

Houston Asian American Archive (HAAA)
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Badie Khaleghian

Interviewer: Ann Shi

Date of Interview: December 7th, 2020

Transcribed by: Youngbin Lee

Edited by: Jun Liu

Audio Track Time: 1:47:21

Background:

Badie Khaleghian was born in Kerman, Iran in 1985. He grew up in a small house with his parents, sister, and brother as a follower of the Baha'i faith. Due to his religion, which was persecuted by the government, since Iran has a Muslim run government, he was unable to finish his university tenure. This led him to immigrate to the US by taking refuge in Austria for a year, then coming over to the US. He arrived in Georgia, where his sister was living, and attended the University of Georgia where he earned his Undergraduate Degree in composition. While he was there, he learned of his best friend Basir and his inability to come over to the US due to the Muslim ban the US had by then-President Donald Trump. This inspired Badie to write and compose a musical movie that centered around the life of his friend Basir and his struggles coming into the US. Badie currently attends Rice University in the Shepherd School of Music, and is very engaged in the social movements going on today.

Setting:

The interview took place via Zoom, a popular video conferencing app (and the official app for Rice University) during COVID-19.

Key:

BK: Badie Khaleghian

AS: Ann Shi

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: speech trails off; pause

Italics: emphasis

(?): preceding word may not be accurate

[Brackets]: actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

Interview transcript:

AS: Today is December 7, 2020. My name is Ann Shi. We're here interviewing Badie Khaleghian for the Houston Asian American archive. Thank you so much Badie for contributing your time for the archive's living history. [**BK:** Of Course. Thank you.] Thank you. To start, can you tell us where and when were you born?

BK: I was born in Kerman, Iran. Kerman is a city southeast of Iran. And I was born in 1985.

AS: Great, thank you. And can you describe some of the memories about the neighborhood you grew up in?

BK: Um, sure. The neighborhood that—the first neighborhood that I was born and I live for almost nine years was a house next to an open space and I love that open space next to our house because there were lots of street dogs on that place and they were like my best friends growing up so yeah, it was a—how should I describe it, my memories, so I have lots of good friends in my neighborhood. So I used to bike around with my neighbors and friends. I used to go for some like a grocery shopping or like in Iran you—there's a specific source for like bread like a bakery is that like every—everyone, usually like kids are responsible for getting the bread, so I used to—and like usually there's a long line in front of the bread shop that you have to go and wait in the line until you can get your bread. So I used to go with my friend and invite to this and usually race back to home. So that's like, yeah, these are my early childhood memories in my neighborhood.

AS: Thank you. And you describe some of the houses. Do you remember like what kind of building or infrastructure around in the neighborhood?

BK: Um, so in my neighborhood there are—it was kind of like a block of maybe ten to twelve houses next to each other that they all built in the same kind of structure. It was a long alley in front of them and they were all connected. They were all open to the house, and there was like a backyard. And then after the backyard there was like one or two small rooms like storage rooms in the back of the yard. It was very small though. So my house was like two bedroom I think, without those storages on the backyard. So if you want to count that, that's going to be three bedrooms, so.

AS: Great. And sounds like you had a lot of childhood friends. Do you remember some of the games you play with them?

BK: Oh, yeah, I mean it depends on my age. So it changed over time but playing soccer on the street was the—was the thing for my childhood, so since I was five, six years old. I guess I put lots of soccer at—at—at our alley basically. So we played—what did we play? Let me think. Yeah, most of our games happen outdoor, so I cannot remember when we had like a regular indoor games with my friends to be honest. So chasing our dogs also was a game for me and one of my friends. It wasn't the common thing so but they're like obsessed with dogs. And what else? I think we played some like badminton or something like this as kids as well in the street. Oh, we also love to build—okay so in front of my house and next to my neighbor's house that we were like really good friends, it was a like a building that they just start building that building, but they stopped for a long time but there were still some materials there. And we used to go there and like make some structures. So like a house, but not really like a house, but really small things. So yeah.

AS: Thank you. Next, I was just wondering what kind of food did your parents or your family usually eat?

BK: So like 99% Persian food. So especially when I was younger, like other kind of like—I remember like when I was eight or nine was the first time that I went out to eat pizza. And that was such an exciting moment. And then after that, like we have a tradition like every—every month, one night we all went to—there was just like one restaurant that had pizza in my town so, and then that was such a good time for us. But there are lots of restaurants but they all also serve Persian food. So my mom also made Persian food, mostly. I mean, all the time. But mostly. [laughs]

AS: Thank you. Can you also describe the household that you grew up in? Like, what did your parents do back in Iran?

BK: Oh, my parents? Yeah, sure. So my father was a carpenter when I was young, really young. And then until I think I was seven, eight years old. And then he started to like a second part time job and he was selling glasses. And then after that, he had a part time job—he had like his carpenter shop. And he worked usually like near in the morning until like a-afternoon and then, then he came home and then change and then he went to the second job. And then he was selling some like soaps and what do you— like—like—like creams and these kind of things. So I cannot remember what's the name of this job. There's a good name for it. But like beauty products, mostly, but not like lipsticks or stuff like—more like, yeah, more soaps, I guess. So, and then after, I don't know, I was fourteen, fifteen years old I think, he closed his carpenter shop and then he became like a full time businessman basically to sell this new stuff and then he grow like his business... My mom is a—she was a house mom. She was at home.

AS: Thank you. And do you have any siblings?

BK: I do. I have older sister who is two years older than me and I have a younger brother who's seven years younger than.

AS: Great. Thank you. Do you—Do they live in the states as well or back in?

BK: Uh, my my sister lives in Georgia. She's a pharmacist. And my brother lives in Rome, Italy. He is a grad student there, he's studying (unintelligible).

AS: That's great. Thank you so much. And yeah, moving on to your early education. What was your favorite subject at school back then?

BK: [Chuckles] I don't know nothing, I guess. I mean, I had to study and I was always a good student, but I don't think I had a favorite subject. So I-I found that like useless most of the things I-I studied at school, but at the same time I was fascinated with music but we didn't have any music education you know, like—like a public at school. So everything I learned was from home, so. Yeah, especially when I became a like a middle schooler, I found also a few friends that they were also into music. So music was a big after-school part for me. I don't know, sometimes I like science. Sometimes I like math. I like history actually, when I was in my elementary school and like early middle school, but after that, I don't think I was very into it.

AS: Did you have a teacher that influenced you on your journey to music?

BK: Um, my father was my first teacher. And I really didn't have any teacher until I was 18 years old. So actually, I had—it's kind of funny. I had one teacher in Iran that I studied violin when I was seven years old, for maybe six months or so. But he was a family friend also. And I was very young when he was teaching me. Maybe he was eighteen, nineteen years old. Um, and—but like, when I got older, he became also like, I-I sang in the choir, and he was a choir director of that choir. And funny thing is that he lives in Houston now. Yeah, I did—that's something I didn't know. But I figured recently that he lives in Houston.

