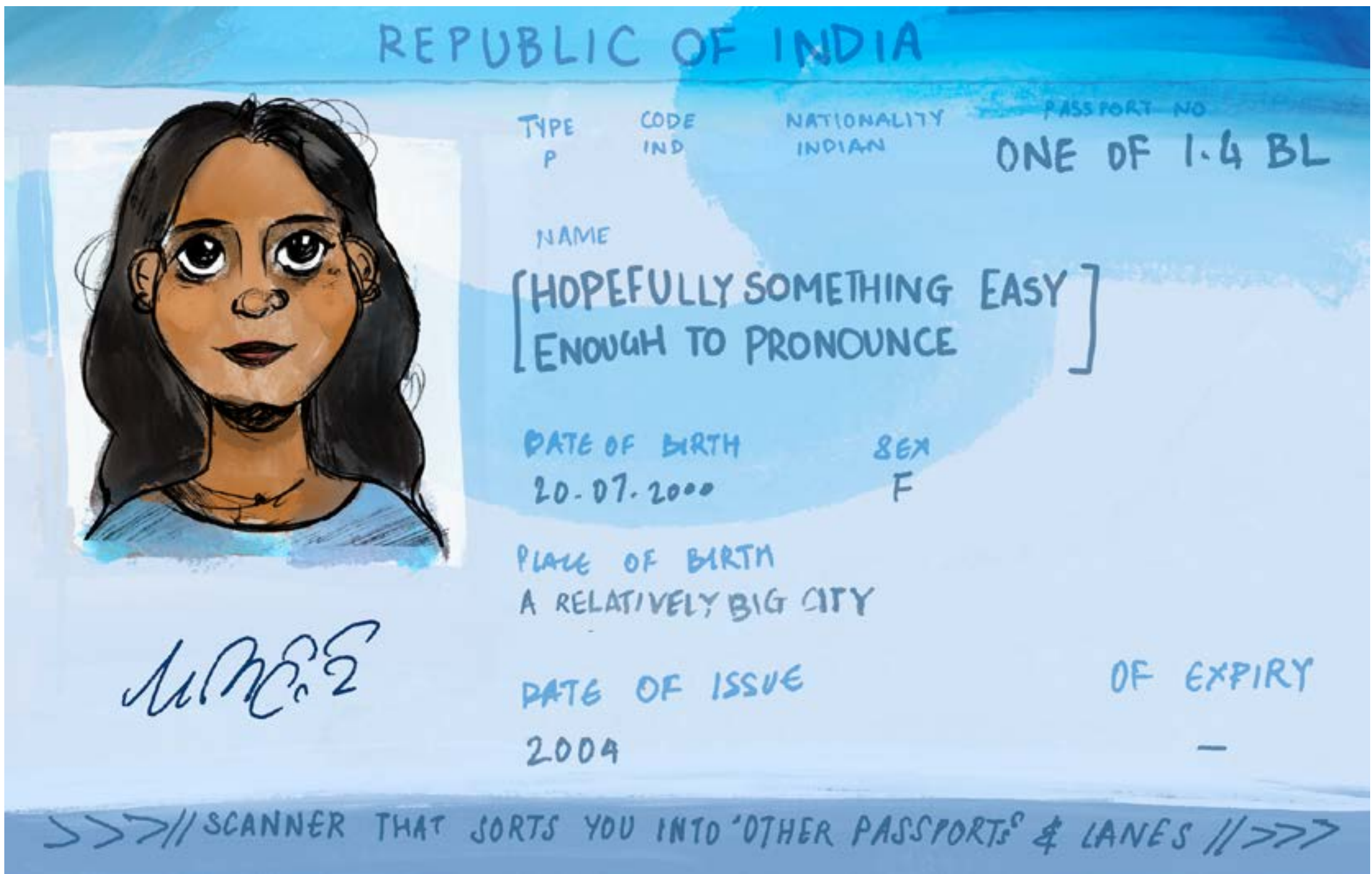


(Top) The best way to express humanity in this nearly robotic process of coding the interface was illustration

