NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

FAINAN LAKHA

Interviewer: Elliott Maya

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Location of Interview: Kent Hall, Columbia University

Transcribed by Jamie Magyar

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Elliott Maya: Hello, my name's Elliott Maya, and I'll be having a conversation with… Fainan Lakha?

Fainan Lakha: [correcting emphasis] Fai-NAN LAK-ha.

Maya: Fainan Lakha, thank you, for the New York City Trans Oral History Project, in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is July 13, 2017, and this is being recorded at, Kent Hall?

Lakha: Yeah.

Maya: Kent Hall. Well, okay.

Lakha: Alright.

Maya: So. Tell me about yourself. Who are you?

Lakha: Yeah, I mean—I guess, you know, I mean it's—it's like, such a general place to start from, you know? I'm a student, organizer, I don't know. I.. I don't really know. That's too general for me.

Maya: No, you can just tell me… tell me, so, you're at Columbia University—College—University. University. How did you get to Columbia, and what year are you?

Lakha: Yeah. So, I came to Columbia in the fall of 2013. I graduate in December of this year, 2017. Yeah, I, I grew up in the—like, in the Seattle area. I don't know. I, like—at some point, like, I feel like I—I like, you know, there came a point, like, kind of when I got into high school, my parents like, started like really putting pressure on me, being like, you know, "You gotta go to like, a really good school, Fainan." And you know, I was like, I kind of—a lot of my, like, you know, teenage years, was a lot of like —and before— felt like things were kind of like, automatic, or I didn't really have like, a really good sense of self. I was always like, you know, pretty quick mentally, but like, that didn't necessarily mean I was able to like, really have a good sense of myself. And so—you know, so it was like, kind of—although very painful, like kind of, you know, very easy for my parents or people around me to be able to say like, "Oh, you have to like, go try to get into a good school." So, you know, that was the kind of thing that initially put me down the path of going to Columbia. Yeah. Later I got more interested in like—into my studies. I was really, really religious in high school. Like, really interested in like, mysticism. I was raised in kind of a small Shiite community—Ismaili community—who are defined by the fact that they follow, like, a living descendant of the prophet's cousin, Ali.

Maya: A current living, a *currently* living. Can you tell me more about that?

Lakha: Oh, sure. Yeah. Yeah, the imam, he's like—he like, interprets and like, renews or makes current, like, the practice of Islam for a, you know—for a current moment. It's a little bit weird, though. Like, the current imam has the title of "his highness," from the crown—

Maya: Interesting.

Lakha: —and also like, traces himself back to like, some aristocratic lineage, from like, some king of Iran in like the 18th century or some shit. And it's like, the previous imam, who was the current imam's grandfather—this guy's name is Sultan Mohammed Shah—was like, one of the, like, key people who were—is like one of the foundational people for the like—for the politics of the Muslim League.

Maya: The Muslim League?

Lakha: Yeah. Which was like, a kind of like, bourgeois aristocratic group that like, kind of existed to, you know, call for an independent state, or some kind of independent political space for Muslims in India—you know, was the idea. Anyway, so, I say all of this because like, there's kind of like—you know, this like, context, is like the context of what's now called, like, Muslim modernism, this idea of like, basically trying to like, fill in or situate ideas of Islam within a very, like, 19th-century English rationalist kind of Protestant-y sort of framework.

Maya: That's so wild.

Lakha: So Ismailism, as I understand it—yeah, totally—Ismailism as I understand it is like, in a very deep sense a kind of Protestantism, like, in Islam. And—so, I mean, you know, it comes like—today, like, the Aga Khan—that's like, the title of like, the imam—has like, an enormous, like, development network, that does like, whatever aid work all over the world, and like, you know, comes with like a kind of very—it's like, very ideological, basically. Like, a lot of what I was, like, you know, kind of taught was basically a like—an idea of like, liberal multiculturalism in a very religious setting. Or like, placing, like, spiritual value on liberal multiculturalism. So, I mean, you know, it was very weird, kind of, being Ismaili. 'Cause, like, one, Ismailis are sort of deracinated because of this. Like, it's like all of the material is something new, so it's like, historical practices are sometimes put to the wayside, or like, sometimes more like… There's stuff that's kept, especially the singing tradition—the tradition of poetry is kept, maintained. But it's like, very sanitized, in a sense. So—and, you know, and this ethic of liberal multiculturalism, like, kind of like, places, like a really large distance, and kind of forces, like, a sense of conformity with, like, the places that we are. Like, you know, it's like—makes a lot of sense to be—like, in America, to have a religion that advocates—that's like, very focused on liberal multiculturalism. So, you know, that kind of stuff was like, yeah, kind of wild. What—how did I get to Ismailism?

Maya: I think you were telling me about what it was like growing up in that, and that you were very religious in high school.

Lakha: Right, right, right. So, you know, but part of the other thing was like—I was like, really—like, there is like, within Ismailism, something that's like, kind of buried. Like, you have to wake up at like, four in the morning in order to like, go to like the prayer hall in order to get the more mystical stuff. But there is this tradition of like, kind of Sufism in there. And so like, I was in high school, and I guess I was like, very interested in kind of trying to like, resolve some of the tensions that I had in my life, like, by like having mystical practices. And it was like, kind of a period of like a year or two when I was like, very manic just from like, doing meditations every day, sometimes for hours, like, ritual prayer practices, all kinds of stuff. I'd read a lot. And, you know, like eventually it kind of burnt me out, you know? I was like—around, at the same time—this like, kind of got set off because my parents got really—I'm like, kind of going backwards in history.

Maya: No, it's fine. We're gonna jump all around. It's so fine.

Lakha: Yeah, okay. I know it's meandering, but you know, maybe this is like, getting a sense for how I think, too, you know?

Maya: It's good, it's good.

Lakha: But like—we like—my parents had gotten like, really involved in this like—I don't know exactly what term to call it, but basically they became followers of one like, Godman in India. Really like, him and his wife are the Godman—

Maya: Oh, the Godman. Can you tell me more?

Lakha: Oh. A Godman—so like, in India there's these, kind of like big, almost really corporate kind of like gurus, religious figures. They like, you know, often make claims, like being some kind of, you know, either like enlightened, or like, being able to like, give enlightenment, share enlightenment with other people, or, you know… In this case, this person said, "I'm a Bhagavān," said they're basically the incarnation of Vishnu.

Maya: That's a big claim.

