Pathway Project Documentation

A 1700 word case-study written in May 2021 as part of academic coursework at IIAD, Delhi.

- Arjun Yadav (UG18014)

Contents

1.1 - Understanding The Brief

The ISTD 2021 Student Brief for Project 1 read, "What can a typographer do to address the imbalance, to harness, shape and organise words in service of breaking barriers? To encourage reflection, respect, and self-awareness?"

Due to the vast nature of this brief, I spent a lot of time studying. As a result, I found myself constantly stuck between wanting to know more & not needing to know more. This was my first realisation as a student trying to handle a research-intensive project for the first time.
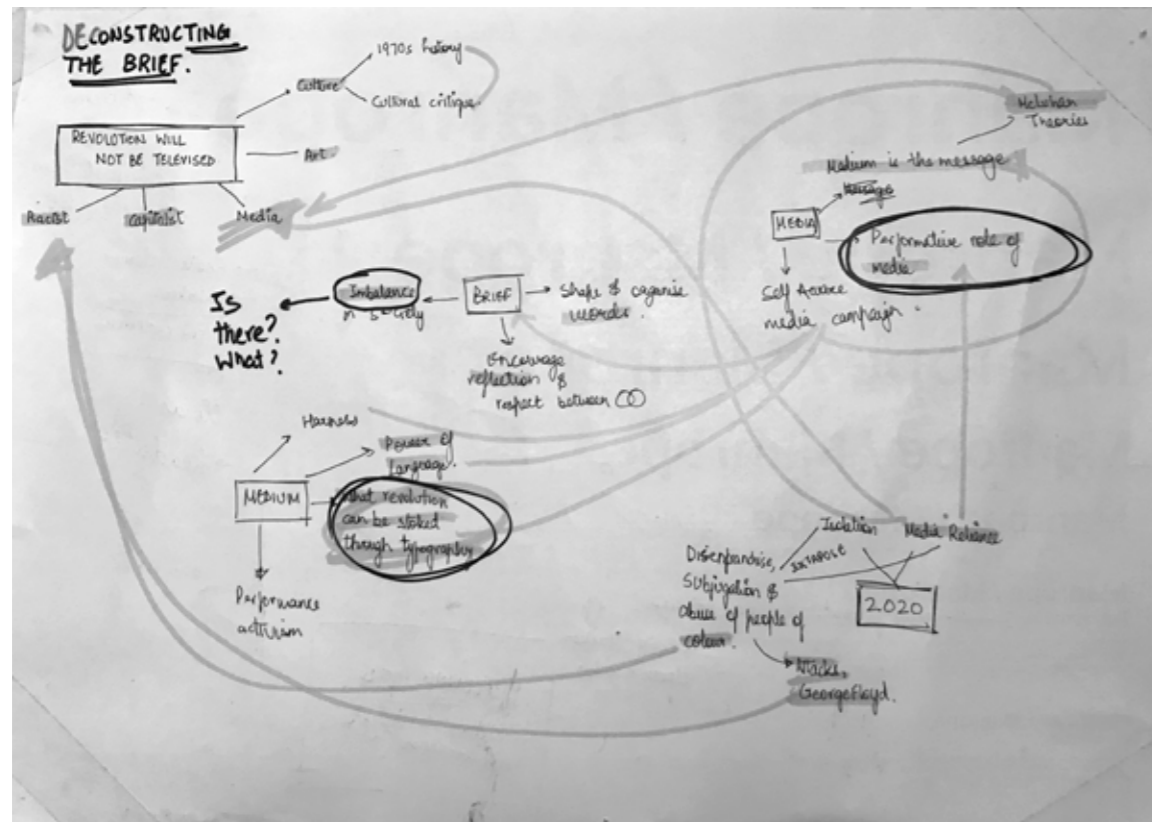
De-constructing & connecting separate elements of the brief led me to a better understanding.

1.2 - America: the 50s, 60s & 70s

The work of Gil Scott-Heron (namely, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised") and media theories by Marshall McLuhan were the starting points for this brief. Diving deeper into these two individuals was deemed necessary & it made evident the role of art, words & media in stoking a revolution.


Gil's piece, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" was quite captivating.

A collection of Gil's words collected through different sources such as books, poems, performances, documentaries & his memoir, "The Last Holiday".

1.3 - Further Research

During this time, I understood the context in which the brief was set in. This led me to my own foray into different branches such as: the power of words, calligraphy, activism, the role of graphic design, cultural & social issues in the country, the understanding of race, media theory, social models in the country, the transformative role of the media, philosophy and other such branches that directly or indirectly connected to my brief.
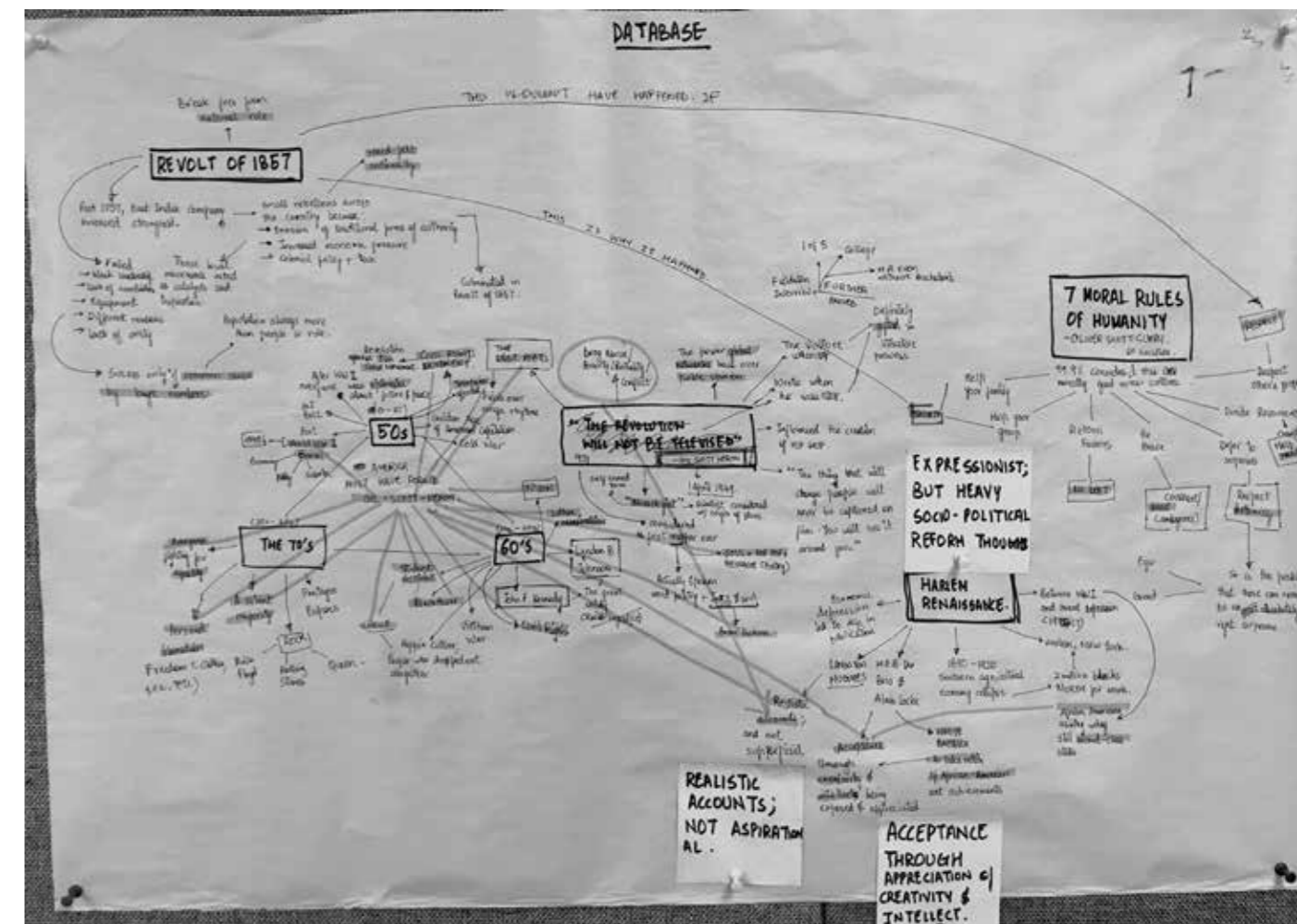

I formed a database of things I was reading and started connecting different points between pieces of seemingly unrelated data.

The culmination of this phase gave rise to another important learning with regards to a research-intensive project: It becomes imperative to define what is & isn't in the scope of your project. Otherwise, you spiral down an endless rabbit hole.

2.1 - Forming The Context

I understood the relationship between context & design quite early on in this project and realised that I needed to take a locally rooted issue to address.