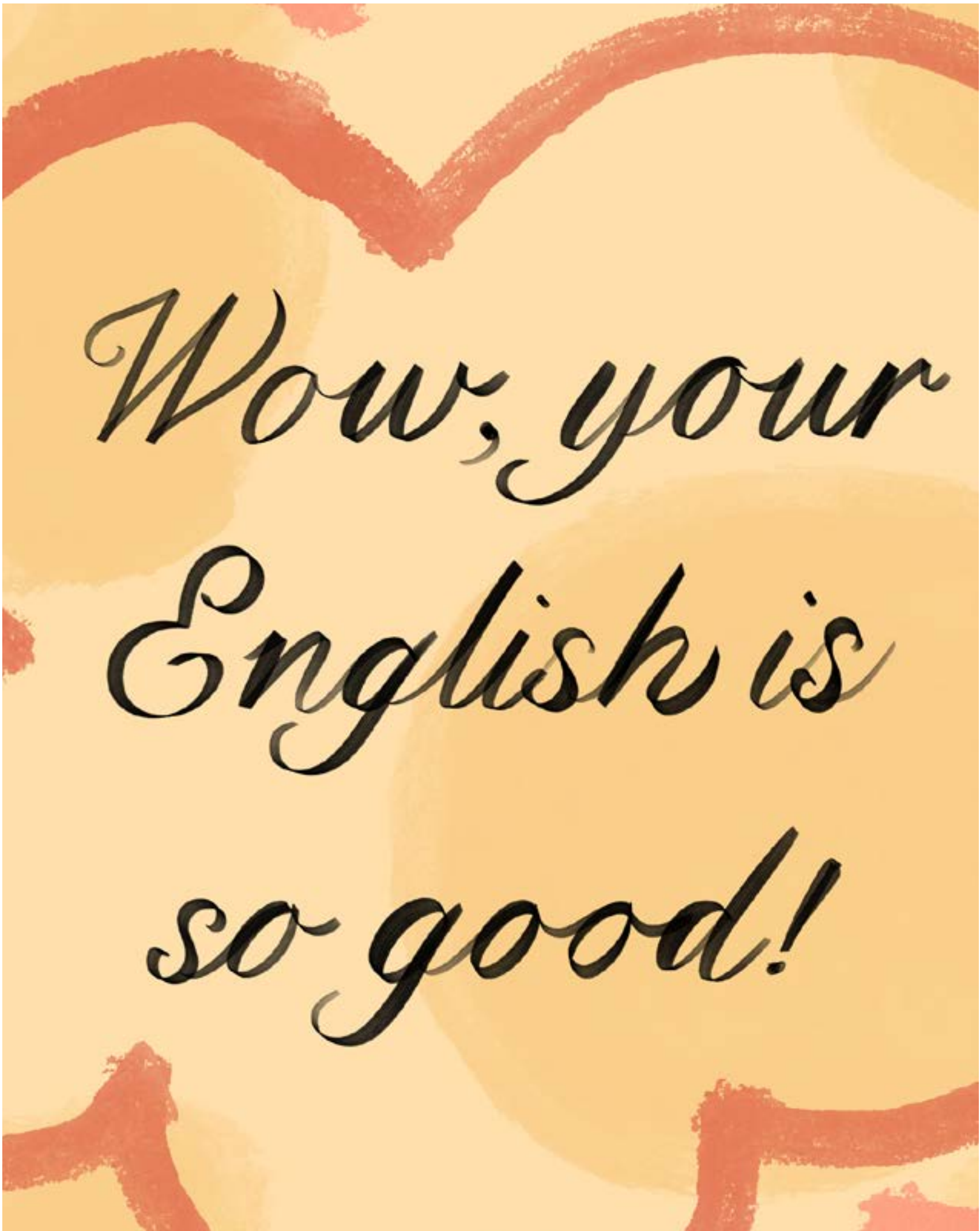