Lakha: Yeah, yeah. Seriously. God on Earth. Bhagavān means god. So my parents like, you know—actually my dad was like, friends with Tony Robbins. You know, like the, like—in the 80's, he was like, really big, being like a lifestyle coach, like self-help, he has these huge sessions.

Maya: Okay.

Lakha: Even today. Like, they're like, you know, for professionals trying to like, make it or do your best. It's like literally—my parents sent me to some of his seminars—it was like, literally disgusting. I'm so ideological today 'cause I was raised really ideologically. Like, I like went to these super intense, I feel like three- or four-day seminars, and like literally, it's like—they like, pound you down. You know, some stuff was like, really like, sexist. Like it'd be things like, you know, like—he would like tell women, you know, your husband's not happy with you or whatever, and that's like, your fault, or like, whatever like, issues you have, you have to be able to take responsibility for them, pull yourself up by your bootstraps kind of thing. Success really clearly defined in terms of like, whatever like, financial whatever, and like, financial gains or being in the top of your field. He'd hold himself up as this like—as like, the incarnation of all these things, and—you know, like, it's this very intense eight hours—eight to twelve hours—in like, a cold room, very exhausting. It's really a way of kind of drilling certain ideas into your head. And it's a way of like, programming people to be able to be like, efficient professional workers, basically, you know? This is what your aims are. If you buy into these aims complacently, and you apply these skills, you know, you're supposed to be able to make them. But really what you're doing is producing yourself as a docile, complacent, and efficient worker. So like—you know, like, that was like kind of the intellectual food I was served, nourished on. But, you know, so there came a point when Tony Robbins kind of became interested in this, you know, movement, ashram, Godman thing. So—it was called Oneness University. So my parents got involved in that,

and then came a time in which like, they were very like, involved, very intense about it, and eventually like, it kind of came to a point where like, my father would start to really, like, wield—and this like, is the natural outgrowth of like, combining Tony Robbins' ideology with like, whatever, like some kind of, you know, like Indian mystical kind of thing. So like, you know, like basically my father—all of us really—would like, basically try to like, make arguments by using appeals to like, certain phrases. There'd be all these like, phrases, slogans, and like—

Maya: Can you give me an example of one?

Lakha: Yeah. Like, you know, if I was like, upset about something—you know, like, he'd be like, "Oh no, don't worry. Suffering's not in the fact. It's in the perception of the fact." Yeah. Or like, you know, things that were like, relativism, like, "This is not your reality," like—or I'd be like, "Oh, look. You just did something like, really fucked up. Like, you basically just like, twisted my words, or blaming me for something you did," and they'd be like, "No, that's *your* reality. Whatever." This like, super destabilizing kind of experience for me and for my consciousness, like, how to make sense of the world in that way. So I—you know, not feeling very grounded, not having a good way to be grounded, you know… This is like—now let's circle back into talking about mysticism in high school.

Maya: No, I'm loving it already.

Lakha: Like I—you know, I started like, kind of breaking out of that a little bit. I guess, actually, I should say more. So, there came a point where like, the Oneness Movement split and like, there became a kind of like, more US-focused, more corporate-facing kind of thing, and then there was like, the stuff happening back in India. And this is when shit started to get pretty intense. This is like, maybe my eighth grade, freshman year in high school, kind of thing. It was like—basically we'd have like, people traveling around the country, like come to stay with us, and we'd have these huge sessions. Hundreds of people, sometimes—you know, in different places. And it'd be like, just this like, very—it got like, started to get—it was very small, very intense. Like, ideas were like, you know, like—the main thing was like, this idea of diksha. It's like—diksha means "blessing," something like that—passage of energy, by like, touching someone's head, or like putting—staring at someone in their eyes. Like, channeling divine energy through that. You know, to be kind of like, atheistic about it, it was like, you know, you work yourself up into a manic state, and then you get into a very intense connection with someone who's also working themself up.

Maya: Interesting.

Lakha: It's like, oh my god, you know?

Maya: So it's like channeling the godhead, essentially, by touch.

Lakha: Yeah. Exactly, exactly. And, you know, it was like—to do this on a mass scale, with lots and lots of people in the same room, it's like, very, very intense. I can't like…

Maya: So when you say "mass scale," do you mean like, you come into the living room and there's like eight people in your living room, or…?

Lakha: No, no, no. So, we had some things like that, where it was like, you know, maybe fifteen people at our house.

Maya: Yeah.

Lakha: But more often—or, also—it'd be like, there'd be like, events, in like a hall or something.

Maya: Okay.

Lakha: So like, five hundred people or something, or two hundred people, you know?

Maya: Doing that.

Lakha: Yeah.

Maya: And you would attend.

Lakha: Yeah.

Maya: Can you tell me what was that like for you, and how old were you—you were in eighth grade? Tenth grade?

Lakha: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Between like—yeah, like fourteen and fifteen.

Maya: Fourteen and fifteen. And so can you like, walk me through one of those events, when you—from leaving your house to attending this event?

Lakha: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, it'd be like—you know, you'd go—I remember the most memorable one was like, we went to Vancouver one time. I grew up in the Seattle area—

Maya: In Seattle, yes.

Lakha: —I said that already, so Vancouver's like, three hours away. And it's like—you know, it was like, people were really, really nice to me, because I like, knew the stuff, you know? I, like—I read all the material that they published, I listened to the podcasts. Like, I meditated all the time. I knew the stuff. And so people were very like, "Wow, you're so like," you know, whatever, "powerful."

Maya: Powerful. Did you feel powerful?

Lakha: I tried to feel powerful, you know?

Maya: Did you believe what you were listening to and learning at the time?

Lakha: Yes. Very, very fiercely. Very fiercely. Yeah. Yeah, and so these experiences were like—you know, a lot of it was really—and the reason why I remember this, like, experience in Vancouver—is that a lot of it was really like, trying to… kind of like… I mean, when I reflect on it, I really think about this period as being like, trying to like run away from some like, really serious issues that were happening in my life. Like, it's like, my parents really fought a whole lot. They like, really like—it was like—I just expressed, it was very destabilizing at home. And my like, feeling like—I was like—I experienced childhood sexual abuse when I was around ten, eleven. I don't really want to talk too much about that.

Maya: That's fine.