During this time, I was exposed to a lot of ideologies, incidents, literature & stories that could all have resulted in important issues to address. However, it soon became evident that I simply did not know enough and it felt unethical to base a project entirely on secondary research. Hence, to add authenticity to my project, I narrowed the scope of my project even further in the next step.
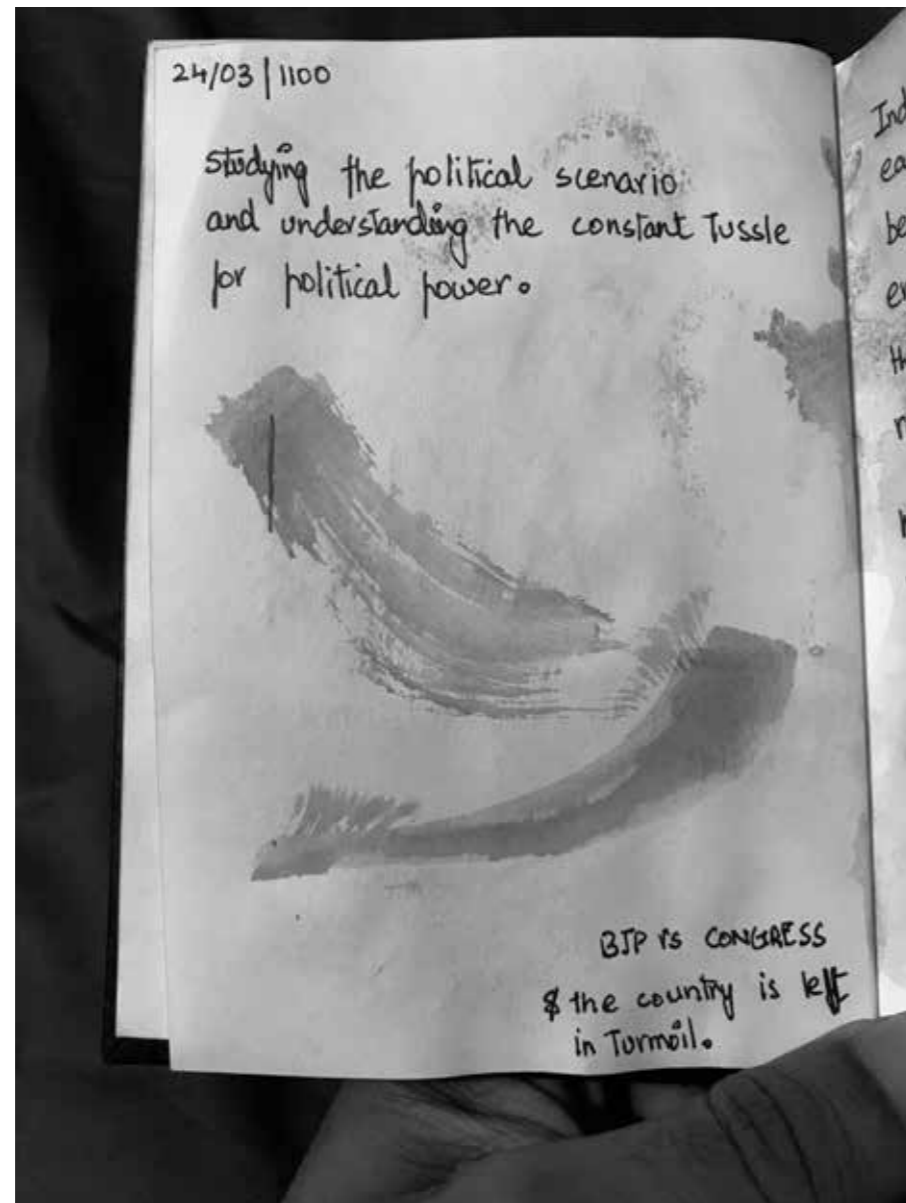
A page from my reflective log when thinking about group forming & subsequent segregation of people in India.
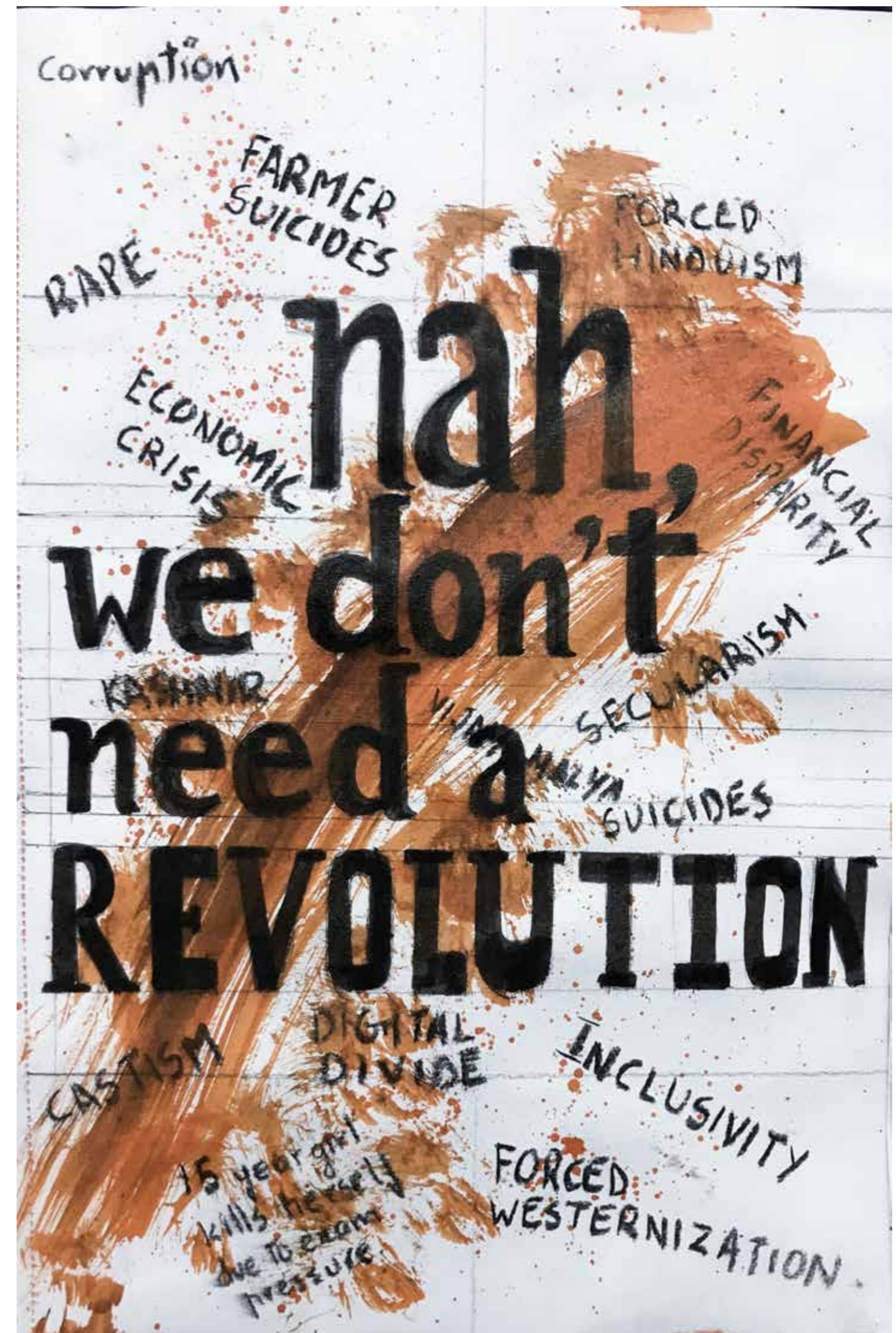
2.2 - Narrowing It Down

My mentor helped me narrow down my scope of research to Delhi, the city I reside in. This would help make the project valid & authentic.

Initially, my ideas revolved around trying to tackle communal disputes by increasing empathy between groups who loathe the other. However, my mentor pointed out that the authenticity of secondary data to base the project on was doubtful and collecting first-hand data could be threatening.

This stage felt like an endless tunnel & I had a lot of problems trying to arrive somewhere.
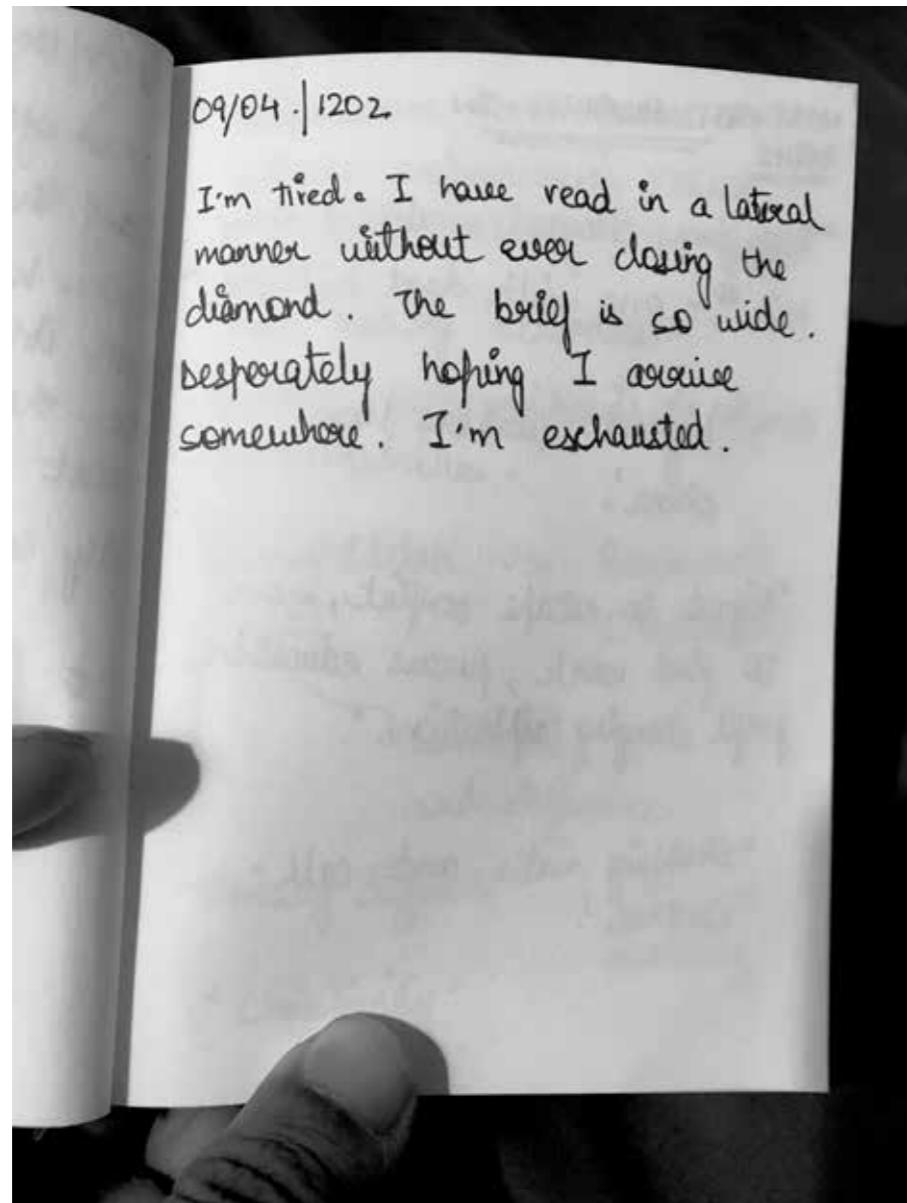
Photo of the reflective log during this stage.