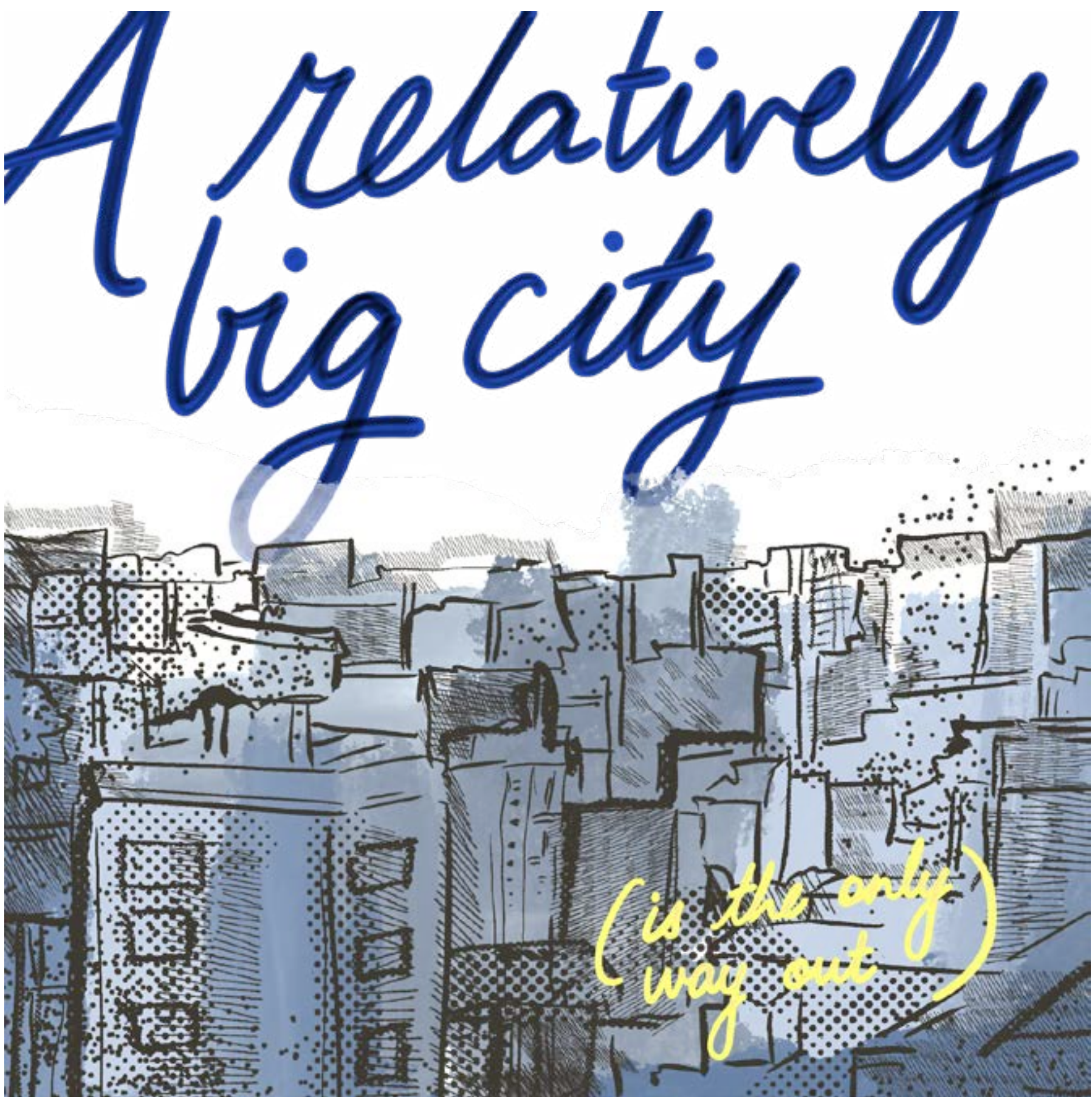
