

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Yama

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in English

By

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California State University, Northridge

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“Yama,” a forty-page chapter from an ongoing project, is a graphic memoir that blends images and words in order to tell a story of memory and mourning within an Afghani American Muslim family that loses their eldest son. As such, “Yama” joins a growing body of hybrid graphics works that use the forms of the comic and the picture book to tell stories of complex cultural identity among immigrants, refugees, and their children and grandchildren, such as Lynda Barry’s *One Hundred Demons*. Scholars in comics and autobiography studies such as Hilary Chute, Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson have recognized the power of graphic memoir as a form of memorializing, witness, and political testimony, and have shown how graphic stories of personal loss and transformation can reveal larger cultural issues. “Yama” is a story that conveys one

sibling's grief while combating damaging stereotypes about Muslims, their customs, and families.

The process of creating “Yama” began with a roughly ten-page draft of the written text, to which images were added to create a provocative interrelationship. While the diction of the text is deliberately simple, the images lead readers to a different level of understanding of the story, while adding moments of light humor to ease the tragic situation and point out its ironies. “Yama” went through multiple revisions to make sure that each panel worked side by side; at times, story pacing and transitions would be adjusted to make the visual panels work more effectively together. A new overarching structure was built in the final revisions to add elements of poetics, meaning, and repetition, so as to make this first chapter complete. The resulting forty-page memoir aims to cohere and make sense on its own, though it is a chapter from a larger project to be continued after this MA thesis. Attached to “Yama” is a brief essay stating the context and goals of the project and the learning curve that working on a graphic text entailed.