Yeah. I don't think I had a teacher in my early education that influenced me a lot other than the environment that I lived in. But when I was older, I have lots of teachers that like did change my life about music and my perspective.

AS: Thank you. And I'm also curious, like, back in your childhood, what kind of kid are you? Like were you the very quiet and straight A kid? Or were you kind of the-

BK: Oh, I was, I think, in the middle. So, and I change I-I guess. I remember when I was like in middle school, in elementary school, I always like to sit on the last row of the class. Because I was, at that time, I was really into reading books. And I always remember that I had like, my school books open and looking between my books, I had my-my own books [chuckles]. But then I got older, like, when I was in middle school and high school, I-I changed and I became a better student, I guess? So I don't know, somehow it became important for me to have a better grades and I'm not sure why. But yeah, that's actually my parents also. They wanted me to be like this. In terms of childhood, like in my family, or my friends. Um, I think I was a normal kid. I wasn't like too quiet or I wasn't too social or like problem maker. I definitely did some problem making but not that much. I think I look at it as normal as a boy, I guess. So I injured myself lots of time during the playing and biking and this kind of things, but nothing too serious.

AS: Thank you. Um, and next, I'm wondering what kind of extracurricular activities or student clubs we've part of?

BK: There is not-nothing such like this in Iran, at least in my-my hometown at that time. Maybe it's different now. I don't know. But not from school. But I grew up, like my family are practicing Baha'i faith. And I grew up with Baha'i faith, as well. And Baha'i faith is under oppress-oppression and minority in Iran. So because of that, as a child, lots of things that are like, my non-my like Muslim friends or my non-m-majority friends, they could do like, we talked like we couldn't do. I'm not sure why. Maybe you couldn't do it wasn't safe or something, I don't know. But there is lots of activities from like the Baha'i community for kids. That made mostly made by our parents. So I remember when I was very young, my mom had a class for me and my few of my friends to teach us just like random things about, I don't know. They had a geography class that we learned all their, I don't know, capital of different countries or flags, or my father used to teach like storytelling, or creating something. So we've done this kind of activities. And there were also some social fun events. Usually during the weekend or near the summer. So but at school, there was none. Yeah, and then when I got older, so I-I joined a choir, which was also part of the Baha'i community. Yeah. Nothing that something exciting actually. Now I'm saying is I had like pretty boring the childhood. [**Both:** Laugh]

AS: Not at all. Each—yeah, each person has their own journey. Right?

BK: Right. Right.

AS: How did the time in Iran shape you as a person? Or like its culture and history? Like, what do you like-like, reflect on your life in Iran? How did that kind of part of your life influence you as who you are now? Just looking back?

BK: I mean, definitely culture and religion and family are all elements that shaped me who I am or who I was, to be honest. So I don't know, I-I'm, yeah, I'm thinking I have—I had like few midlife crisis about my identity and who I am, especially after experiencing living in very different cultures. And figuring out gives you perspective that you can think about who you are and who you want to be and why you're thinking that way or why you're acting this way, or why your parents they think that way. So that changed me a lot. Um, but—okay, so let me tell you about my faith, like being Baha'i. That shaped one of the things that my mom told me always that was part of her teaching me about like, the faith was okay, so you need to always have a purpose for life. And based on the faith, she sug-she suggested that the best goal that you can have is serving other humans in life. And I now that I look back and like to, to see why I'm—whatever I've done in my life, lots of things, I think is coming back from this mindset that, okay, this is a good thing. Even though I'm Christian, and yet still, but I think lots of ideas that I had about the work I wanted to do, about my activism, or anything like this was kind of related to that. So this is coming from part of my faith slash family.

Being from Iran, definitely musically, being Iranian is a big part of me. Like all of my, I would call it like listening bank, is coming from whatever I-I was exposed as a child. Even though I actually grew up in a family that my father, mostly as a kid, forced us to listen to classical music. But I was still managed to listen to lots of hearing and music as well, especially when I was like a teenager. So that shaped me a lot musically, like the culture. Um...let me think. All of the experiences that they have as a minority in Iran I, and I think that also shaped me who I am now, for sure. That's something that's non negotiable. It's very obvious that that's something that I'm passionate about. I'm 35 years old; I'm still at school. That this is coming from my experiences as a kid in Iran, that like I was banned from higher education and lots of other things that forced me towards being passionate about education, my education and other certifications.

AS: Do you mind explaining a little bit more about how Iran banned you from higher education?

BK: Sure. Um, so about like forty years ago in 1978, there was a Islamic Revolution happening in Iran. And before that, the government system of Iran was managed by a king . And but on '78 there was lots of straight revolution and things happen, and then they change the system to more democratic system actually, but it was very influenced by Muslim extremists leaderships. So, three years after, four years after the revolution, Indian Government—I'm not sure still why—but they didn't like minorities, especially Baha'is. I'm thinking mostly because they, they thought like Baha'is are more thinking globally, and like more time forward, I guess. So they're thinking about the future, like they have more modern ideas about living and about the government and about everything. And they discrimin-discriminate like lots of Baha'is in early 80s. So, and that was part of it, andAnd then they also banned all of the Baha'is students at that time that they were students, they couldn't go to university. They basically expelled them. So both my parents, they were actually, they were on the last year of their degrees when this happened, and then they got—they couldn't get their degrees.

So after that Iran, everyone needs to take exam to go to university. And for a long time, there was a—so I have to do application for this exam. And there was a section in the application that asks you, what's your religion? So I remember maybe, like twenty years ago or so, you had to write what's your religion. So if they see that you're Baha'i, then they didn't even give you permission to actually attend the exam. So basically, you couldn't go to university. And then they change it to, okay, so we're not going to ask you

what's your religion, but we're going to give you options, like, like four options, and Baha'i is not one of the options. So Baha'i believe to—didn't want to lie basically about their religion. And it's not just something religious, I think it's more fighting for your rights or other thing. So, and then recently, maybe in the last ten, or about ten years, last ten years, they even then don't do that for the application. But then some B-B-Baha'is, they can actually attend to an exam. And then, like 90% of the Baha'is when they want to get their result, when they open their application after the exam, there is something comes up for them that says, your application is not complete. So therefore, they cannot actually attend any universities. And even though Baha'i minorities are— is the biggest minority- religious minority in Iran. But there is lots of, we don't know how, but everyone knows what Baha'i is. And then they just figured out, you know, they—I don't know. But few people actually can get to universities, from Baha'i, that it's coming mostly from the lack of world pressure, like international friction to Iran, about the human rights, but usually they—they get expelled from university after a year or two. So yeah, and that's—that happened to me as well. So when I was eighteen, I wanted to actually I was one of those people that I could attend the exam. But when I finished my exam, I couldn't get my application. It says like my application is incomplete.

AS: So um, having been kind of discriminated for your religion in that way, have you had any—in any way come across your mind to kind of disguise your religion by any chance?