Lakha: But like, that like, really stayed with me, and I held a lot of guilt and pain about that. And I like—you know, I saw like, trying to do all of this as like, a way to kind of get past it. So I'd like, you know, sometimes really like, just kind of sit there with the pain, and like, feel really, really bad. It would be really painful. But like, trying to get into manic states, trying to get really—like, be excited, trying to be outward-facing—was like all very—that all felt very good, but also was like, a really good way to kind of stay away from all this like, really difficult shit that I was not dealing with. And this of course was like—you know, like, beneath it all, it feels like, you know—it was like, I was like in middle school when I really stopped allowing myself to really like, identify really strongly or feel like it was okay or easy for me to identify more closely with girls—you know, identify myself that way. I didn't have, necessarily, like, a really—damn it, we're going so far back!

Maya: No, it's so fine.

Lakha: I didn't really have like, a language or good concepts for thinking about what it meant to be trans.

Maya: What do you—can you tell me more about that? Like, what do you mean by the language?

Lakha: Yeah, yeah. You know, so, I mean, it was like—I have like, recollections from, you know, a young age. Like, I remember I was on a field trip one time, I confided in some friends like, you know, like my real big wish is like, I wish I could just live as a girl.

Maya: How old were you?

Lakha: Six, seven?

Maya: Six, seven.

Lakha: Yeah. And I mean, you know, like, I don't think like, you know—I think like, kind of like, the genesis of being trans, like when or how someone becomes trans is very—is born—whatever

this is, like, all that seems like a weird way to talk about it. I just have like, recollections, and I've put my life together at some point, you know? I put together what I needed. And so like, you know— [phone vibration]. That's my mom calling.

Maya: You're good.

Lakha: Yeah. Good, you got to miss the fact that my ringtone is "Careless Whisper." Yeah, like, it was… Yeah, I mean, so like, I guess like, you know, when I was younger like I, you know… There's all these, like, you know, like I was mostly friends with girls, like, you know, and like, my favorite things to do were like, more girly things. But I was also like, really pushed, obviously, into like, playing sports, which I hated, you know?

Maya: Mhm. What sport did you play?

Lakha: Oh god. You know, it's like, there's only two sports I ever really liked. I played like—my mom signed me up for all the things. I did like baseball, tennis, basketball, soccer—I tried it all—football. I had to drop that really fast. I showed up late every—like, to all—to the first three practices, and every time, the coach would like, make me run around this field for every minute I was late. I'd spend the whole practice running around the field, 'cause I was like, a bad runner. I have like, a knock-knee, so I fall really easily, especially back then. I have better balance now. But yeah, like, I got into snowboarding a little bit. That was pretty fun. I used to do that a lot. You know? And the other thing was, I started playing lacrosse after sixth grade. I joined a team that had just been started, like, kind of out pretty far into the suburbs—you know, like 45 minutes out of Seattle. And, you know, I didn't really fit in with anyone on that team, but I didn't give a shit because I got to play defense, and I got to like, eventually—not at first, but eventually—got to play with a six-foot-long pole, and I got to like, stab people, tackle people, like, punch them, essentially. Like, it was great. I loved beating the shit out of these boys. Like, it was so good. I was angry, you know? I was like—all this stuff was happening in my life, and like, I did not have like, a good way—a good outlet, and…

Maya: So lacrosse became that for you.

Lakha: Yeah. Lacrosse totally became that for me. And it got—I was so intense about it, I ruined my knees. Like, my freshman year I had to stop playing lacrosse because I started having like, really, really bad knee pain. I'd had a couple surgeries. But I was like, so gung-ho. It was like, yeah. Yeah, my team won championship the next year, so. We went from being like, the worst team in the league to like, four years later, winning.

Maya: Wow, that's a real underdog story.

Lakha: Yeah, seriously, right? How did we get to sports?

Maya: Talking about high school. I can like, cycle us back if you want. I actually want to go back to you talking about—talking about the genesis of trans, and how you thought that was a very weird concept. Can you tell me more about that?

Lakha: Yeah, yeah, sure. I guess it's like, this like, you know—I don't, like—I… I'm very like, wary of trying to like, give a single kind of narrative to my life, you know? I'm very wary of—I could go off into another tangent, but I won't like, go—

Maya: You can. You can.

Lakha: Well, okay.

Maya: I'm taking notes. I can get you back.

Lakha: Let me talk a little about psychoanalysis—

Maya: Oh, here we go. I'm ready.

Lakha: —and then we can go back and talk about this. Because this is, I guess, a more recent kind of like, part of it. So I like—in my freshman year I took a seminar on Freud. And I—it was like, really, really intense for me. It like, brought up a lot of traumatic shit, and I like, couldn't help but like, try to process everything, kind of through the psychoanalytic framework, you know? It was like, Freud's texts were kind of like, hard for me to read, so I'd spend a lot of time on them, so consequently it'd be very like, heavy on my mind all the time. Anyway, like, this kind of like—this kind of stuff, you know, like, stressed me out for a while. I definitely like—I'm very like—I'd smoke weed and sometimes get anxious, and then I'd just kind of lose myself, like, in self-analysis. It'd be like, a very bad, unhealthy kind of thing. And what—the kind of like, dominant thing that started—this became particularly bad once I left school. I got very depressed, really because it started to be more and more pressing that I, like, start to transition. I left school after the fall of my junior year.

Maya: High school?

Lakha: 2015. College, college. Fall of 2015 was my last semester at school until fall of 20—fall of 2015, I didn't take class until spring of 2017.

Maya: This past year.

Lakha: Yeah. Or—yeah.

Maya: This year.

Lakha: Yeah. Anyway, so, I left school and I like—you know, I saw some therapists and they were all like, you know, basically—I like, hit up my professor who was a—who like, trained people

through the Columbia Psychoanalytic Institute. So I had people—my professor, I was like, "Oh, I want someone who's like, trained in psychoanalysis to analyze me, you know? I'm very interested in this stuff," blah blah blah. It was so bad. You know? Like literally I was so bound down by…. I was so bound down by this idea that like, everything I experienced, everything I'd go through could be like, reducible to a single narrative that, you know, like basically being oedipalized. Like, I could—it'd haunt me. It would terrify me. Like, I have this thought, or I feel this way, and this means exactly this. Like, you know, it goes straight back to the thing. And it like—it felt like I was being chained down, literally, you know? And like, you know, that is like, a really—it's hard for me to find exactly words to express what it's like to, you know, like have a rubric to judge everything that I think. But that's how I felt, and that's how I felt like I was supposed to feel, like, working with psychoanalysts.

Maya: Did you feel like you needed a rubric at that time, like, that you needed a guideline to go back to if it was wrong?

Lakha: I mean, I needed to make sense of things. But this didn't help me.

Maya: It didn't help. Okay.