During a study session, I came across the horrific incident of Nido Taniam, a 20 year old student from Arunachal Pradesh who was murdered in New Delhi.

Source: The Hindu Business Line [online], 2018.

The incident as well as the premise was bizarre & shocking. Other similar cases made evident issues that no one was speaking about.

Further digging into the exploitation of Northeastern migrants in Delhi led me to understand the existence of deeply embedded social injustice systems that remain prevalent even today.

2.3 - Context Building

In this phase of my project, I became aware about the incidents, stories & history of the Northeastern migrants in Delhi. Resources such as 'Northeastern Migrants in Delhi: Race, Refuge & ' by Duncan McDuie-Ra, articles from various journalistic outposts & informal conversations (+observation) with people in Munirka helped me empathise with this particular group of people.

This publication by Duncan McDuie-Ra soon became a wonderful place to get insightful observations of ethnographic study & has impacted my project to a great extent.
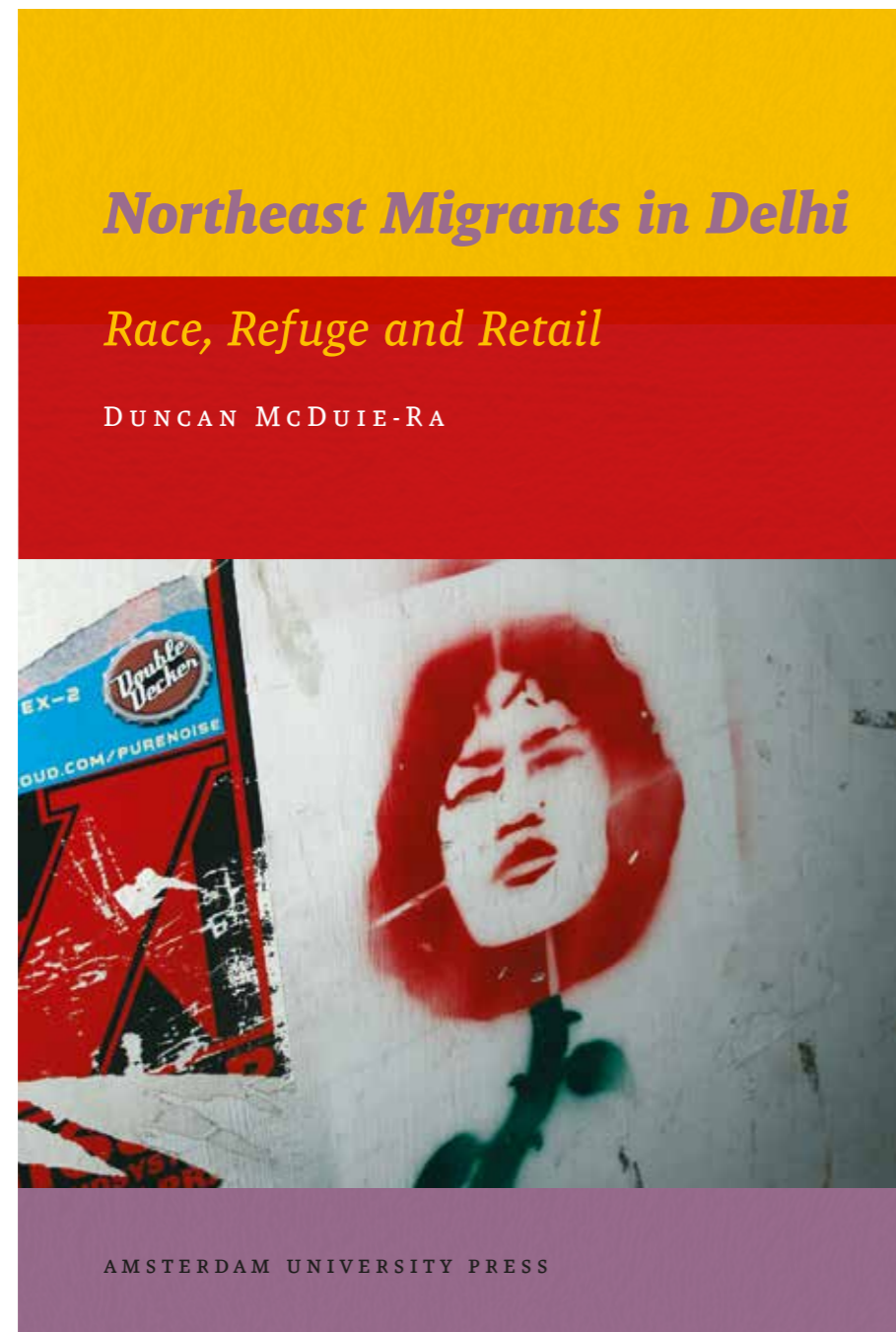
I was moved by some of the incidents and, what is even more scary, the measures taken to prevent these incidents in the future (refer to Page 13 of my final book).
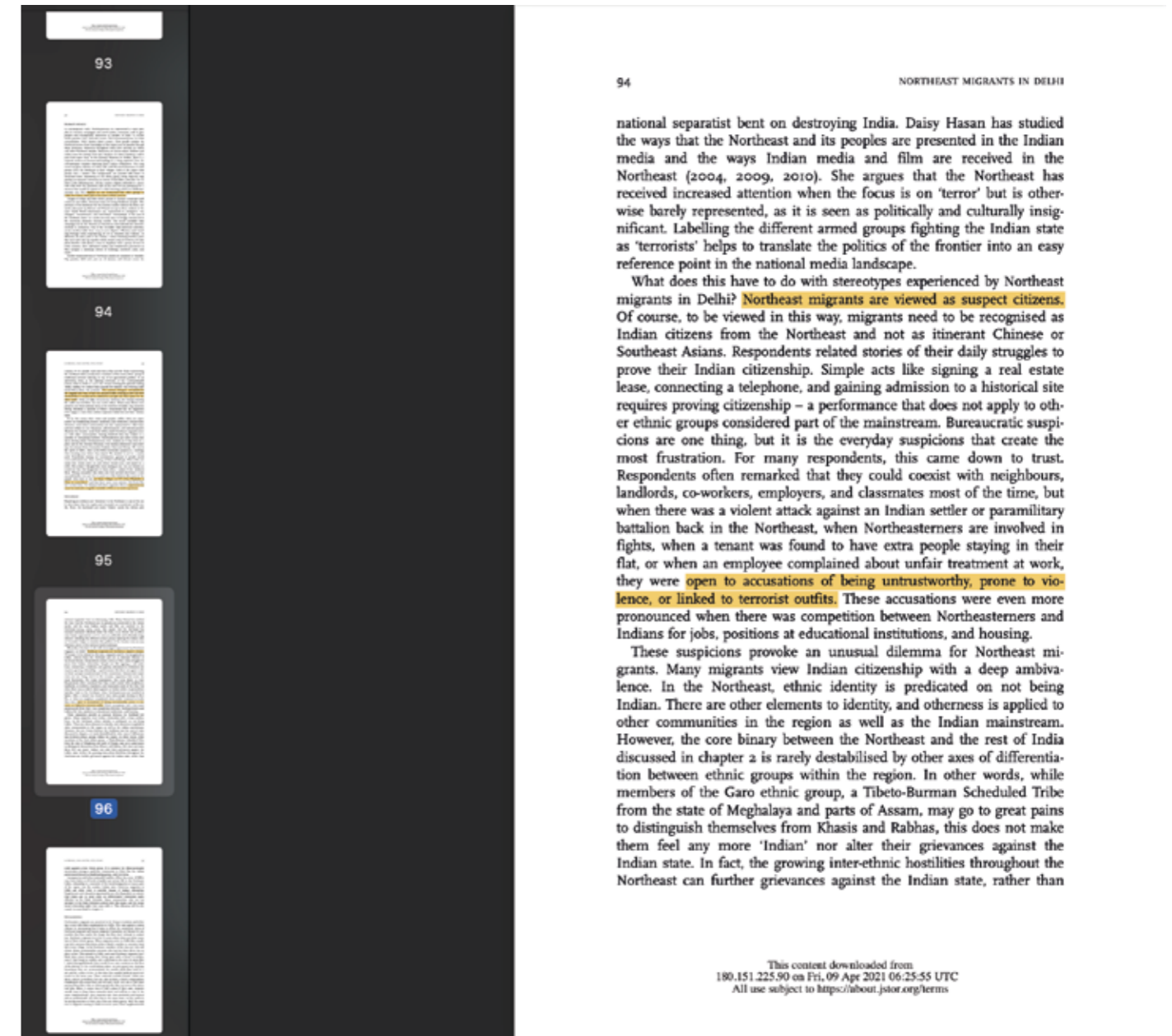
All chapters had insights that were both shocking & yet weirdly accepted.