BK: Um, no. At least not at that time when I was in Iran. I'm not saying that I'm a very religious person. And I'm not saying that I'm coming also from a very religious family. But my—my parents, they lost like their best friends when they were—they were in like their twenties after the revolution. Few of like their closest friends got killed by government, so. And they also got expelled from university, both of them are very smart people. And it became a like a fight for—at least I'm talking about myself. Like okay, so if you don't want us to go to university, we figured out how to how to do it. So that was the, like my mantra when I was eighteen, nineteen. And not just me, most of my friends as well. So yeah.

I was very confused actually, when I was a lot younger, because, you know in Iran, when you go to school, you have to also study some reli-religion courses. And like it's—it's Islam for everyone. And usually my religious studies course, like teachers, usually at the first day of the school, when they come to the class, they ask everyone who—who's not Muslim, I need to take your hand and say, okay, and they ask you what you are. And some of them, they don't care that much, but some of them, they just don't like you because you're not Muslim. And I remember when I was on seventh grade, I had a teacher that he didn't like me, and he was not a nice person to me in the class. So lots of time he physically abused me in the class in front of my classmates. And at that time, I didn't know. I didn't understand, you know, I was young. And yeah, now, maybe at that time, I was confused as like, why are you doing this because of religion? Who cares about religion, you know? I wasn't bad as a kid. Yeah. But I don't think I've never actually came to my mind to change my belief system or my faith because of the pressures. Although, I—in the last ten years or so, lots of time, I've questioned my belief and my faith, just for personal reasons, not because of the pressures because of, I don't know, I read a bunch of books. I understand the intersection of culture and religion and how I figured out all of that, that these two are very entangled with each other, so I wasn't sure: am I actually following the culture or am I following the faith? And yeah.

AS: Thank you for sharing that journey. [**BK:** Of course.] And next, I'm wondering, did your parents were they born with the Christian faith from their parents? [**BK:** Yes.] How did they influence you?

BK: Um, both my parents, they—they were born in a Baha'i family. So although in Baha'i faith, there is a rule that you're not Baha'i until you're 15 years old. So after you're 15 years old, you need to do your own research about the religion. And after that, you're qualified. If you want to be Baha'i, you're going to say, okay, I want to be Baha'i. So, but usually, that happened to me that like , I'm talking about myself, I'm not talking about everyone. But when I was younger, I didn't think about religion at all. It was part of the daily life, it wasn't a policy to think about. This is a...this is a way of living. You know, I was thinking more about, okay, so these are the things that we believe and you know, mostly lots of problems that we have are coming from this religion. So you didn't think about it that much, especially when you grew up in a family that they all like, they were not a first generation Baha'i so my, both my parents are even not the second generation, they are like generations of Baha'is.

But I also did lots of research while I was older, and I'm still doing it about other religions. Because I was—I was honestly very confused, but I was more confused maybe three, four years ago. But I—but I attended a bunch of like Bible studies, for example, or lots of—I attended some, as a-as a kid, I was very familiar with Islam, because all of the studies that are done at school was about Islam. All of my friends were Muslim and yeah, and all of this actually informed me that, oh, it seemed like Baha'i faith is still sounds more interesting to me. So, but there were still lots of things that like I'm not sure about then, so I need to do more research to be like a hundred percent. But like the ideas that I grew up with, from Baha'i faith that was taught by my parents, I still believe on believing like most of them, that I think this is a—that was a good way of growing up and teaching, so..

AS: Did you have strong teaching from your local church back in Iran?

BK: Uh there's no church for Baha'is. So everything is actually community-based. So, but we had some like weekend classes taught by our parents. Not, by the way, something too serious. But most of my—my information are coming from my parents, not from other entities.

AS: So how is the kind of family based community for this small congregation back home in Iran?

BK: So um, like in my hometown in Kerman, when I was growing up, there was like maybe a thousand body members. Like, and so that like every—every month, every nineteen days, Baha'is actually gathered together to make some prayers and also, there is a feast. So they just like socialize basically. So there is a like a devotional part of the feast and there is also a social event after the devotional. So that was the way that I socialize with lots of my other friends, and like my family is also socialized. And yeah, I do all community based on—on those like feast. Sometimes they decided what to do about—and they were like some children classes when I was a lot younger. That and it's not just about religion to be honored at that time, that is what I remember, it was about everything. So, even like in the classes that I mentioned earlier that my mom taught us about geography and something, sometimes there were some like faith teaching in them as well. Now that I'm thinking about it. Just memorize some prayers or something like this.

AS: Thank you. I was wondering what the—you said you were dismissed from your course in college after a year? Is that the same associate degree in music that you receive from Bahar Institute of Higher Education or was it another one?

BK: No, actually, that wasn't about me. That's like, I got expelled. So I couldn't actually attend university like public universities in Iran. But about twenty-five years ago, I mean, like, eight years after the revolution, and after all of this discrimination started, Baha'i College in Iran, they started—they taught—they started like their own university which is not created by Iranian government. So you cannot use your degree for anything. And it started very small, maybe like four or five degrees. And over the time, it got bigger and like there were like more Baha'i students. And now it has more than like thirty different degrees, I think, but there is no infrastructure for it. So there is no like building for this university. So all the classes happened at people's houses at that time, and usually, it's not a continuous program. So every two weeks for two or three days, students get—get together with the teachers and they have like two or three, like intense classes, and then they go back to their cities, and then they come back for, so every semester, they have six to eight or eight, I think, three day courses basically. So, but these days, actually, everything are very different because of the technology. So now the Baha'is of higher education is doing most of the teaching online. So, and are also using lots of help from people around the world.

So I studied my bach—my associate degree in music at this university. Actually I started with pharmacy, I studied one year of pharmacy, but I hated it. So and then I switched to music. Um, so yeah, I did like two years of music studies and then that was it. But after that, for two and a half years, I started, I was teaching at the same institution. I was teaching one course. And then I was also involved in the administration. But the whole—the whole system works with no money. So there is no money involved, everything is part of like an act of service. So the teachers, administrators, like students, they don't pay. So everything is just part of service, basically. So I worked with them. And then me and twelve of my classmates at that time that we were all working at the same time on that administering thing, we decided to find some ways to actually make this associate degree as a bach—to a bachelor's degree. And—and then after two and a half years, you're able to start that four year degree. And then I was teaching and doing administrative work, and I was also a junior student at the university. So, but everything didn't go as planned as we wanted, so lots of the classes of the plan, they didn't happen. So this, basically, we had to study for two more years. But these two more years took almost five years. And in 2011, and then in 2013, there were more pressure from the Indian government on Baha'is of higher education or BIHE, and they started arresting students, professors and administrative things in Iran. And that was when I decided to leave Iran and yeah. But I'm still teaching online at the same university. So this is after I came here, this is my third year that I am teaching a course there.

AS: Thank you for sharing. I'm just wondering, how far later did you decided to move to the US and what was your decision?