Lakha: It made things worse. It made things a lot worse. It was destabilizing. You know? Yeah. It was destabilizing, again. So anyway, like, you know, at the end of this period, I started reading a book. You know, the other thing—I study comparative literature and society at Columbia. I mostly like, study social philosophy, Marxism, and then modern India. And I read—I picked up a book called *Anti-Oedipus* by two French philosophers, [Gilles] Deleuze and [Félix] Guattari, which is a book that's really about like, trying to like, criticize both Marxism and psychoanalysis—Lacanian psychoanalysis—but like, tries to do so by producing like, a kind of unified framework that's grounded in like, a perspective of the world and all processes being unified, part of a single thing, but also like, always multiplicitous. There's a—there's like kind of a certain, like, traditions in Chinese Buddhism that are a little like this, too, I think. I'm learning about that right now. But, you know, like basically reading them really staged like, really reading through a critique like, of Oedipus, of feeling like I could like, understand myself in terms of like, many different things, or I could like, you know—at any moment I'm like, composed of something that's not like, totally fit together and coherent. It's like, unstable. Those kinds of—and like, seeing like, you know—try to see myself better in terms of like, flows or changes. These are things that really, really helped me to come better to terms with being trans. Even though I'd talked to psychoanalysts, like, it'd be like—more than anything talking to them like, would give me fear. Fear about like, trying to like, you know, construct a different narrative about who I am than what I had taken for granted before. So, I guess like—so, you know, that's why I'm wary about like, any like, kind of like, structuring total narrative about like, who I am or have been. What I know is this: like, I have always had certain desires that I didn't know exactly how to make sense of. I didn't know exactly how to make sense of my, like, closeness, attachment, identification with femininity. Certainly like, a lot of things that happened in my life just kind of stopped me from being able to experience it, and that was very painful. But it's also like, it's not as though like, I—you know, I had like, visions of myself as being, you know, other, I just had dissatisfaction and detachments. So it really

took like, me trying to think about what's bothering me, what's making like, life so miserable for me at this moment. And it was in that way that like, I really came to reflect on and realize like, my need to transition. I guess there's other like, more recent experiences that're relevant there, too. Like, I had a friend—okay. There's this like, house—I'll go back a little bit for context—there's like, this house at Columbia that is like a place for like, you know, like, students of color, really. And, you know I, like, I was around a lot my first few years of school. I really didn't fit in, you know? I felt like, you know—like, I grew up in Seattle, a kind of place that was like, very white. I was like, you know, always kind of like, a little uncomfortable, tried to be things that i wasn't, you know? And like—so like, people weren't like, very affirming. Very judgmental towards me in general. And as a consequence, you know—I actually don't want to say that. But I mean, it was a place where, you know, I was supposed to be able to fit in so, you know, I had a friend who lived there. I started, like, my junior year, this fall before I left. Like, I started hanging out there basically every day. This friend of mine, like—I had been, like, seeing her best friend, and she had gone abroad, so we were both kind of like, out of the like, a close person. So we started spending a lot of time together. And, you know, it was like—this friendship got like, pretty toxic at some point, and one thing that was like, really bad was, you know, I like—you know, it was like, kind of over like, that year that I started realizing, like—you know, maybe like, trying to identify as like, you know, gender nonconforming or non-binary, or something. Like, not sure, just trying to figure it out. And this friend like, really, really—this friend who's a lesbian—was like, really, really—or queer—was like, really, really insistent on like, gendering me as a man. And, you know, if I was to be queer, basically, for her it was like I had to see boys, which was not something I was particularly interested in at that time. And like, you know, this was one of the things, I think like really, really like, sapped me. Like, she—like, there'd be times when like, you know, she'd have like, friends over, and it'd be like—they'd be like, "Oh, this is girls' time now." Literally. Like, I'd be like—

Maya: Like, an unnecessary division.

Lakha: Yeah. And like, to be put in that position constantly, to like—you know, it's like—I don't know. For me, like, a lot of my life—and I think this is one way that I make—that I—I feel like transitioning has like, made a difference. Being trans like, made a difference. It's like, I feel a lot of what people expect of me in a given situation. In a sense like, there's nothing we can say or do that doesn't happen in some kind of context of like—that codes you. That codes you, and coding in terms of gender is like, a really deep form of that. So, you know, it's like, I couldn't play—I couldn't speak or be authentic to myself if the expectations upon me were, you know, deeply gendered. And the expectations upon me now—you know, from people who accept, understand, or are able to see—is like—are a lot different, you know, and a lot more comforting. But, yeah. I mean, that was like, really, really painful. And that was like—I think like, that kind of experience was part of like, what made it so pressing once I left school, to like, really reckon with all this stuff. I guess I didn't go that much into like, the—like, what it means to not have, like, a singular narrative, but I hope that kind of like—

Maya: I think I understand. I think you're saying that—it sounds like you didn't have the typical like, one moment that you hear a lot, like, "I woke up, and like oh, I'm *this* now," right? There

was like a sense of knowing that you were working with for a period of time, but that also you didn't have the support of people who should've supported you. Yeah, okay.

Lakha: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I think a lot of my life is like this. Like, I tend to chew on things for a long time, and they just kind of ruminate in the back. [laughter] You know, I like—you know, like, I'm like a materialist in the philosophical sense, but I would like really get very interested in astrology.

Maya: Interesting.

Lakha: I have this whole like—

Maya: No, tell me. I want to hear about both materialism and your astrology thoughts.

Lakha: Yeah, yeah. I mean—okay, so I'll like—I'll hold aside like, talking about materialism for a second, talk about astrology. Because like, materialism will link like, very well, very clearly, back into this kind of like, longer narrative about like, gender, like, religion, mystical practice, philosophy, that kind of—is like, kind of the dominating arc maybe, of my last like, ten years, or eight years. But like, astrology-wise, it's like—you know, I mean—I just think like, you don't need to believe that like, the stars incarnate reality in order to understand astrology as a practice which has embedded in it all kinds of different, like, knowledge or ideas that makes you focus on asking certain kinds of questions when you look at someone or look at their life, or when you read something and reflect on your own life, you know? I mean, it's not like thoughts come out of nowhere. Like, they have to be prompted by something, and having the right prompts—prompts can be very subtle, very, like—produce like, very specific effects, like, you have to have the right prompts. And like, you know, with a birth chart it's like, you have a really complex combination of elements. And I love doing a reading of someone's chart because like, here I am, like, looking at this person, thinking about them. If I don't know them that well, it's really good, you know? Although my reading might not be as good, it's really fun. Because, you know, I have this like, information right here and this person—I'm like, you know, working through like—with this like, you know, text as like, a medium, and trying to like—and what I know about these signs as I experience them, as I've observed them, and kind of bringing this all to bear. Producing like, you know, some kind of understanding that this person like—you know, like hopefully will find like, very affirming and insightful. And then it's like—it's like, kind of magical, and intimate, and—it's like, you know, like—it's great like, to have like, a really nice way to draw on intuition in a way that feels like, valid. So like—sorry to like, you know—I like astrology. And so one thing I was like—you know, I have like, an idea that I have that, you know, is not so, so common, but I like to think that like, you know, you can think about like, your dominant signs as like, kind of a figure, you know? Like, we're not like, one fixed thing. Like, you know, you have different elements that might like, come out in different situations in different ways, or over time, you know. So I sometimes think about myself as like, you know—my, like—I'm an Aquarius. A Scorpio moon and Aries rising. So I have like, an air, water, and fire sign.