I arrived at the conclusion that these forms of classism, racism or harassment were not recognised as forms of social injustice in the country. My mentor encouraged me to look at how prevalent and accepted these forms of social injustices were in the country.

North East Migrants in Delhi

Derived from the publication, "North East Migrants in Delhi: Race, Refuge and Retail" by Duncan McDuie-Ra.

"Ideal gratifiers for the West".

Therefore, finding **solidarity in this difference.**

Rarely vote.

'On show' voyeurism.

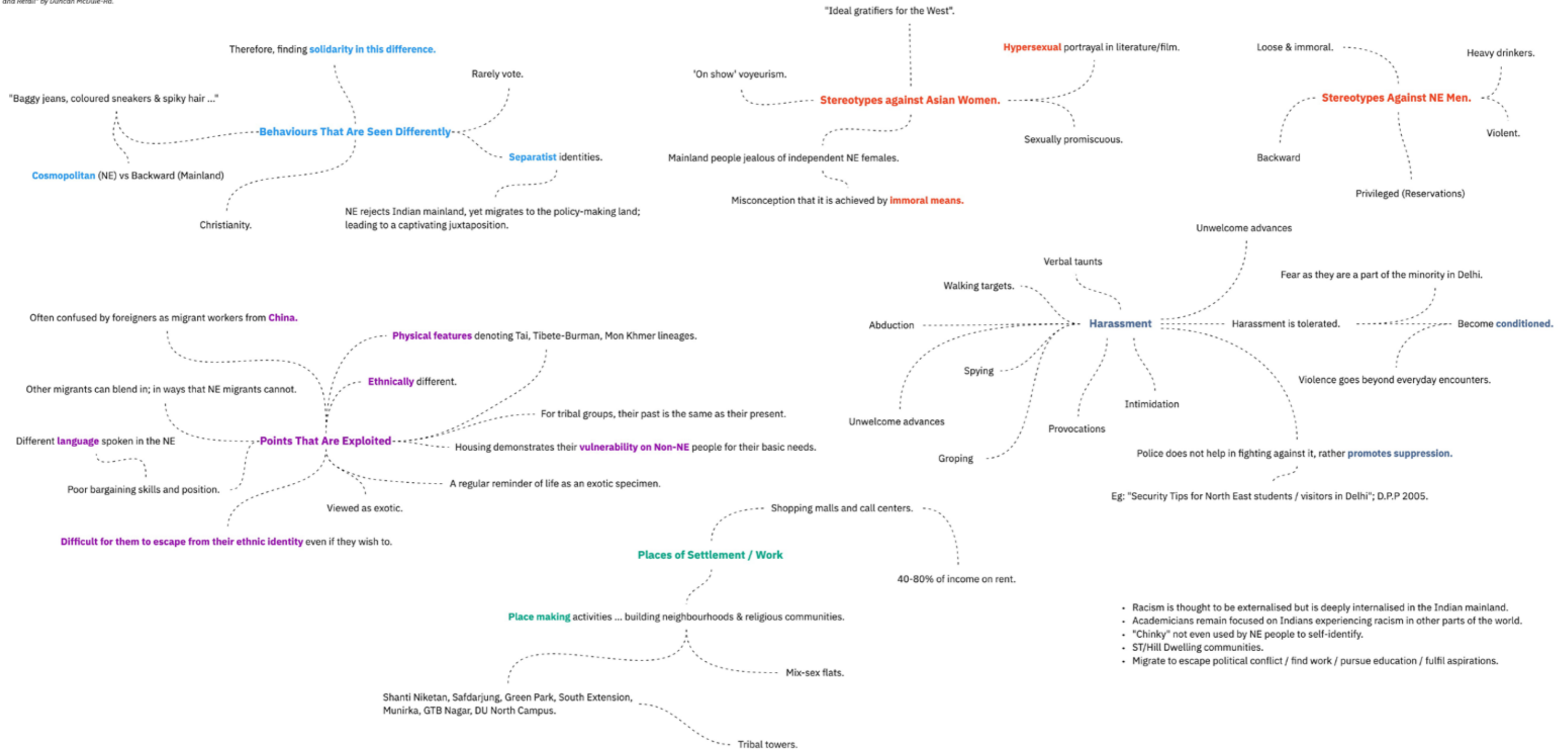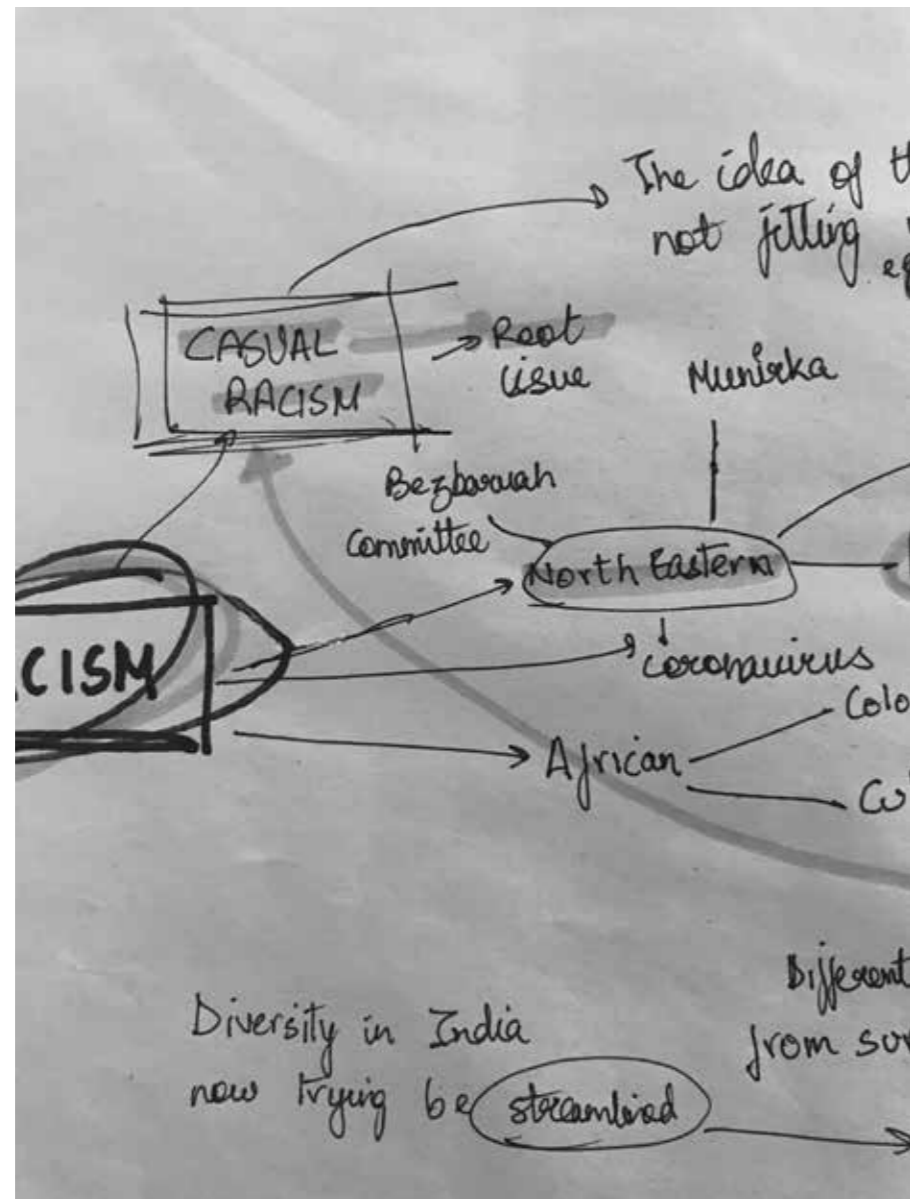**Hypersexual** portrayal in literature/film.

Loose & immoral.

Heavy drinkers.

"Baggy jeans, coloured sneakers & spiky hair ..."

Stereotypes against Asian Women.

Stereotypes Against NE Men.

Behaviours That Are Seen Differently

Sexually promiscuous.

Violent.

Cosmopolitan (NE) vs Backward (Mainland)

Separatist identities.

Mainland people jealous of independent NE females.

Backward

Christianity.

NE rejects Indian mainland, yet migrates to the policy-making land; leading to a captivating juxtaposition.

Misconception that it is achieved by **immoral means.**

Privileged (Reservations)

Unwelcome advances

Verbal taunts

Fear as they are a part of the minority in Delhi.

Walking targets.

Often confused by foreigners as migrant workers from **China.**

Physical features denoting Tai, Tibete-Burman, Mon Khmer lineages.

Abduction

Harassment

Harassment is tolerated.

Become **conditioned.**

Ethnically different.

Spying

Other migrants can blend in; in ways that NE migrants cannot.

For tribal groups, their past is the same as their present.

Violence goes beyond everyday encounters.

Different **language** spoken in the NE

Points That Are Exploited

Housing demonstrates their **vulnerability on Non-NE** people for their basic needs.

Unwelcome advances

Intimidation

Provocations

Poor bargaining skills and position.

A regular reminder of life as an exotic specimen.

Groping

Police does not help in fighting against it, rather **promotes suppression.**

Viewed as exotic.

Eg: "Security Tips for North East students / visitors in Delhi"; D.P.P 2005.

Difficult for them to escape from their ethnic identity even if they wish to.

Shopping malls and call centers.

Places of Settlement / Work

40-80% of income on rent.

- Racism is thought to be externalised but is deeply internalised in the Indian mainland.
- Academicians remain focused on Indians experiencing racism in other parts of the world.
- "Chinky" not even used by NE people to self-identify.
- ST/Hill Dwelling communities.
- Migrate to escape political conflict / find work / pursue education / fulfil aspirations.