BK: What—what do you mean?

AS: Yeah, sure. Sure. So yeah, read—reading about your background, you sought asylum for religious asylum for and then you're kind of stuck in Turkey for a little bit and all those like-

BK: Not—not Turkey.

AS: Oh. I see.

BK: No, I moved—so at that time, so first, right. So I moved to US. I-I-I came to US like on January 2014. So but my sister, four or five years before that, went through the same process that—but Baha'is at that time in Iran, they could apply for a system that they could get refugee status in US, but it took at that time between like two to three years from the date that you apply to get to US. But in between you have to go to Austria and to do—like it depends, for some people is three months for (other) people a year—to do like a background checks and lots of paper books in Austria and then you could come to US. That was what happened to me as well.

AS: I see. That was really interesting, because I also was reading your work on Apaci.

BK: Oh, that's about my friends. This is not about me. [**AS:** I see.] That's about my best friend. Yeah.

AS: Can you tell us a little bit about that story and you are one of the producers right? Or you were the sole producer.

BK: Oh yeah. Yeah, so the story is about my—my best friend Basir. So we—we were in the same situation. He was also studying music and he play cello. And we became like best friends. I was also very good friend with Basir's wife, which was my composition teacher's daughter. So, and we spend lots and lots of time around together. So we've worked together also. And yeah, and when I saw—Basir was also involved in BIHE and basically has the same kind of story. But Basir didn't have—so if you want to leave Iran, so you have to go through a—what do you call it? Alright...So you have to stay for some amount of time in Iran in the military. So, but Basir, he didn't want to do that, so he couldn't get his passport because of that. So the only way that you could leave Iran—which was common, his brother did the same thing like, two, three years before he did—was actually passing the border and go to Turkey, and then start like his asylum thing in Turkey. So yeah, I think he—the same year that I came to US, he also passed the border and went to Turkey in 2014 if I'm not wrong.

BK: And then usually when you go to Turkey with this situation, it takes—takes a bit longer from the day that I've went to Vienna. So it takes two years from the time that you're in Turkey. So and—so he had some savings because you could really cannot work in Turkey. And yeah, and then right at the end of this process, the Muslim ban happened. And all of the—like after Trump, everything got canceled for refugees. So they got stuck in Turkey. So then they didn't know, they couldn't go back because if you go back to Iran, you could go to prison. And he couldn't leave the city that they were in. So it was a really hard time and they were out of money. And one time I saw like a Instagram post from him. And he is like amazing cellist. One time I saw a post from him that he was—he's working in a like a wood factory. He's cutting woods and then he also cut his hand. So that was like such a tragic moment for me that like, ah, he doesn't deserve to be this because he was playing in like Iranian National Orchestra, like best orchestra in

Iran. And now he's working in a—like illegally in Turkey with almost no pay. And now he's hurting himself as an artist as well.

So, and I try to do as much as I can. So I even like email, like Georgia's representative to just tell them the story. I didn't hear anything back so I had no idea. So and like his brother actually lives also in US. He lives in Pittsburgh and he did the same process maybe two years before Basir, and it was also hard for me because I was seeing myself at all. I came here now I'm going to university and like I have, and growing and growing and growing, and he's going downward. And it was very heartbreaking for me. So I decided to make a movie about his story. And but at that time, I didn't have money to go to Turkey to make a film. So online, I found a Turkish filmmaker also, and then we did a fundraising together to fund his trip from Istanbul to the city that Basir lived. We go there and then he filmed some stuff that we talked about. Then I was basically interviewing Basir and his wife, (Noura) on Skype, and he was filming them. And then he sent me all of these shots, and then I produced a documentary, and I made music. So, and then it wasn't the normal documentary, it was a documentary with live performance. So there are three, it's like a string quartet that has no cello. So but we have like four seats with three string players, and one empty seat for Basir with the lights on. And Bassir played all of his parts in Turkey and record it. And the other three players are playing live with the recorded cello part. So yeah. That's the story of Apaci. And Apaci is the nickname of Basir and the Wood Factory.

AS: So you said the food factory?

BK: Uh, Wood.

AS: Oh, wood. Oh, I see.

BK: Yes. So they are—they're still like a carpenter shop, but you would call the carpet—carpenter shop.

AS: I see. Wow. I'm so excited to see the story. Sounds such a touching—so many history and very personal ones, though.

BK: So last year they could finally get out of Turkey. And now they're in Australia. And he's playing with Perth Symphony. So he's in that now. [chuckles]

AS: Good to hear. [**BK:** Yeah.] Wow. Um, like, when is this documentary coming out? And have you received some—some feedback on the documentary?

BK: There is actually—it already came out. So, but we didn't find any like place to actually sell it or anything like that. So basically, I applied for a few occasions, and then I sent them the actual, because we—it's not just a video. It needs like a live performance with it. So it's more like an art installation than just a documentary. Because has a life component to it as well.

AS: Interesting. Wow. Thank you for sharing. And it's probably one of the new kind of beginning for people to start making, like very intimate, it's also another form of oral history, but with the performance aspect and then. [**BK:** Sure.] And now back to your own story. And now what are some of the immigration experiences because it definitely sounds your own is as like heavy and dramatic as well. Can you share some of those?

BK: Um sure. I'm not sure if like I had like a really heavy experience because especially when you're coming through as a refugee, you see lots of other people from like other countries, especially people like in Africa, for example, I mean, in lots of the early processes. So when you come to US, you have to go through some like paper works and stuff and then I've seen lots of, like Somalians for example, refugees that they live in like camps for years before they come to US and like their—the life story is not even comparable to mine. So I think I was very, I had a really easy transition to be honest, compared to them. But—and I'm very grateful for the all the opportunities I really believe like US is a land of opportunity.

But in general, the—I think the cultural shock is—is a very common thing for all of the immigrants. Definitely I have lots of cultural shocks that like influence you to reevalu—reevaluate yourself that like who you are. So why you're who you are. So I don't know, maybe it's not a common thing, but for me that was the biggest challenge, because I—let me think about how I can put it in the right way. There are lots of things, even though when I came to US, I wasn't a teen. You know, I was old enough I guess. So I was twenty-seven and twenty-eight. And—but there were lots of like important things that I've never thought about then. So, maybe because I didn't have time, because I always knew I was always in like a survival mode. Okay, I need to just think about myself, how can I survive. So but then I got here, I think I had the luxury of having time to think about more deeply. Or maybe I just—I was just in a different time of my life. So—but identity crisis was the biggest challenge.

For me personally, and also, for me, musically, as a composer it was—it was very hard. It's still hard and a bit uncomfortable, because lots of things that you believe in, it changes, and then you get surprises by the changes in your voice, or even your thoughts. You know, lots of things that I'm thinking very naturally to them, it seems like—like impossible when I was young, or it seemed like a scene when I was a lot younger. Or for my music, lots of things that I do right now naturally, if I—if I played the same song, for like a twenty year old Badie, he would hate all of the things that I'm making now. So this is a very big conflict of interest. And also, I had a very interesting experience of being naturalized. You know, like when you go through all of this documentation and like the naturalization test and everything that you figure that, oh, actually I'm—I'm alleging myself to a new country. And it-it's weird. It was weird at least for me. Yeah. The mix of like you having the like, dual identity is—is really confusing in lots of ways.