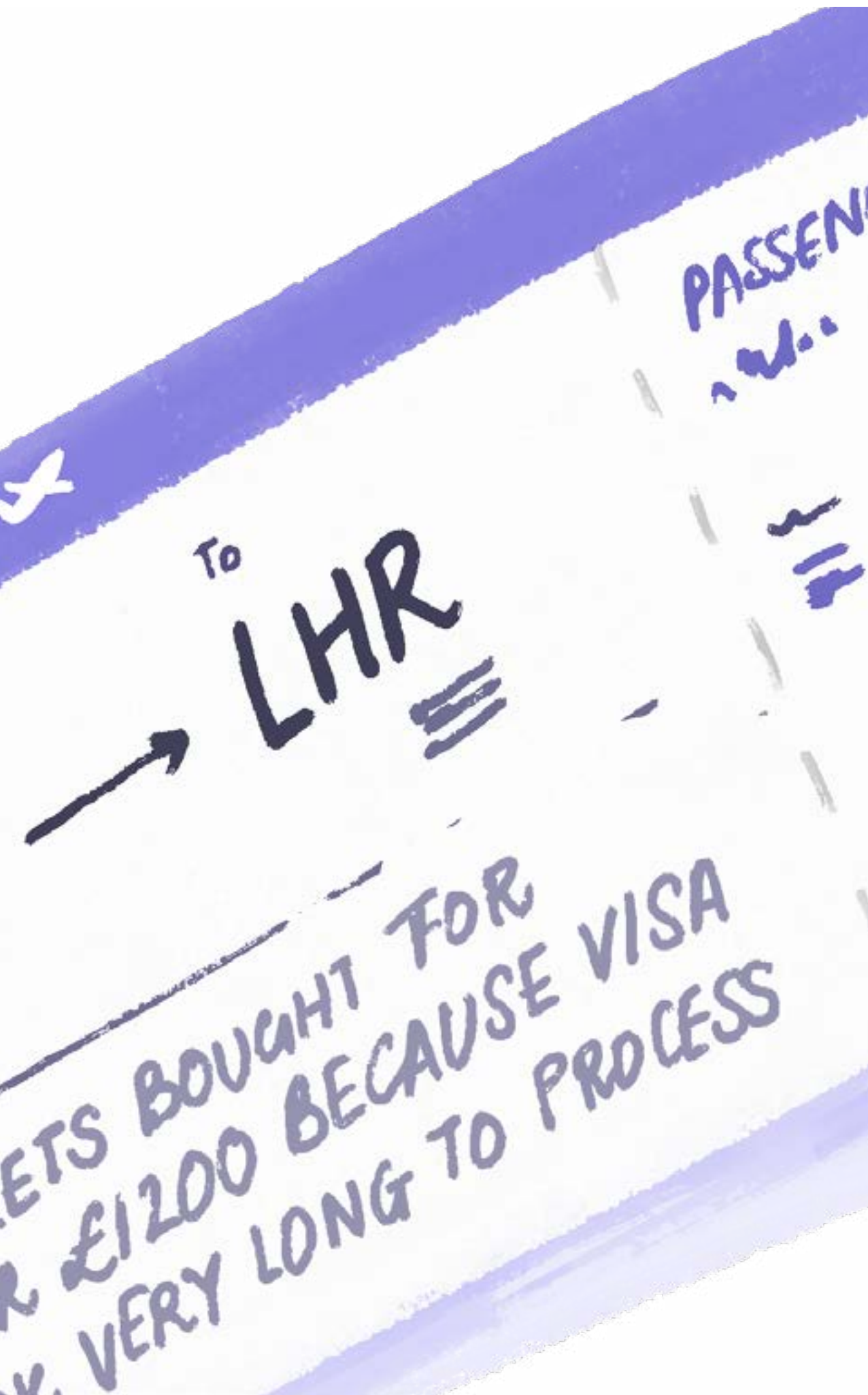