Place making activities ... building neighbourhoods & religious communities.

Mix-sex flats.

Shanti Niketan, Safdarjung, Green Park, South Extension, Munirka, GTB Nagar, DU North Campus.

Tribal towers.

Some of the key insights used in my project, building upon the ethnographic study done by Duncan McDuie-Ra.

3 - Ideation

I used a converging-diverging process during this phase. When converging (thinking critically), certain factors such as provoking empathy, questioning assumptions & other such sub-factors played a huge role. My concepts were constantly evolving because of the deepening of my understanding of the underlying issues behind the discrimination faced by Northeastern migrants in the city.

The arrival at the term, "Casual Racism" is what gave me the extra edge.

In a parallel train of thought, I was exploring how the same set of characters could lead to such multifarious outcomes differed only by their motivations

Identification of "casual racism" as the underlying root issue during an information mapping sprint.
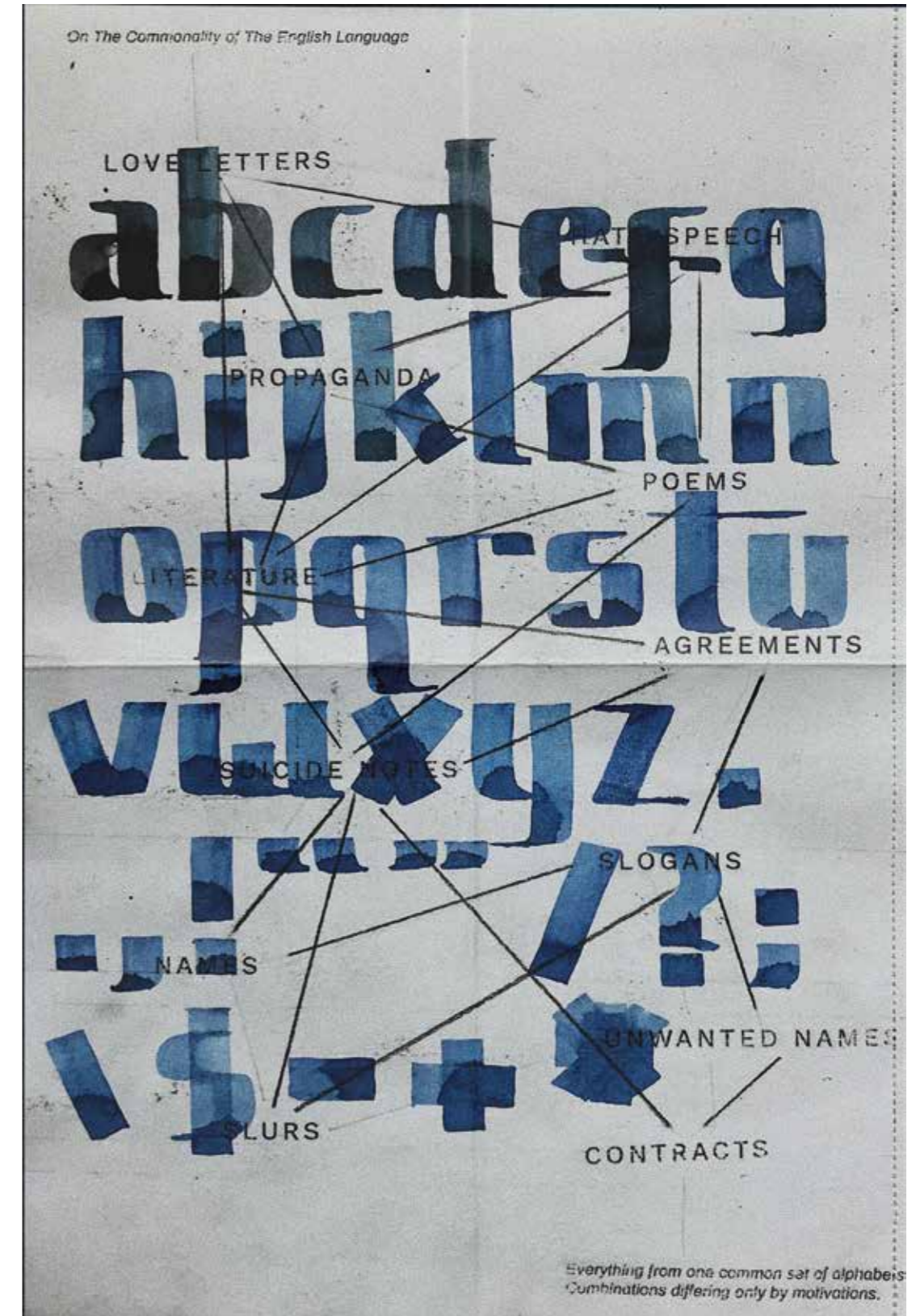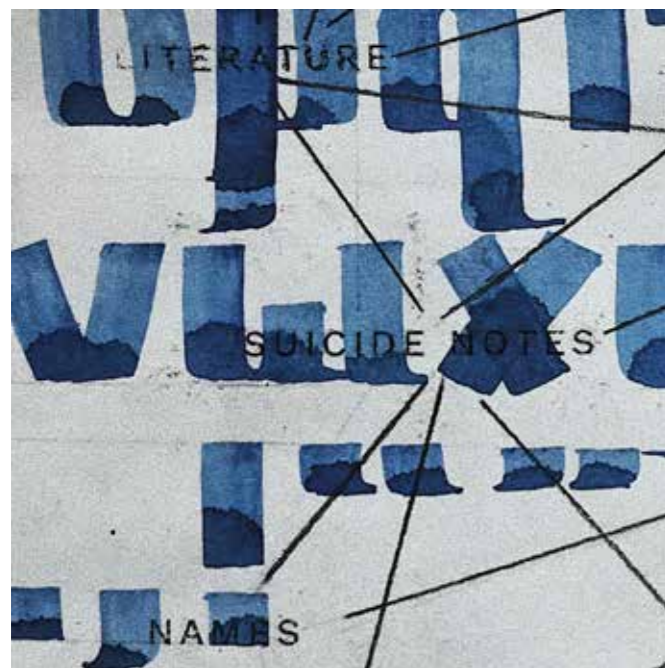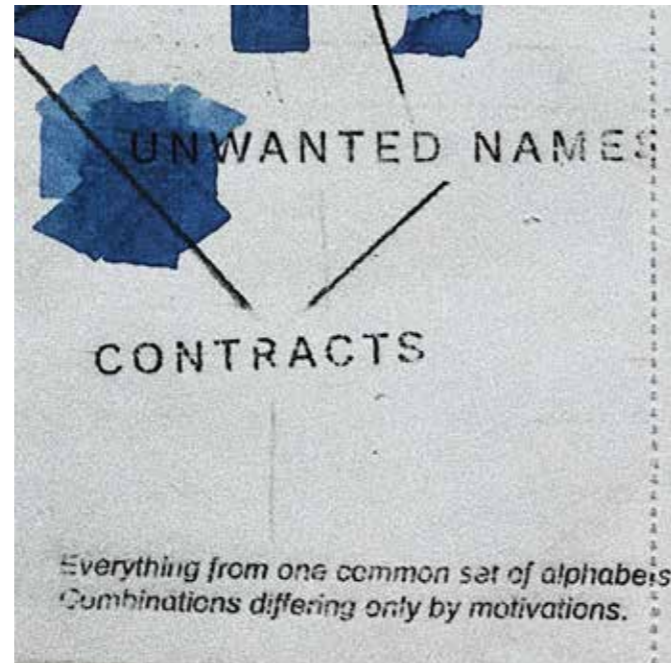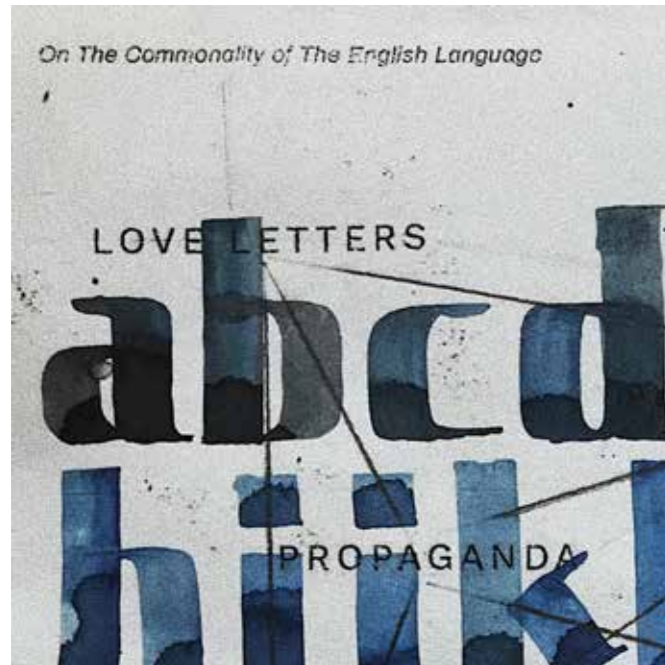
I was able to forge a metaphorical connection between these letters as representations of the inhabitants of the world, differing in physical form & features and yet somehow part of the same common grand picture.
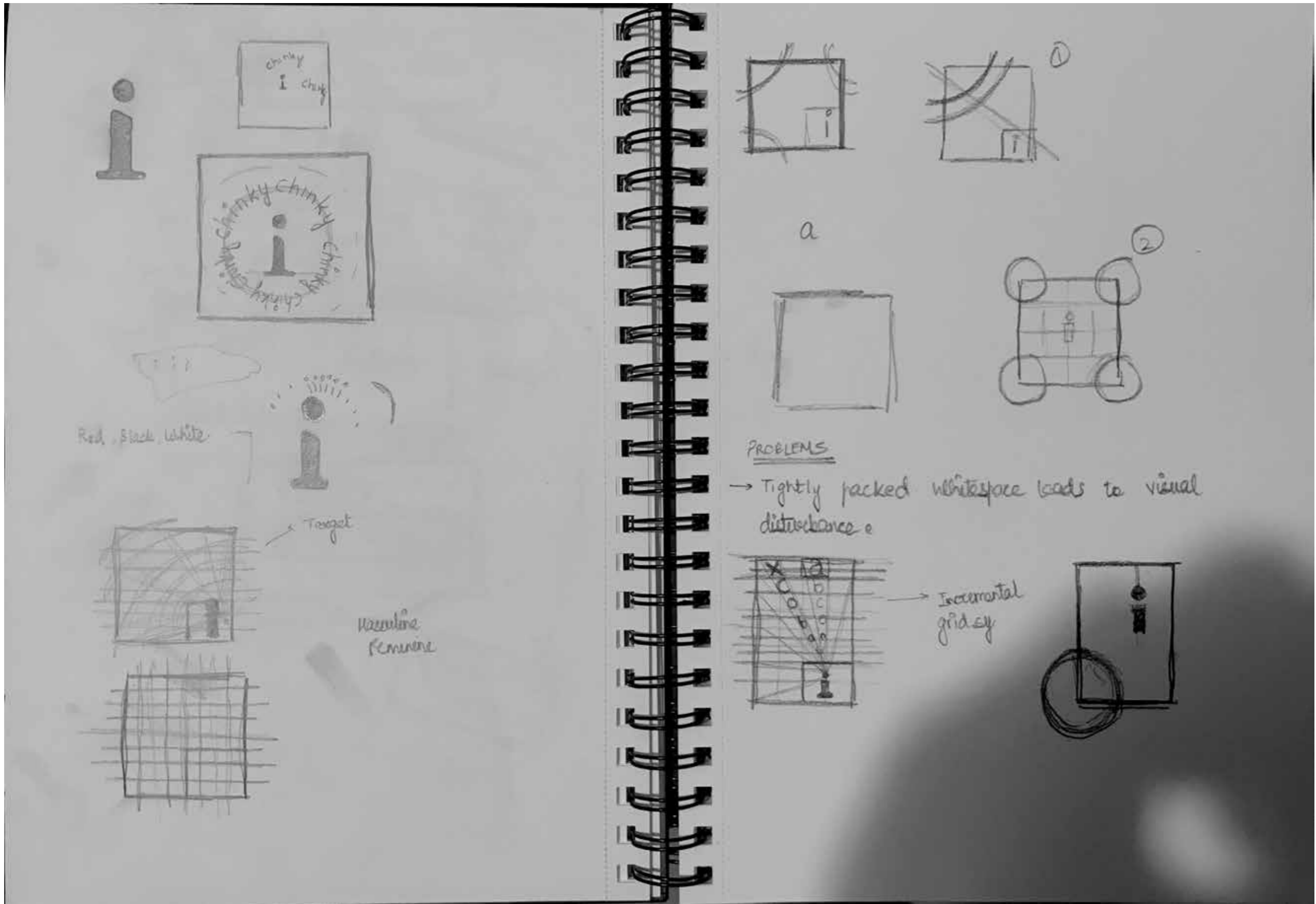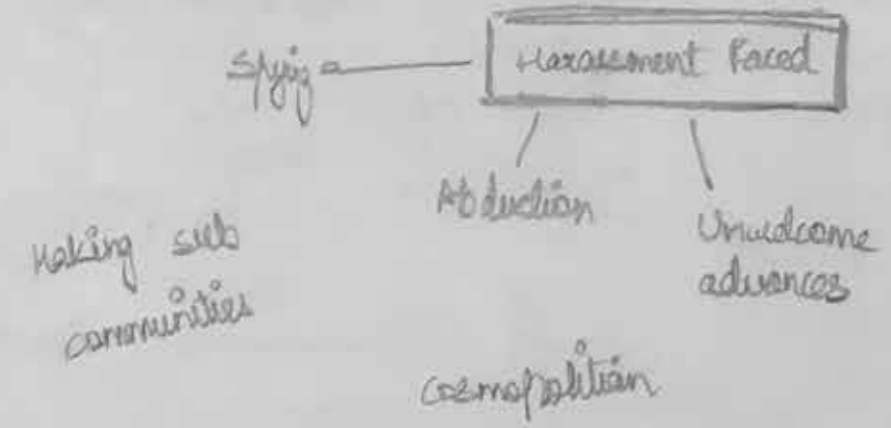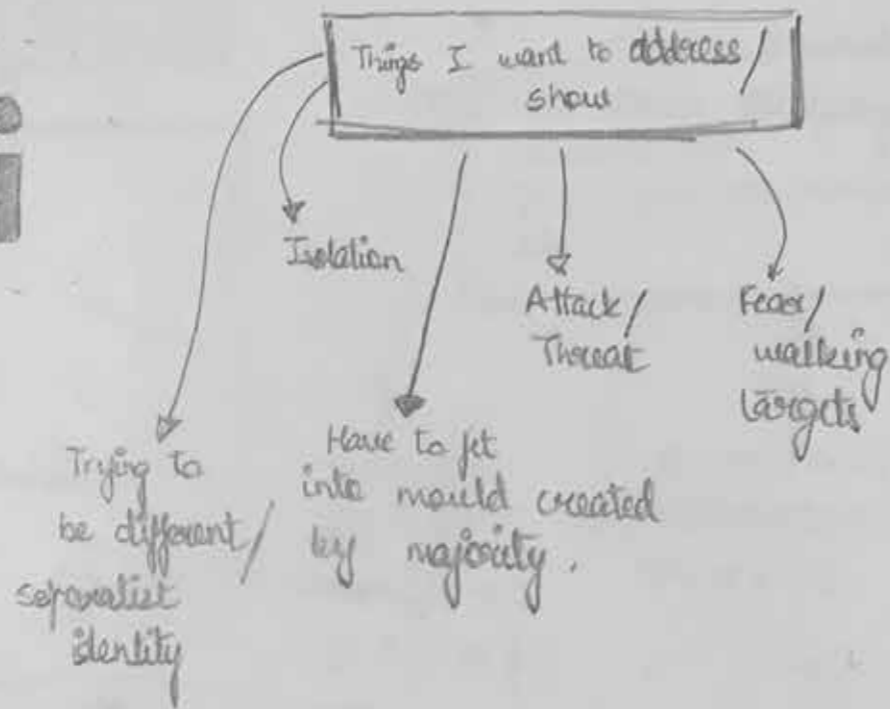
Cogs part of a larger machine, if you will.
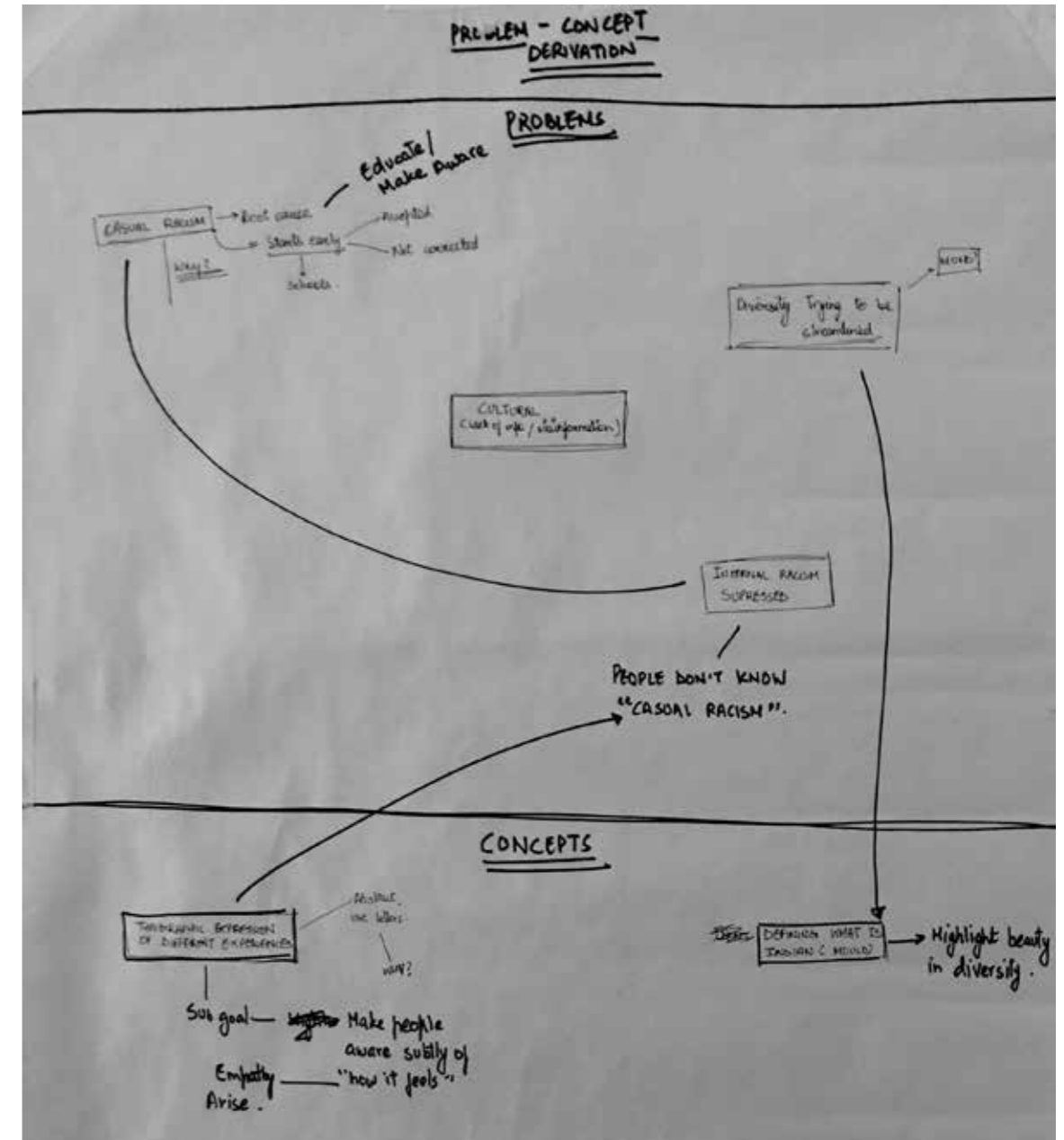
After rounds of messy ideation, I used a Problem-Concept Derivation map & this led me to incorporate my earlier thought about the alphabet.