AS: Can you talk a little bit about the naturalization test? What was it like to go through that process?

BK: The naturalization test is actually super easy test. So naturalization test, they give you a like—like a thirty or forty page booklet that you need to read about, like American history and government and some ideas about the American beliefs. So and about the Constitution, and then you go and you have an interview with someone that are asking you a few questions that they want to see if you can understand them. You can speak English, and also you know these basic facts about United States. But the naturalization test itself is not very confusing, but when you are doing your—you're filling out the papers for naturalization. That's something that was very interesting for me, because I thought these are all paper works. You know, like being an American Iranian is just on paper. It's not changing who I am. It's still like, I am who I am. So like these are on the paper that now I'm also American, or I have American passport. But surprisingly, it wasn't like that. I felt that, oh, actually, I'm—I'm being different from who I was before. And this is like my American side is actually coming out of the shell. So I'm thinking differently. I'm living differently. I am eating differently. I am composing—it is definitely different from me. So, but I still try to—not—not always trying, but always trying to hold some of my old, like thoughts

or beliefs. But sometimes this whole thing becomes a fight between a new identity and the old identity. But you don't know which one is best for you or which one you want.

AS: And you created a work on your naturalization right?

BK: Yeah, this is an ongoing work because I don't think I'm done with understanding my new identity. So this is a good outlet for me to just think about. And like the whole idea of like, identity also, is an interesting subject. Yeah. Anytime that I'm really confused, I—I put it on music. So, that helps.

AS: Yeah, definitely. And I'm also curious, how did music become your outlet? Like, how did your kind of this intimate relation with music as a channel was built? Because, yeah, we went through that in your childhood. It wasn't as dedicated in music. But your father kind of took you to this route, but it wasn't like a dedication and how to become so—so intimate and dedicated?

BK: Um, yeah actually I was like, right before our interview, I was listening to another interview by my—one of my old piano teachers. And she was telling like, when she was four, she was playing piano and blah, blah, blah. And when she was seven, she went to another country to study music, and then she went to Juilliard. And like I said, like, oh, I didn't have any of this experiences. Why am I doing this? So um, okay, let me tell you a story, why I became composer. So—so I didn't have like a really good music education, but I grew up in a very good environment musically, so I played lots of music with my sister. She was a pianist, and I was playing violin at that time. So we played lots of duets together. And like, we were very encouraged by our father and also friends of family to play. And then we also played lots of improvisation with our family. That was like any gathering we had. So music was part of it.

And then especially when I got a bit older, and then I had my own parties, when I was invited, everyone asked me to like bring your guitar. And I always was a music person in the room. And I played something and everyone sang. So that was a fun part of it. But I have a grandfather on my father's side, that he's a amazing painter, but I've never met him because he passed away, like, two years before I was born. But like, our my parents house and all of my father side's families, like, all of the houses are full of my grandfather's painting. And now, in my apartment, I have ten of my grandfather's painting. So and he also has a really interesting story. And very amazing painter, but also he lived very poor. Nobody know him. But he's amazing. So when I was fifteen years old, I always had the story of my childhood that like my grandfather was commissioned to paint a painting of a early ages of Baha'i faith hero basically, that he was killed because of his fate. And—and my grandfather got a commission to write, to paint a painting of him while he was basically that the hero is being killed. And the way that he was killed was they put holes in his body on the whole body, and they put candles in it, and that was the way that he was killed. And there's a story of him that he is actually he was a very strong and big man, nd that he had like—like, had candles all over him. And he's—but he's still dancing, and singing. And that was always like a very interesting story for me before even I see this or I hear about my grandfather's story.

So—and I always had this hero in my life that okay, he was a very strong man and he was a very musical and moving story, so I could imagine it very well. So and then my parents told me that my father that like, you know, grandfather had this commision and it's a huge painting. And my grandfather had stroke two times while he was doing this painting because it was very emotional for him as well. So right after hearing this story, I felt a connection with my grandfather and was like, oh, I love this story. He also love

this story. And when I was fifteen, we traveled to a town that the person who commissioned this painting to my grandfather lived there. But usually they don't allow anyone to look at this painting because a very heavy emotional painting. So and we found some connections to this family to ask them if they let us to go and like watch and look at this painting. And they said no. And it was very heartbreaking. But like the last hours that were in town, they asked us to come back.

"Now it's okay. You can—you can look at it."

And it was such a memorable moment for me as a fifteen year old kid. And all the times I was looking at that image, I was hearing my grandfather and the person I'm like, I was imagining this, that how everything has been. And when I was like few months after that, several times I saw a dream that I'm conducting like an opera or something about the same story. And I saw same dream like many times with the exact music and voice. So I started writing the words, and singing the melody, but I had no idea how to write the music. So then I figured, okay, if I want to know whether I'm hearing how to put it in on paper, I need to learn how to compose, and then I became a composer. So yeah.

AS: Yeah, that was beautiful. And I would love to—yeah, if you have the art, like the images of your grandfather's works, we'd love to archive it in your box as well, if you're willing to share it

BK: Sure. Sure. I can. I need to get permission from family, but I think I can. At least the one I have in my house, I can share it with someone.

AS: Thank you. And you talked about hearing music and your dreams. Is dreams one of the like the biggest inspiration for your music, or what other ways do you usually get inspired?

BK: Um, it was when I was younger, to be honest. Still, when I'm composing something, I think about it a lot when I'm sleeping. So I hear it when I'm sleeping. Sometimes there are some developments during the sleep or some ideas, but the inspiration is not coming from dreams. The inspiration recently, like in the last five, six years, mostly, it's coming from some stories. So it can be my story or can be someone else's story. So I love to narrate something in music. So I'm looking at the narration to give me the inspiration, how to make the music and how to make the project. Sometimes I have to write something with no narration and it's super hard, to be honest. Um, yeah, but like, the most interesting thing for me is actually when I collaborate with other people, or like instrumentalists or artists or anyone. And then I talk to them. I have my own kind of interview with them. I asked them like what they think, some interesting things about them and then all of this inspiration is coming from the conversation usually. Also, most of my favorite pieces that I have done is coming from this kind of conversations.

AS: That's interesting. Wow. I hope that you can also check out our archives and find some stories I think.

BK: Yeah. Yeah. That would be fun.

AS: Thank you. And can you talk a little bit about the training you had at Georgia University—University of Georgia?