Maya: Interesting.

Lakha: And you know, like, I have really—I'm like, very much an Aquarius. I can be kind of emotionally distant, very abstract, creative, sort of weird. But I can be like, you know—like, people—if I like, give a talk, people like me, people think I'm like, you know, approachable, and more friendly and exciting than I actually am. And, you know, like—I guess that, you know, that like, being outgoing is kind of an Aries thing. But I'm also like, hella moody. And I go into crises. So like, you know, ruminating on things and having them like, kind of—having everything fall apart until I resolve them is kind of thematic for my life. Kind of phoenix-like, is the quick sort of the way I think about it. You know, maybe it's self-aggrandizing to refer to myself as the great mythical phoenix, but… You know, I just really do feel like I—there's times when I'm like, doing great and like, I'm like—I can like, burn through anything, like I'm like right there above. Other times when like, I can feel myself like, struggling really hard to keep things together, and then times always when I feel like everything is falling apart and I'm very depressed. But I inevitably resolve really, really, like, rich and complicated things. At the heights and at the lows, like, those poles have always helped me like, kind of figure out like, where I was going, figure out answers to problems that it took me a long time to ask. Yeah. And I'm very grateful to be able to, like, chew on problems over a long period of time. I like—that's like a—for me, like, a very meaningful way to live life. Yeah, astrology. Yeah. So, you know, and like… Yeah. That's basically the astrology thing. Materialism… So, I got to school. And the other thing that I kind of did in high school a lot was organizing. I like—I was like, really involved with Amnesty International. Liberal organizing, you know? I was a state organizer, I did a national committee, and I… Yeah. So, I like—you know, I got like, kind of frustrated with it by the time I was leaving school.

Maya: What made you get frustrated with it?

Lakha: Yeah. For one thing, I just didn't know anything about all these issues I was supposed to be like, getting people excited about, organized about, and like, doing stuff about. I also didn't really do much of anything. Like, it's like you could write letters, like, have a little bit of a protest, but like, there's no like, strategy, for like really fighting.

Maya: Change.

Lakha: Yeah, exactly. When I got more involved in the national stuff, it was like really ossified, like, super like—kind of like, basically like what I found was like, there's like a board of directors which is very like, interested in lobbying the US government. And they sometimes use the membership's letter-writing campaigns in order—for leverage. But for the most part, like, this is not very relevant, even though it's the mode—it's the thing that Amnesty is founded around. The other thing that Amnesty does—the other thing that the board of directors does in order to keep itself in power—is by like, depending upon like, a middle-aged, like, white, very liberal, you know, like kind of population of members, who will just like, vote in the people with the most experience. So it was like, you know—it's not like there was like really anything for me to do that was meaningful. I didn't know anything, I couldn't—and there was no strategy. So I was like, "Yeah, fuck this." And I went to college and I was like, "Alright, well, you know, I guess I should like, get involved in some—like, something more radical." Now like, you know, I like really

wasn't—when I was like sixteen or seventeen, like, I kind of like, started really slowing down with the mysticism stuff. Like I—you know, I said like, I had this period of like being very manic. Eventually I crashed, and after that I kind of like, left it behind. You know, there was like—I became like, interested in studying religion, studying Islam, but like, you know, I was like, a little bit—without that, I was like—you know, didn't have like, a really clear way of thinking through things, and I wasn't like, having these like, serious affective experiences of reality all the time. So—

Maya: And when you were having the manic period, everything was very affective?

Lakha: Mhm.

Maya: So, can you tell me more about what it was like for you?

Lakha: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, I like, really genuinely felt like, very in touch with everything around me, and I really genuinely like—I could like, really like, feel like, "Oh, like, the force of my energy is like, in all of these things," or I could feel like—you know, I'd like see a person and like, really feel like I was really in them somehow. Yeah. But I was like so—you know, I mean—like, it's not that I—and I don't have a totally like, atheistic view on all of this. Like, you know, there's something really meaningful about like, feeling connected to reality, and something really meaningful about feeling like, you know, whatever—like, the energy and unity of the world, being able to like, you know, open yourself up to things. But, you know, I think like, I was very like—one could say—I shouldn't say "I say"—but one could say, you know, I was like—it's like a dark stain in my heart, you know? Like, pain that I was not dealing with, and so instead of like, working on that and trying to like, you know, achieve some kind of peace, I'd like, pursue like, very stimulated or exciting feelings about things.

Maya: About the external world instead of inner life.

Lakha: Mhm.

Maya: Okay. That makes sense to me.

Lakha: Yeah. But like, you know, I didn't know how to think through things clearly, is basically what it comes down to. So, you know, I got involved in this organizing, and, you know, people's politics were like, pretty bad, you know? It's like, you know, they'd like say they were radical, or like, you know—I got involved with like, doing prison divestment work, I got involved with doing the fight against gentrification in like, the neighborhood I now live in. And, you know, it was like, very hard to organize, and like, very personal, and… You know, I like—I also like, still couldn't learn anything about what the stuff I was trying to organize around was. So, you know, I—in the gentrification stuff, eventually I met some people who were in an organization called the International Socialist Organization, which, I've been a member now for a little over three years.

Maya: Wow.