The reason behind choosing the "i" to depict Northeastern migrants in the city & a different typeface being used to depict inhabitants of Delhi was to subtly show how the Northeastern migrants never fit into the culture of this city.

Plans of typographic compositions were then made to highlight different key-points which were further dramatised through the incorporation of a narrative.

chunky
i chunky

chunky chunky chunky
chunky i chunky
chunky chunky

Red, Black, White

Target

Masculine
Feminine

a

PROBLEMS

→ Tightly packed whitespace leads to visual disturbance.

→ Incremental grid sy

Each issue was treated as a separate strand & I ideated on typographic compositions for the same.
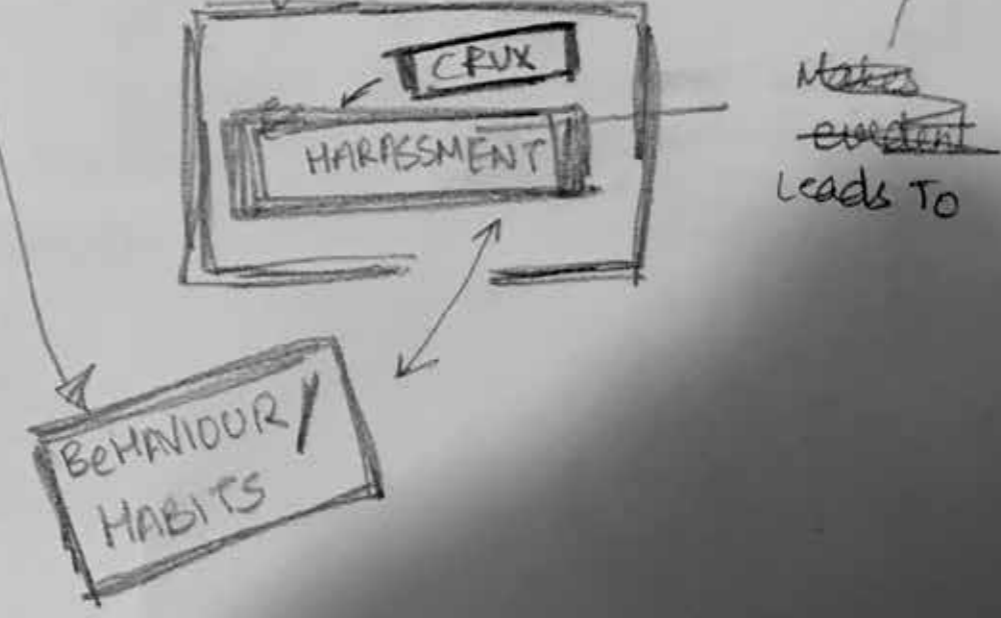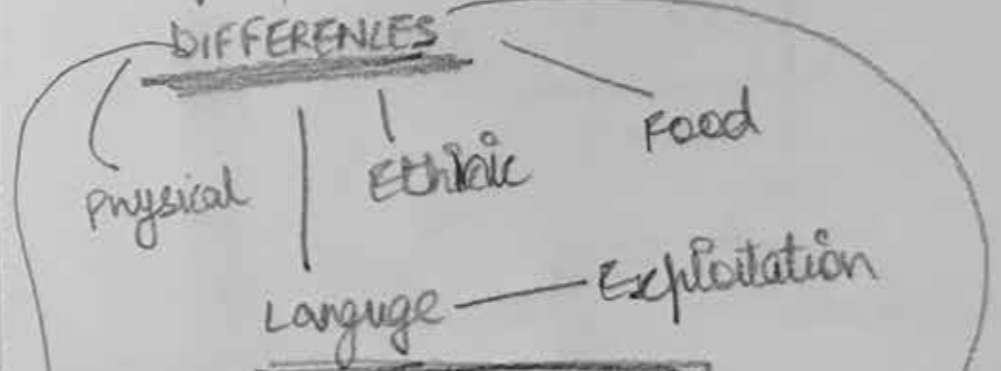
All typographic compositions were then tied together with the help of a narrative.

4.1 - Selecting Typefaces

for the "i" signifying migrants from the North-east; letter size: 38 pts.

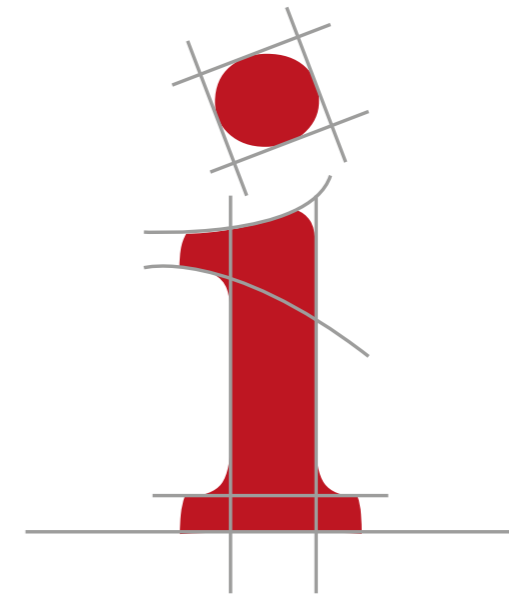|					
Garamond Bold	Hoefler Text Regular	Hoefler Text Italic	Lora Bold	Lora Regular	Crimson Pro Bold
Luminari Regular	Vollkorn Bold	Vollkorn Regular	Neco Variable Bold	Georgia Bold	Golden Type ITC Std.
Grenze Grotisch Bold	IBM Plex Serif Bold	Inknut Antiqua Bold	Iowan Old Style Bold	Kanit Semi Bold	Inknut Antiqua Medium
Katari Bold	Kefa Bold	Lucida Calligraphic Italic	Mina Bold	Marker Felt	Merriweather Bold
Minion Pro Bold	ModerataSerif Bold	Aleo Bold	Marion Bold	Athleas Bold	ModerataSerif Bold Italic
Cormorant Garamond Bold	Neco Bold	Script MT Bold	Baskerville Bold	Shobhika Bold	Sora Bold
PT Serif Bold	Sitka Display Bold Italic	Crimson Pro Bold	Rockwell Bold	Times New Roman	Texturina

I knew that the chosen typeface had to have a certain flair in the way it handled the lowercase "i". This would help make the "i", signifying a migrant from the Northeast, look unique.

The top stroke of the "i" was an important selection factor. In some ways, I also wanted this stroke to be beautiful & elegant which added a humanist bias in my selection. However, it could not have been an overly artistic / calligraphic typeface as this would disrupt the overall visual compositions.

Finally, I decided to go with the Vollkorn typeface.

4.1 - Selecting Typefaces
for letterforms signifying the natives of Delhi; 34 pt.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Roboto Bold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Roboto Black

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Aganè S Extra Bold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Fivo Sans Bold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Barlow Bold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Source Sans Variable

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Segoe UI Bold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Open Sans Bold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
HK Grotesk Bold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Gill Sans Semi Bold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Ebrima Bold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Neue Hass Grotesk Text Pro 75 Bold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Space Grotesk Bold

Here, the primary basis of selection was to use a very geometric, mechanical & computerised - feeling typeface. The reason for this was to amplify the loss of our diverse identities and the ongoing transformation into an evolving mould in the city.

I wanted to use something which felt somewhat threatening when characters were looked at in isolation. Certain features, for eg: the ascender of the lowercase "t" were looked at from the viewpoint of whether it could give off a sharp / threatening feeling.

Other considerations such as the contrast being minimal, strokes being more sharp & geometric rather than humanist and wide letter widths were important factors during this selection.

I chose the HK Grotesk typeface.

4.1 - Selecting Typefaces
final typefaces.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
HK Grotesk Extra Bold to signify natives of Delhi.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Vollkorn Bold to signify the North East migrants in the city.

minimum

HK Grotesk's construction lines in comparison to the "i" of Vollkorn.

The interesting thing about using these two typefaces was that the stem widths were similar between the two. This helped make the "i" feel not-so-different from the rest of the characters which is what I wanted to establish. Too much and you propagate the wrong message, too little and it goes unnoticed.