BK: Um, sure. So even though I almost finished, I almost finished my bachelor's degree in Iran. But because I had to leave Iran, I—I had like I—I needed to take one more course to be graduated from university. But I couldn't. So I came to University of Georgia and I asked them if I can actually transfer my credits. And they said no. So I thought like I can actually finish this and then start my master's degree, but I couldn't, so I had to start over. But when I got to School of Music when I did like my first semester, then like most of my teachers figured, okay, so you're not like a beginner. So they push me ahead, and they helped me to reevaluate some of my courses. And so yeah, then I had like a shorter degree in like for my undergrad degree. And then I also did my masters degree there. I love University of Georgia. So that's like, I—my heart is always with University of Georgia, it's like my home, so I was very comfortable there. Lots of like—I had like full support from everyone.

So yes. I mean like the first year that I was there, I really didn't know what to do. But over the time, I became more—also, okay, so the first year of my studies was very hard for me because my English wasn't that good. So I couldn't communicate that well. I have lots of problems writing well. So— and I-I-I was questioning my intelligence to be honest. Like, why like these kids are like a lot younger than me, they can write really well, or they can like, do presentations better than me. So why I cannot? And it was very hard. And then I figured, okay. On my second year, I figured that, okay, my music is better than lots of them. So, well, not better than lots of them, but I'm not behind in my music at least. So I-I-I like my music gets enough recognition or more from like few other more students. So like my confidence came back. And then I could actually communicate better and like I had better English skills. And—and I love the community. At like the School of Music there. And also Athens is a very small city. It's basically a huge university with some houses around. So that's how I see Athens. But not that far from Atlanta which is like a huge city. Um, but it's a very progressive city, Athens. It's like a blue dot. You know, all was red dot, but now it's all blue. And it's a very musical town. So if you go to downtown, it's like Nashville or Austin in a way. So they're like, you hear music and art from all the bars. And like there are lots of art shows around the town. So yeah.

AS: That's great. Thank you. [**BK:** Of Course.] And do you remember anyone who helped you settle down? When you first arrived?

BK: In United States?

AS: Yeah. In United States or Georgia?

BK: Oh, yeah. In Georg—I mean, like, my sister lived in Georgia. So she was the biggest help for sure. [**AS:** Yeah.] Um, yeah, I mean, I live like for three months, the first three months with my sister. And my nephew was just born at that time, so it was actually good for me and for her because I was babysitting my nephew for the first two months that I was—for two or three months. And like I made a very special bond with my nephew. He's seven now. Um, yeah. And like at school also, I remember it was a summer I applied and I got accepted to university but I was trying to figure out how I can transfer some of my bigger exams. For the first time, I sent some emails to the music theory, like chair of the school. And when I met her, she was like the nicest person ever, and helped me and she introduced me to one of her TAs to get some classes with him. And I did like three or four classes with him and everything went well. But later on, she became my boss. So I was teaching—I was her TA after three years. So now—and she helped me a lot, a lot, a lot in lots of different things like musically, and also with being a teacher, and like

all the courses that I teach at BIHE right now, all of my materials are coming from my teacher. So she gave me all of her like syllabus and all the class materials that like I'd be able to teach so. I-I-I had like three or four people that they influenced me a lot and I think at the University of Georgia. So she was one of them.

There was another professor that I had never had a class with her. But she was a conducting professor and she's a real activist. She's like all of her performance is about something about social like problems, or about like environment, or something like that. So, and she did a speech on the end of the first year of our study for—for the commencement speech. And that changed my life, basically. So the way that she looked at music and how, what does it mean to be a musician in 21st century and what the society needs from us. So it changed my life. And then I did a few collaborations with her as well. And that—that was very informing for me.

AS: That's great. I'm glad you like the life in US so far. And can you talk about moving to Houston?

BK: Oh, sure, I mean, after I finished my master's degree, all my teachers they told me that, okay, you need to leave Georgia. So it's not good for you to stay here. Oh, so I mean, I-I-I applied for a few schools and—and I got to few schools, and Rice was definitely my favorite one for lots of different reasons. And, yep. And that's why I came here. So Rice definitely was the only factor because I don't have any family or friends. I didn't have any friends in Houston. Yeah, but then I came for my interview last February, the campus was gorgeous. And before that, I was like, I was interviewing at University of Pittsburgh and it was so cold and snowy. And then I came here and it was like blue sky and sunny and green campus. So that changed my perspective, but I'm joking. Like, all the teachers at school of music are great. And like, one of the research that I wanted to do, basically Rice is the only place that I could do this research. So.

AS: That's great. And can you share with us some of the kind of mentoring experiences from your—from your professors?

BK: At Rice? [**AS:** Yeah.] So I just have one semester here, so I cannot tell you a lot because I just have one semester and it was online, so it's a very different situation. But—so, one of the interesting classes I had was a class called Asian Studies and Culture. So and like my professor actually suggested me to take these classes based on the interview that we had, when I was interviewing here, because I told her about all my passion for so-social changes and like all of the things I have gone around things I want to do. So, and this class was actually very interesting to me because basically every week we had some guests from different parts of the country or different part of the world, which were somehow involved in some sort of social changes with their art. So I got lots of inspiration from different artists, not just musicians because it actually was like more other form of art. So theater or writers or poets or filmmakers, so all of those are. It was such an interesting class for me. It opened my mind a lot about like the possibilities.

And like I did also for my composition class, I did a collaboration with a—like a wind chamber class at Shepherd School of music. And because of the COVID, lots of the students, they couldn't come to campus this year. So they had to have this chamber class online. For the chamber class, normal chamber class is a class that everyone plays at the same time. Was almost impossible to do it online because of the latency and lots of other things. So I—I—I made a music for them that they can make, they can play over the zoom, basically. So that was actually super interesting experience for me, and I got really good support from

everywhere. So that was part of how new music, new art from Moody Center. And I got full support from Moody's, everyone on Moody, to help me to figure out the technology and like how to manage things, and especially for my teacher, my composition teacher, Dr. Brandt. And yeah, so far, these two, they were—actually no.

There is another one, I have a—this is something probably, I don't know, probably few at Rice they know. But whenever I tell this for my friends from other part of the other universities, this is very surprising for them. So there is a class for musicians here for the first semester. It's a career skill class but they teach you how to—how you should be ready when you're done. And this happened on the first semester, which is very interesting approach that teaches you what you need to do in the next three, four years in your doctorate that you have a better market for yourself, for your—for jobs. So that also was very interesting, very interesting class. I think it was really a smart choice to put the class back just on the first semester.

AS: Great to hear. And how do you—how did you settle in Houston? Like, did you find any Iranian community here in Houston that you get to?

BK: Oh, no. I mean, to be honest, I moved here in August. And I had two weeks before my semester start. So, and it was like during like early August, that was one of the worst time for the COVID. So I stayed home. Mostly. And then I was, and I am still, I haven't finished my semester, but I became super busy with the semester. So I didn't really have time for, unfortunately, for socializing. I know that there is a big Iranian community in Houston, but I haven't—also a big Baha'i community in Houston, but I haven't been able to actually get in touch. I have few friends from school, which is a good start.