Lakha: Yeah. So, you know, I mean—and a big part of it was like, you know, not only having a clear idea of like, how to organize, or like what like, makes sense to do, but also like—also having a clear sense of the world. So two things kind of happened that like, made like, becoming a Marxist a particular kind of like, really—like, a really like, resolving point, I guess. The first is like, I started studying like—my first year at Columbia, I also started taking classes in analytic philosophy, or, philosophy, and I found it extremely challenging. I had never really thought through things like, in terms of like, propositions, where like, you know, you follow a chain of thought like, really, really clearly forward to a conclusion. That was like, very foreign to me. My parents like, you know—neither of them have had like, really any substantial humanities education. My father like, graduated from college with a degree in like, finance or something, and my mom has an AA in accounting. So like—you know, like, they, you know, didn't have like, much of this, you know, in them either. So I—you know, I wasn't like, really exposed to this—I've been saying this, but like, thinking very clearly, rationally. Studying philosophy was kind of like, really like starting to raise these questions for me. It started to feel like, kind of like opening up a whole different way to look at life, to understand what was like—to understand what was going on within me, you know, to like, resolve a problem. Like, ask myself like, "What's my goal? How do I get there? What's happening?"

Maya: Are these questions that you just previously never asked yourself, or thought to ask, that were introduced to you?

Lakha: They were questions that I'd drown in, you know?

Maya: Drown in?

Lakha: Like, I—to answer the question, it's like—you know, like, "Why's this person upset?" I'd like, let whatever came to me, came to me, you know? Whereas like, another way to ask that question is to like, really think about, "Okay, well, they seem like this. And they seem like this, and I did this, this, and this thing. Oh, like, this thing might seem connected to it in this way."

Maya: Okay.

Lakha: Like, actually like, breaking things down and taking steps in my thought.

Maya: And like, correlation between events. Interesting.

Lakha: Yeah, exactly. Like, tracking things. So—you know, I don't think this is like, the best way to think about things, you know, but it was really important for me at that time to learn how to slow down and focus enough to like, try to follow causes and effects, not just follow everything in terms of this like, powerful intuition I had, or reactions to things, whatever it may be. And you know, like—but you know, a lot of what I was exposed to wasn't really political. And a lot of what I was exposed to like, didn't offer like, really good kind of like, way for me to like, break with things I thought before, you know? So like, becoming a Marxist was like really important. I

resolved this political problem—feeling debilitated politically, feeling doubtful that like, I knew anything about what I was fighting about, not having a view of the future or where power comes from—at the same time, resolving also these very personal, kind of philosophical problems that had been kind of like, brewing within me for a long time. Like, kind of becoming a Marxist meant like, being able to have like, a grounded way to like—a systematic orientation towards the world, like understanding what makes like, you know… like, First off, materialism: believing that the world is like, the world is what comes before ideas. Ideas always follow within and always exist within the context of a system of social relations. And organization of production, and organization of politics, of the law, of media, whatever, you know? And understanding that a lot of these have to do with like, capitalist power, with like—the fact is that like, things that we think or do are oftentimes determined by the fact that there is a class of people who have—whose like, defining characteristic is that they own all the instruments that make it possible for us to live. They own the factories. They own the farms. They own the TVs—or, the TV stations, you know? They own, whatever, like, our clothes. They own the music labels. Like, everything—or, you know, they own the clothing factories—everything like, you know—our world's made up of things that is, to some extent or another, like, under the control of an exploiting class. And to suddenly be able to like, go back and criticize things—like, go back and criticize like, Tony Robbins, and all this like, Tony Robbins bullshit that was in my head—like, you know, having like, a clear view of the world to counterpose to all this other stuff that had been swirling around in me like, you know, really changed like, what my life was. And it didn't resolve a lot of problems. Like, you know, I wouldn't really come to the point of like, transitioning for a few years after that, but it opened me down a path of like, trying to resolve things, finding new ways to think about what's happening to me, and like, coming to answers to those questions in the process.

Maya: So it sounds like becoming political, from what sounds like a previously apolitical home, was a point of clarity, or rather a lens that you then took out into the world, different than the way that mysticism had been a previous lens.

Lakha: Mmhmm.

Maya: Do you ever find yourself—I know you say you're not—you don't lean towards mysticism anymore, I believe—do you ever find yourself having moments where you do, though? Or that your political lens, your political self, and your like, mystic self come into contact, and what is that like? And if it doesn't, is it—what is that? Yeah. That wasn't worded very well. I'm sorry.

Lakha: It's something—no, no, no, it's something I'm really like—it's something that's a very present kind of question for me. There's one thing—there's one more simple thing—which is the philosophy of [Baruch] Spinoza, who like—is something like—there's something kind of mystical that—or something that resonates with like, my—the mysticism in Spinoza, who is like, you know, a definite influence on Marx, who provides a certain way of reading Marx, and who's like, a very heavy influence on Deleuze and Guattari. And Spinoza's like, key thing is monism: thinking about the world as a single unity, against like, the idea that mind and body can be like, rigorously distinguished. Instead he says, well, you know, "We perceive the world through the attribute of extension of physical things, and the attribute of thought, but the order and connection of things

is the same as the order and connection of ideas." So we're talking about one thing; we just perceive it in two ways. And so like, this kind of like, belief in like, the total unity of reality, that's like a very mystical kind of conceit, very present in like, you know, some—it's like, most visible in Buddhist philosophy but also in like, Sufism or like, in—you know, more like mysticism-based, like Vedic or Hindu mysticisms. Yeah. But, you know, that's like, kind of like, more like, abstract and philosophical. Like, you know, the like—there—I guess the other, the phase that comes after like, kind of like, really like, trying to learn how to dig through everything clearly is coming back and thinking about how to do politics, and like how do—you know, it's not just about like, having a good idea of what my ideas are, but actually of like, looking into the world, seeing like, how things are changing or moving, understanding what kinds of things I can say or do in order to push them in the direction of, of staging a revolution, you know? Or building a mass movement, you know, coming to have, like—you know, build a left in—a real like, substantive left in the United States. And like, being in touch with like, how things are moving, being in touch with how things are changing, being in touch with what someone, like, what someone I'm talking too like, sees as—like, sees or desires—all of these things like, demand like, you know like, something similar that—to something that I had to develop with mysticism, which is like, contemplating on things. Understanding kind of intimately like, what do—like, how do these ideas come to bear on the world? What is like—what is the reality of them? You know, it's one thing to say something. It's a whole other thing to realize that this is a—like, a way through which you can view and interpret the world, and try to make sense of sometimes very complicated situations, or a way to understand what someone's thinking, and understand how it lines up with what I'm thinking. So in the sense of like, having to like, really internalize ideas, having to make them like, really a part of how I perceive the world in a deep sense—not just like, "Oh, yeah, like, this is that," you know, not just recognizing, but perceiving—that's kind of where I think the connection plays out most strongly, and I think it makes—I think it makes me, you know, a better organizer, a better activist. You know, it's kind of striking to me, because like, I, you know—I think about this narrative, you know—I think of [inaudible]—it's, although it might seem fragmentary as I speak about it, like, you know, these things make sense. My politicization makes sense to me in this lens. But it's interesting because like, it's not like I spend all my time in this place, or that like, it's necessarily like, the "how I think" kind of thing that like, matters the most when doing politics. Like, you know, a lot of the time I'm like, really thinking about like, concrete issues or debates. Like, you know, how does like—how do I like, you know, make arguments for—like, for being in a socialist Marxist organization for people who aren't like, really grounded in Marxism, aren't really socialist, but have like, strong anti-racist politics? But also whose politics might make them hostile towards us. How do I find a good way of articulating what we think or do in a way that like, is able to like, you know, bring us closer, make it possible for us to work together? That kind of question's like, you know, kind of far away from all this other stuff. But, yeah. That's that.