The x-height of Vollkorn is a little less than that of HK Grotesk, which added to its resemblance to real world physical features.
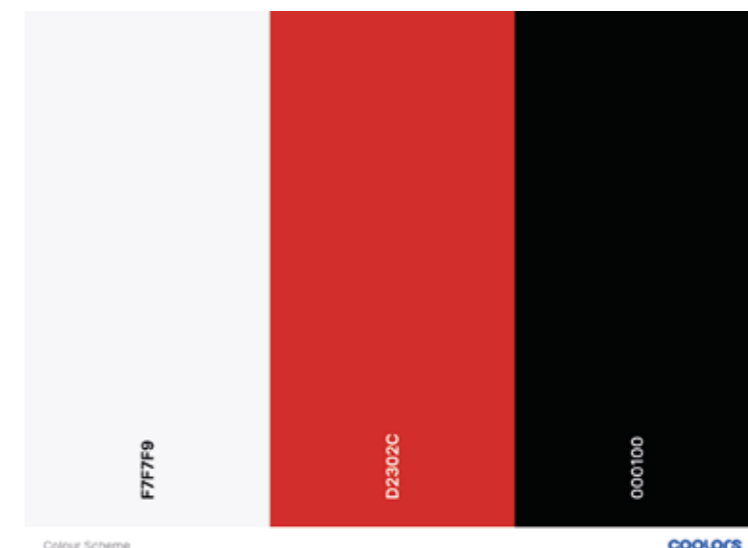
While I do believe that something thinner would add to the resemblance even more, I did not consider it simply because it was adding too much diversity between the letters.

The sharp upper stroke of the stem felt like the perfect fit to highlight the intimidation / aggressive nature.

4.2 - Development of Style Sheet

Considerations such as retaining focus on typography, subtlety in delivery & a resemblance to the North-East were kept in mind. The "gamcha" led to the incorporation of red to highlight in what would otherwise have been a black & white series.

A Strange New Land

Delhi. The capital city of India has seen a remarkable increase in the number of inter-state migrants over the last 10 years. According to the 2011 census data on migration (Kawoosa, V.M. 2014), 40% of Delhi's population (approx. 63, 00, 000) were inter-state migrants.

With the middle classes embracing a rise in consumerism, Delhi presents its inhabitants with an increasing number of employment opportunities and better facilities & infrastructure. The promise to a better life in the city is what brings hundreds of migrants from the North Eastern states of India every year to Delhi.

It is here that the cosmopolitan identity of a North Eastern migrant is regarded as something that does not quite fit into the mainstream mould.

A Strange New Land / 01

A Strange New Land / 02

F7F7F9   D2302C   000100

Colour Scheme   coolors

Initial colour scheme; modified slightly later.

4.3 - Grid Systems

This was an incredibly frustrating phase. An important realisation was that regular box-based grids do not work for typographic heavy compositions as each letterform has it own unique width + the inclusion of ascenders & descenders for certain characters.

I found myself using them only as starting points and then breaking away from their to create organic compositions.You can refer to the document titled "Grid Systems" for further clarification.
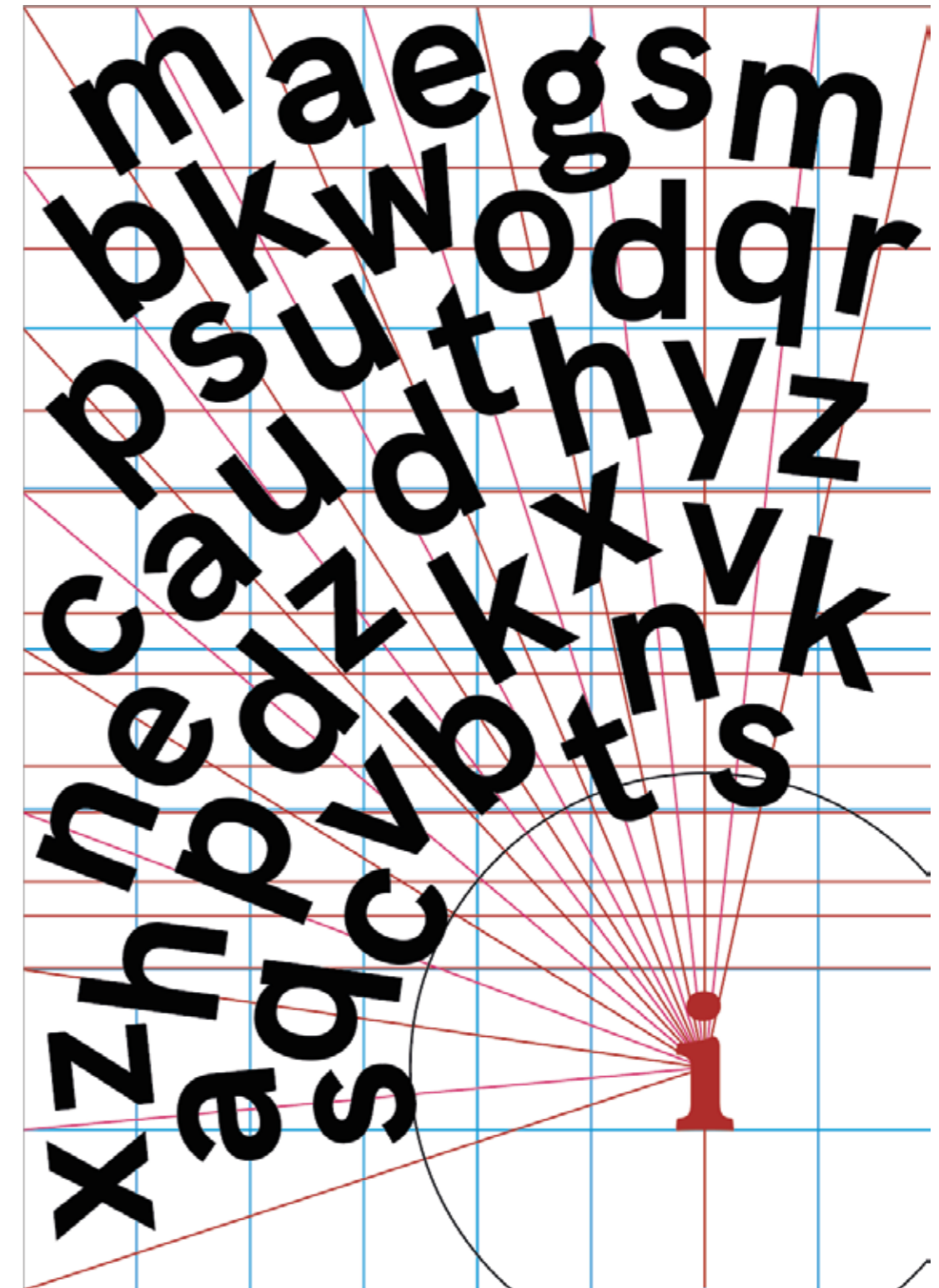
Whereas they proved to be quite helpful in some compositions, especially those where randomisation needed to be eleminated.

5 - Final Outcomes

I knew that each poster needed to target a specific issue. However, without context, the typographic compositions in themselves may have been too abstract & metaphorical in nature.

Hence, I created an A5 book/zine & a series of typographic posters. You can **view it here.**

The book was titled "Dear Delhi, There's Something Wrong With You".

Each page explored a specific issue & a typographic composition accompanied it to provoke feelings of empathy & express the feelings of a victim.

The posters, by themselves (showcased in the next page), were capable of being independent entities as well.

Groping & Assault

A common stereotype, majorly against North-Eastern females in the city, is that their financial independence is earned by immoral means. This is strenghtened with the hypersexual portrayal of Asian women in literature & film and results in a long string of multifarious harassment.

Groping or verbal assaults have found freedom to occur even in public spaces and this makes it profoundly hard to be addressed as a dangerous form of harassment because of its widespread acceptance. Even in more intense cases such as the Deer Park rape case in Hauz Khas in 2017 (Sunny, S. 2017), women are often blamed by the authorities and measures to curb their freedom are put into place.
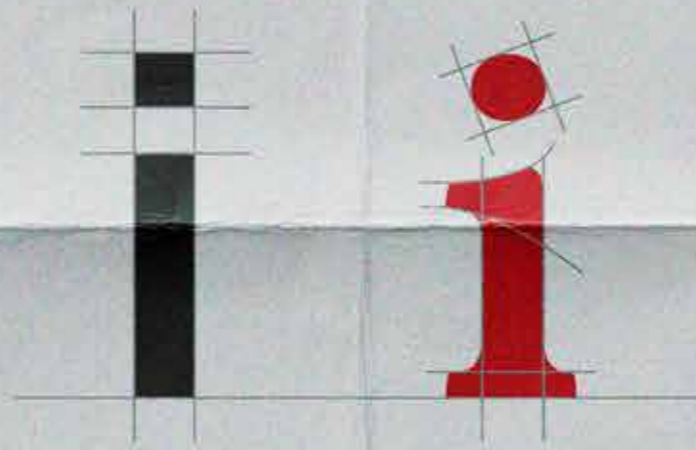
North Eastern women, on a daily basis, have to tolerate catcalling, groping, slurs & judgement in the society.

Groping & Assault / 11

Groping & Assault / 12

i

vzseba
ac
ow

Being Built Differently / 02

6 - Critical Reflection

Ah, this project. How do I aptly end this?

It has been such a flurry of emotions, levels of motivation, sickness & health, expectations, failures and small successes. This project was carrying a lot of self-created expectations & pressure which was a great motivator during the initial phases of the project. It was also my biggest hinderance when resuming the project after a month of sickness & completing a 3-week project in 10 days.

Somewhere, I reacted immaturely in the later parts of what was shaping up to be an exciting project. I failed to adapt but somehow, I'm not mad at myself like I usually would be. Deep down, this project went perfect regardless of the situation.

I've learnt so much about the gaps in my process, grid systems for typographic-heavy compositions, writing on sensitive topics, project management, narrowing down in research-intensive projects, the understand of typeface weights in correspondence to their size, subtlety in visual communication and more. It has increased my awareness, not only about design but more importantly, about the role of design in the society & the power it can possess.

I don't know if I'll ever create visual communication powerful enough to make an impact / generate change in the society but I realise that what matters are attempts to change wrongdoings of humanity by education or encouraging practices such as reflection. *And all it takes is one.*

Thank you for a wonderful project ISTD, Mr. Suman & IIAD. Until next time.

-Arjun.