AS: Great. Um, next, I'm just curious, what do you think of Americans representation of Iranian arts, like music performance, or films, or pop culture in general?

BK: Can you repeat one more time? I think I got it, but I want you to repeat one more time to make sure that I understand your question.

AS: Um, sure. So I'm just curious what you think about the representation of Iranian art forms in either like classical art forms, like music performance, or in pop culture, like—like films or mainstream media? Like what are your thoughts about their representation of Iranian culture?

BK: Um, I think it's very different from—it's very different where you're living at. So something that bothers me a lot about, like, I don't want to say like mainstream media, but like there are lots of like Hollywood tv, like movies or TV shows, for example, whenever they are talking about a bomb, or a terrorist attack, even though if it's—if it's not about Iran, it's a terrorist attack is coming from somewhere, somewhere else, but the music is, you know, middle eastern music. So that bothers me a lot. So this is a bad presentation, misrepresentation of—in my opinion. But in other ways, there are lots of interesting actually Iranian American artists in US especially like, there are lots of them in California and or New York. Most of them are modern artists, like modern musicians, modern visual artists, or—but I don't think Iranians in general, they have a strong platform to represent themselves, like this in like US. I mean, something like, like for example, like the Asian cultural- what was the name of this place? Like in Houston? Is this huge building for Asian culture? [**AS:** Asian Society?] Society, yes. So these kind of platforms gives opportunity for some different cultures to come and present themselves.

So I don't think, at least there is nothing like that that I know about. But I know there are some universities for example, like, especially in California because the number of Iranians are more in California. That they have like Persian studies and relate to Persian studies, they also have some platforms for representation of artists, like in general in American Iranian, or Iranian artists, but I don't think it's a very strong platform. So I'm not sure, to be honest, if it's an actual presentation—presentation of them or not. Or if they are presenting themselves, are they representing themselves as an Iranian or not. Because I want those people that kind of don't want to put title on myself that I'm an Iranian American. So I just, I want to just be me. So of course, when someone hears my music, they can find some Middle Eastern roots in it. This is just in my—in my DNA, I guess. I cannot change it. But definitely there are some like, I know like a translator, for example. Amazing poet also. She does lots of old literature translation. And I think like I love her books and like I love her translation, but there's not enough presentation of her. I'm not a friend of her, but like I follow her closely. So yeah.

AS: Next, we're just interested to hear about your thought—thoughts about some of the kind of current events and issues. What do you think is your relationship with the Black Lives Matter movement?

BK: Um, I mean, I support it. Um, to be honest, the whole idea of race is something new to me. I mean, I grew up in a country that (unintelligible) is that there is no diversity of race. It's interesting actually, because there is a diversity of color in Iran. So actually have from dark dark dark to light light light. I don't think anybody would have this as different race in Iran. So there are different kinds of different discrimination happening in Iran, especially regional discrimination in Iran, or language discrimination happening in Iran, but not through race related. So I see it—when I got here, I have to educate myself, I'm still doing it. It's kind of funny, because this is one of the changes that I see myself, because these are the things that I've never thought about them before. Not as a concern that, okay, this is something that exists in a way, in 21st century. So we all read about it like in history, but it was hard to understand why it's still happening, why people are still thinking about it. So I haven't done any, like direct activism towards it, to be honest. And sometimes I feel, I don't want to say this is not my story, but I need to be educated enough. And I need to have enough experience to be have a right influence on it. So the only thing that I right now I can do is just support it. But, yeah. And like by supporting it like, doesn't mean, I haven't attend any, like, gatherings or anything, just because of COVID, To be honest. So, like, my support is coming just like from my heart. Okay, so I know this is something that should be done because of these big changes that need to be done. So, yeah.

AS: Great. And since you moved to the US, I'm just curious, have you come across any form of racial stereotyping because of your appearance, or your country of origin?

BK: Um, yeah. Some of the funny, some of them are heartbreaking. So I'll tell you the funny one first. So after actually Black Lives Matter happen, I was sitting in Georgia, and because most of my friends, they know that like I'm active in social thing at school, for example, like in Athens. There were lots of conversation how, like, how we should support our colored friend. And I was in like a group chat about this. I wasn't very actually active, but I could read all the things that people talk about. And then after a while, I'm like one of the things that they wanted to do as white friends, that they need to just like personally go and support their colored friends. Just having sitting with them and talk with them and like talk to them and hear their concerns and see what they can do as a white ally, basically. So like few days after that conversation, one of my friend, like, he's a really good friend of mine. And he said, like Bhadie ,

do you just want to hang out, and then let's go to the park and then with the social distancing thing, I-let's talk. And at first, I thought like, he wants to do something, like a collaboration or something. And then, in the middle of the conversation, I figured that like he's actually approaching to me as a person of color. That—but that was a very new thing to me. Because, you know, in all of the American forums, if you're Middle Eastern, your race is white, which is something I never thought about that so I was like, okay, I am actually not white white, but at least on paper I'm white, so I don't know. So then, like, when I told my friend, I'm like, you know, actually on paper, if there's any, like, discrimination happens on paper, it's not going to happen for me, thankfully, or I don't know, but thankfully.

BK: But then I told him like this—like my story. But the first time I was doing the paperwork of US, I was doing for social security or for my driver's license or something like that. And I was doing my form by myself. And it asked me about my race. And it has like, okay, white, black, Hispanic, Asian, and something else. And I put Asian because okay, so I'm coming from continent of Asia, probably I'm Asian. So then I went to the clerk, and like she looked at me and said, you're not Asian. I said, I'm from Iran. Iran is part of Asia. She's like, no, you're not Asian. So and then I forget, okay, so on US on paper, I'm white. So this is—this is just doesn't make sense. So, anyway, that's a funny story. Go ahead. Sorry.

AS: Well, yeah, I was just gonna say East Asian was also considered white for a long period of time.

BK: Yes, that's something I learned in my Asians Studies class. It's really, I can't relate to that. This is just not something that just doesn't make sense. Anyway. So but after—after 2016, actually after like Muslim ban, I—I personally like experienced some—then people figured out like, I'm from Iran. They just didn't like it. So once, like, I was walking in the park in Georgia, and I was speaking Farsi. And I don't know how the person figured out like I was speaking Farsi. I have no idea. But this was American white. He is sort of like yelling at me, like you should go back to the country and all of these things. And I didn't pay attention, but it was just like, it was new. Because when I got here, I didn't have anything like this. But after right after 2016, it seems like things changed, and people are coming out of their racist shell. So.

AS: Yeah, definitely. The leaders of this country and the campaign politics have a lot to do with the status of the mindset.

BK: Right. The mindset. Yeah.

AS: And what are your thoughts about the most recent election that actually just took like a month ago?