Maya: No, I really enjoyed listening to that. It sounds like the world is—you're in a constant state of interpretation, but that you kind of enjoy that, I guess, and that you're not trying to prescribe one definite reality for everyone, even if you believe some things are facts, but that—I don't know, you're coming into contact with different things and you are actually having trains of thought instead of labeling something and moving on, which I find very refreshing, and especially

very difficult but laudable in people who the rest of the world is constantly trying to define, I suppose. So—sorry, that's why I have a big smile on my face. I was just really enjoying that.

Lakha: Yeah, that means a lot.

Maya: I want to talk a little more about—you talked about a goal of building a substance – a substantive left politic. And, what does that look like for you? What do you think needs to happen in the US? 'Cause a lot, you know, needs to happen.

Lakha: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, I think like—I don't know—like, the last forty years, you know—my lifetime, the time my parents have been in the United States, so… Basically, like, the experience I think that like—the experience or like, kind of common sense of the world that exists today is one that has been in the context of smashing the left. Destroying trade unionism, like, you know, social democratic parties around the world capitulating to austerity politics, you know, cutting welfare programs, social services, healthcare, et cetera, the fall of the Soviet Union—I'm like, you know, I'm highly critical of the Soviet Union. I don't really think that—I don't think that, especially under Stalin and afterwards, that the—that Soviet Russia could be understood as socialist, although I think they had a socialist revolution. Like, you know, so it's like, we've been in a context of decline and defeat, and it's very exciting, these last few years, you know? Like, in 2000—it's like, maybe the last twenty years has been like, a slow build-up towards something like, kind of happening again in the US, you know. The battle in Seattle around the WTO [World Trade Organization] like express, and the anti-globalization movement at the time like, expressed kind of a high point of resistance, which was totally shut down by 9/11, by the war in Iraq, Afghanistan, like, you know. Suddenly things kind of went downhill but that resistance, you know, kind of stayed alive. In 2006, the huge mobilizations around immigrants' rights that happened nationally. And, you know, like 2011, like, Occupy [Wall Street]. And then things start speeding up, you know? And like, we've had, you know, Black Lives Matter, we've had like, success in moving for gay marriage, and also like, the rise of the more militant trans movement. I think like, you know—what else is like, what else is happening right now? Did I say Black Lives Matter already? Yeah?

Maya: Yes, yes you did.

Lakha: Yeah. There's other things, too. Oh yeah, fuck. Bernie Sanders, like—

Maya: Oh, Bernie [laughter].

Lakha: —Jeremy Corbyn in the UK, which is more exciting than Bernie Sanders.

Maya: Yeah.

Lakha: I don't know. There's more stuff that's happening. Oh, fucking Standing Rock. Like, literally like, how amazing. Like, people literally organizing to like, you know, to connect like, indigenous rights, anti-capitalism, and environmentalism like all together, like really closely, and building,

like—literally like, having people from all over the country, all over the world, that come together to build like, a space of resistance. Like, I know people who went there, and it sounds like a fucking incredible kind of space to have been in. But anyway, it's like—you know, like, we're seeing a resurgence of fights. We're seeing a resurgence of resistance, and like, I think like, you know, to my mind, the number one most important thing if we wanna see a left like, be born in the US, is for like, social movements to become stronger, and to become stronger, and to become more organized. You know, it's like right now, it's like—there's like, really exciting moments, you know, all this resistance to Trump, the, you know—for all its faults, the women's march. Like, these things that like, you know, like really—the mobilization at the airports that happens in response to the immigration ban—like, these are like, really significant mobilizations and—but they're not necessarily leading to like, something long-term. And I think like, it takes like, organization, it takes a vision for the future, it takes like, being able to like, mobilize people with a strategy to be able to like, really like effect change or really like, build power. I think the long-term—the longer-term goal, then, is to like, build organizations which have an explicit perspective of like, fighting for everything—you know, fighting to win reforms that we can, but having on the horizon, always like a perspective of—or moving like—of taking power, and of taking power from the people who have control over all of—like I said, over all of the like, major institutions of our society and production. And so like, you know, I guess like, building a left means organizing a party, whether such a party participates in elections or not, 'cause I think like, you know, a question that needs to be asked, in some cases, yes. But I don't think like it's like—to my mind like, building a left is like, having strong social movements, having large organizations, and ultimately having a perspective on revolution. You know, right now, like, there's a group called the Democratic Socialists of America, and they've like, swelled by like, two and a half times in their membership, and it's a lot of people who're like, kind of Bernie—like, very Bernie supporters—but who're like, not so hype about like, being in the Democratic Party. And the DSA's not totally like, against the Democratic Party, which I think is a huge problem. Like, I think the Democratic Party is the graveyard of social movements. The Democratic Party is a capitalist party. Really, the Democratic and Republican Party are one party. It's really hard to see like, you know, except for its most right-wing elements and its most left-wing elements, like, they're—most members of either party could be in the other party. And so they work to just bounce off each other in order to do what they do. What's the Democratic Party slogan right now? Like, "look at the other guys"? Literally? Oh my god. Ridiculous. Anyway, so—but like, you know—there's like a, you know, like all these people are joining the DSA. All these people are like, getting involved and like, really like thinking about socialist politics. This is like, an exciting and important harbinger for the future and, you know, as someone who like, has a stake in, you know, developing like, a Marxist politics for the 21st century, I think like, the rise of a social movement at the same time as like, there are all these other like, movements that're connected to and have developed lessons from the 60's and 70's like, wave of organizing, and also like, you know, some of like queer organizing, feminist organizing that, you know, took place a little bit after that. It's like, a lot of lessons to be able to develop like, a really synthetic like, politics, that's able to—through the power of social movements, through people like, fighting through their self-activity, through like their own like, desire to emancipate themselves—politics that brings us together in trying to build something new. But I think like, you know, you can't like, let go of the details of differences between people and the specificities of people's oppression in order to do that, and

that is something we are in a much better position to talk about today than we would've been forty years ago.