Development

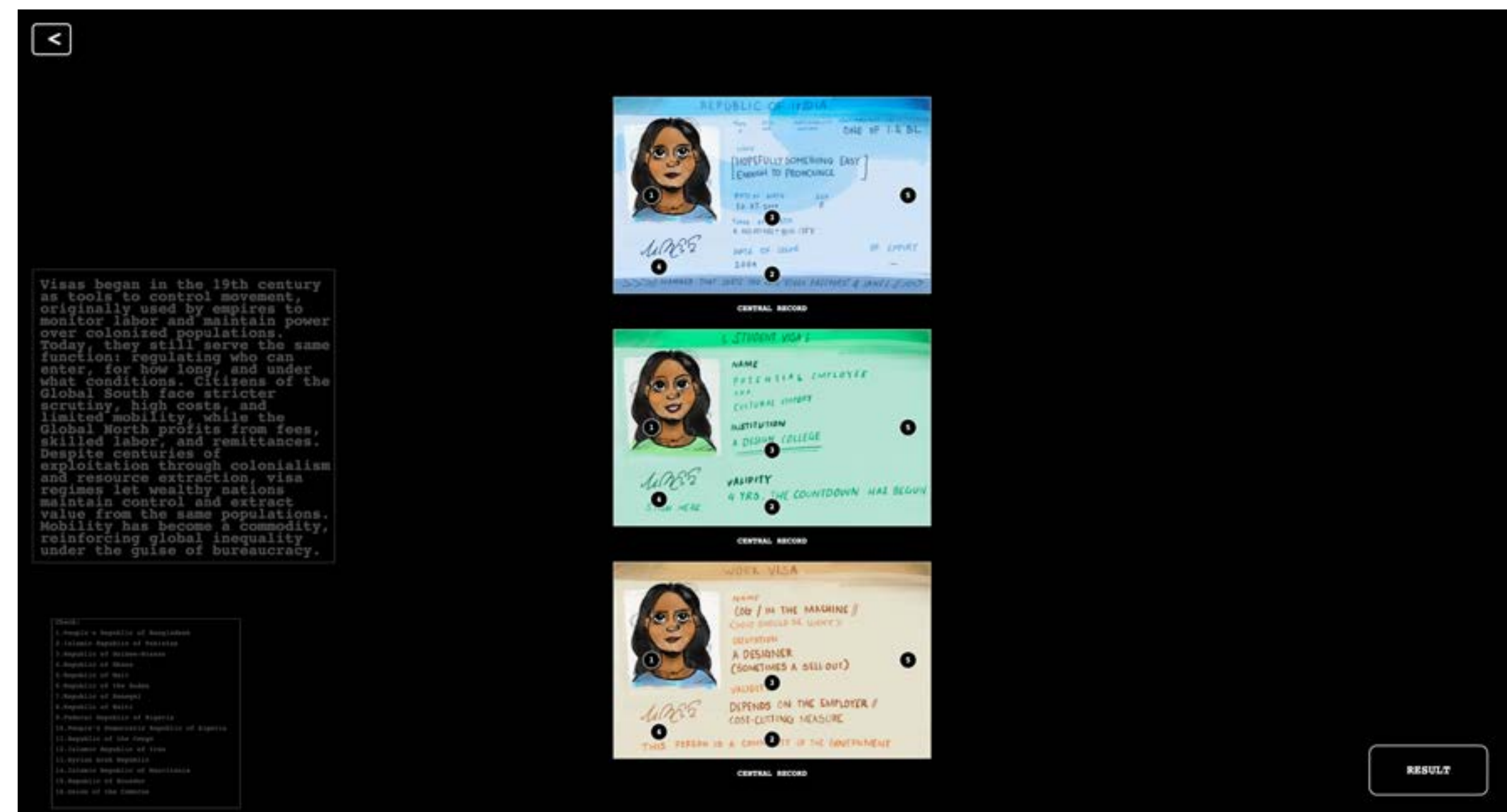
After the basis of the interface was ready, a interaction of clicking into ID cards to reveal a pop-up that expands on the identity of the character, I created illustrations for the - more handdrawn, colourful and sketchy, with a sense of motion and imperfection within them so they stand against the frigidity of the backdrop well.



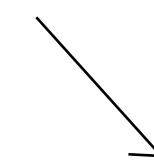
The base ID card each show a phase in the life of the “immigrant” and the supporting images ellaborate on their lives.



Showcase



The cover page leads us into the layout of 3 cards with numbers around them - and **clicking into the numbers explodes the page into several pop-ups**. The identity cards expand into multitudes of aspects, all a different phase, a new shape, created by the experiences that are condensed within the control of a single document.



The **clicking interaction creates a mechanical sound: a print, a process of bureaucracy being expanded**. At the bottom right corner, a 'result' button sits, which if pressed randomly creates an **Approved/Denied message** - quite similar to how random the process is for most people who never know on what ground their visas applications were given the result it were - so the anxiety loop continues.



[See video recording here.](#)
[Access website here.](#)

Further Development and Reflection

End notes

Through this project, I was able to carry out an enquiry regarding the geopolitical realities of the mobility of the Global South and the ease of access bias possessed and protected by parts of the Global North. Using illustration and art revives the humanity that is disregarded in the broad census and categorisation of nations, and brings back empathy in these discussions.

However, the topic is wider and deeper than this enquiry, and while reading the impact is one way to respond to the topic, there still remains a power gap between the privileged few travelling with some means (as the ones illustrated here) versus those who migrate to survive. This enquiry acknowledges that and I hope there would be more opportunity for me in the future to expand on the nuances of immigration and challenge the colonial bias such as this through my work.

Further Development

To further develop this project, I am interested in cleaning up the scope of this enquiry to focus more deeply on the discussions around the impact of border and privilege hierarchies in geopolitical realities of the Global South through subtext.

On a technical level, I would like to push the project to be clearer and easier to navigate while maintaining its sense of “explosion”.