BK: I mean, to be honest, I was very worried about it. I thought like whatever—I knew that Trump is going to do whatever he's doing now. But I thought more people are going to act like him. But it seems no one is taking him seriously, which is a very good news too. But I was very concerned about how about, like, if he doesn't agree, and then he just don't go away. And then he starts something, put people in front of each other. So I'm glad that it didn't happen. I hope—I'm hoping that's not going to happen. I don't think it's going to happen. I'm not a political person, to be honest. I had a very hard time too, because I want to be a social activist. I want to do something for my society, but I kind of against being political about it. But sometimes it's—it's very hard to avoid being political, and social activists.

So it seems like these two are kind of together so we cannot get away. But something that I don't like in general about US political system is i-i-it's just—it's very binary. So and yeah, especially like after, in the last four years, I figured that like there isn't really—there is no real conversation between people. And— and everyone knows about this, like all the social media and how the system works now, but at the same time that I cannot have a like a meaningful conversation with some people that they have very conservative views. At the same time, most of them are, you know, like I'm working in art and like eighty percent more of the artists are more liberal. So at the same time, I have sometimes hard time talking with my various liberal friends that are ignoring the existence of other half. So that also concerns me a lot. So what I'm hoping is the conversation between the two parties. I like more balance. So right now, it's just too left and right. So, and the middle of it really doesn't exist. Even though right now we say, oh you know, Biden is going to be more in the middle. But I'm not sure if it's going to happen that easy or not but that's what I'm hoping that you don't have to agree, but you can still work well and live together well in the middle. So on all the policies I think they need to have—they need to know how they can deal with this balance.

AS: Yeah. And I'm also curious, how do you think Asian Americans could help with the democratic process in this country? And what's about the Asian American qualities, or our heritage can bring in more like diversity of thoughts and ideas in this country?

BK: I would say definitely any kind of different backgrounds coming to US is going to bring more diversity. And the diversity means different way of looking at things also. So this diversity can help. Like maybe if there's just one way of looking at things, you cannot find a solution for something. But based on like your culture, or the way that you've done, or your country, they've done something or your history has done, or has dealt with something, it gives you a specific perspective. And you can suggest different ways of thinking about things.

But at the same time, as much as this diversity is important, I'm not sure how I feel about titling people, as regular Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, or just people. You know, sometimes I feel like if you don't look at things that way, and like you look at everyone with no border, or with no color or no background, and just looking at people. It's very idealistic. I know, it's not going to happen. But I want to think that way. I want to look at things that we are dealing with humans, so they have all have different backgrounds. Doesn't mean like if you're living in America you have all the same backgrounds, very different. Or if you're living in China, you're not going to have same backgrounds. It's very different, which part of country, which part of your family, and like your ancestor is coming from. So it's very different. So, but if you look at everyone as people, I'm more comfortable looking at this. But I'm very grateful to live in a country that I can be—I can experience different backgrounds. Because in Iran, I didn't have this chance. I lived in Austria almost for a year. I think the racism problem is a lot bigger there. Because there is no such other race. I personally experience more racist problems in Austria in a year than seven years in the United States. Which is surprising for lots of my American friends that they think Europe is a heaven, but it's not.

AS: Can you—do you mind sharing some of your experiences?

BK: In Austria?

AS: Yeah.

BK: So yeah, something that was very horrifying for me. I remember in Austria one night, I was in a Subway with few of my Iranian friends. And especially like older generations of white Austrian people, there are lots of them that they don't like people that don't speak German, or they look different. So a half drunk, old Austrian medic came and then he pushed few of my friends inside there, subway. Like, like if I—in the rain, actually. So that was like a horrifying thing for me. I had some other people that they came to yell at us like in German, but I didn't know what they were saying, and I didn't care. But that was a like a physical attack, I think very harsh. So that was the worst experience in Austria.

AS: I'm so sorry to hear that, and did the police come in to the scene before-

BK: No, and to be honest, the thing is happening, it's not like that for me anymore. But when you're new to a new culture, or new, you don't also feel that you belong there. Especially if you're coming as a refugee. Especially if you're coming as a—in a transition that's not the final destination. Everyone cares of everything. So they don't—they're not looking for making any problems. So I actually had the discussion with my friends after that, what should we call police? Should we do anything about it? He decided to do nothing. So they just left. This is very heartbreaking right now if I'm looking at it. But at that time seems like the best choice.

AS: Wow. And I guess given you're also kind of—kind of treated unfairly due to your religion, and both treated unfairly due to your—your race in a new country? Like how do you see like, just general—general prejudice or discrimination about one person's characteristics? Like kind of like, yeah, like, do the consequences of equality and social justice?

BK: Are you saying like, what are these experiences mean to being discriminated from my how it changed me? I'm not sure if I followed your question.

AS: Yeah, sorry. [**BK:** That's Okay.] Yeah, just curious, what do you think about these two types of origins, like prejudice in any form? Like, was there one form worse than the other, and how did it impact your—your thoughts about these different ways of prejudice?

BK: Um, it's very funny, actually, when I look at this. Like my parents, right now, they have green cards. So they come here, visit us often. Lots of times, lots of time, they also experienced all of this even more discrimination. But it's funny because they're not educated about these matters. They also make some prejudice about other races, or about—so not to do it like intentionally, they just don't think about it as if something is wrong. You know, so it's kind of heartbreaking for me, sometimes I see my mom talking about something that she has to talk about this way. You know, or sometimes that how they are un-uncomfortable there with my gay friends or lesbian friends. You know, this is something like for my generation, it's another thing to think about it, but definitely from my parents, even though they experienced different kind of prejudice. Now they're looking, they're tough, so they didn't do anything on it. But I'm thinking how about if they had power, could do these, like these kind of being on educated about somebody or not being sensitive about some others could result on any other kind of prejudice towards some group of people or not.

Lots of time, I think these prejudices are just coming from bad education. So bad education sometimes need like very conservative religious ideas or lots of other things or not just being thoughtful about some sensitive matters in your education from your family, or even from like your educational system. When I was making my documentary about my friend. It's very funny because in Iran, he's a threat for the country because he's Baha'i. And when the Muslim ban happened, he's a threat to US because he's Muslim, but he's not Muslim, but he's just because from Iran, it's assumed that he is Muslim. And I'm not saying Muslims are a trap, definitely not. But like all of these kind of things are also coming from policies sometimes. Like not a clear policy can make some prejudice like the way that we learn, okay, why am I white, and like a Hispanic person is not white? Because almost any time that I go to a Mexican restaurant, they start speaking Spanish with me because they think I'm Hispanic. So I look more like Hispanics than white Americans, but like on paper, they're Hispanic and I'm white, so.

AS: It's a really interesting place to be. I hope that many of our conversations like this could help, like, lower the border of prejudice and how we all understand each other and where places—where we are all coming from different places.

BK: True, true. I really hope too.

AS: Thank you so much Badie for sharing your thoughts and really, yeah, overwhelmingly inspiring life stories to me.

BK: Oh, thanks so much.

[Interviews Concludes.]