Maya: Do you think we're talking about it enough? Because in the way that I've been kind of watching political turmoil and movements develop in the United States, I feel like a lot of the people getting the work done are people who've been shoved to the margins so long, like the trans community and people of color, queer people are coming together, but I find that both within "our"—in scare quotes—own like, LGBTQ+ community, we don't get support from like, lesbian and gay like, moderate sides, or, you know—and I feel like—and all these organizations that're really getting stuff done, it's us getting the stuff done, and then we have kind of the people who're being dragged behind us, or the people who are, if anything, pulling back and saying, "Not too much, too fast."

Lakha: Yeah.

Maya: You know? And like, what do you think needs to be done about that, and how do we engage that conversation and get those people to either step up with us or to step away?

Lakha: Yeah. I mean, you know, it's like, in the 2000's like, anti-discrimination acts like, had provisions for protecting trans people as well, and it was taken out, and the Human Rights Campaign, which had been very reluctant to even accept trans inclusion within the bill in the first place, like, was relieved when like, they fucking took it out. And now if you go on the Human Rights Campaign's website, like, you know, they have some stuff about trans people, because like, you know, they can't not do that, you know? Which is, you know, in some sense like, an effect of our struggling, and our, you know, having like, claimed space for ourselves, you know? "Our" in scare quotes, whatever. But like, I think, you know, the problem is—and this is true for feminist organizations as well—is liberal hegemony, and also liberal hegemony in doing direct service work, and they do it badly, you know? I think like, you know—it's not that like—yeah. I think like, you know, that the problem is about like, not having like, a strong alternative political vision that's able to like, really win over people who are—who like, care about these issues. So instead what you have is organizations that are really like, you know, not concerned with really fighting for improving anyone's condition will like continue to like, take all the funding they can in order to provide their bad services to people, and like, you know, lobby politicians to pass like, some superficial legislation. And, you know, like, that's what's gotta be fought, and I think like, you know, the fights that are happening and like, the work that's being done on the local level is like, really important and valuable, and obviously has had its effects, but there's not like, a possibility of like, changing like, changing what the dominant discourse is from that perspective, so I think that there's like, a real necessity for having, you know, a like, more unified alternative pull, politically, and a really unified alternative pull that has a vision. And I think like, you know, queer and trans people can do that, can put together that pull, but I also think that, you know, this kind of pull makes the best sense in the context—will make—it's easiest to visualize this in the context of a large social movement. And wherever people find themselves organized—a socialist movement, better—like, wherever people find themselves organized, whether in like, kind of like a broad, unified organization, or in a more like, you know, queer-focused organization,

being in that political climate where the questions are not about, you know—where the dominant logic isn't, like, write your senator, like, lobby whatever, but like—or like, or even worse, like, you know, visibility. Not that visibility's not important, but that like, the only thing that matters is—

Maya: The only politic is that we're here, you can see us, when it's like—

Lakha: Exactly. Like, you know, Instagram isn't politics. Having like, Instagram followers isn't politics, sorry.

Maya: We're gonna get to that. I'm—thank you.

Lakha: And, like—but you know, actually, literally like, you know, talking about violence, talking about like, the very—like, trans people aren't just oppressed because of like, gender stuff. In a sense like, it's like yes, trans people are—like the first instance is like, you identify someone as trans because of, you know, their relationship to gender, their position in gender, but trans people are oppressed because of like—you know, like, through all these different things. Through police violence, you know, through like inability to access, like, appropriate documentation, which like, restricts—

Maya: Resources.

Lakha: —movement. Resources, like, psychological and medical—you know, health. You know? Yeah. These are like, key—you know, these are key questions which tie us—housing—tie us into like, the nexus of kind of political issues that makes up capitalist oppression. And so you need a systematic critique and a systematic vision in order to really highlight all of those things and really talk about what a trans politics means, because to talk about gender is not enough.

Maya: Is not even a threshold to the door, you know? It's like, one of the cobblestones leading up to the house, yeah.

Lakha: Exactly.

Maya: I understand. I understand. And like, speaking of that—sorry, you hit on things that I'm really interested in.

Lakha: Oh, heck yeah. Heck yeah.

Maya: So this idea of visibility as being the only trans politic—I just wanna hear more of your thoughts on that, and kind of the reality of the fact that—I mean there are some trans people who like, tout that as their politic, but that's a politic put on us by non-trans people a lot of the time, like, "*Look* at you, and your body! Like, you can see you!" and kind of like—I've been watching this like, trending preoccupation with the trans body, but not with—engaging with

rhetoric, our thoughts, our belief systems, our quote "cultural pulls and pushes" but just the body, and I'm kind of wondering like, what do you think about all of that mess? I guess.

Lakha: Yeah, I mean like, like —I think yeah, you're right. It's like, objectifying, and pretty like, like —pretty unhelpful, like, to really like, make it so—make it seem as though our problems like, go away because like, some people understand that we exist.

Maya: Yeah.

Lakha: Honestly, it's like—there's a sense in which we don't have—like, trans people don't have it as good. Like, there's things that've gotten worse since the 60's and 70's, frankly. Like, developments have been contradictory since the birth of the modern LGBT movement, you know? It's like—back then it was like, you know—it was like, easier to find housing in New York City. It was easier for people to organize like, communities, and like, take care of each other. We're a lot more fragmented now. We're a lot more individually vulnerable now, to violence, housing insecurity, to lack of access to healthcare, like, like, you know? So at the same—and you know, and the social wage—like, you know, the fall in the social wage has of course made like, you know—we're like—especially like, queer and trans people of color, like, you know like —really, really like—one can be fired for being trans in like, 21 states or something like that?

Maya: Yeah.

Lakha: And like, you know, are just in general in a very vulnerable place with respect to employment. Which, I mean, has always been the case, but like, you know—because of like, the level of social immiseration, like, I think makes us like, especially vulnerable today. So—like, these are social issues, and like, the real, like —it's like I was saying—the real content of like, our reality is like, real meaningful social oppression, and not like, simply bigoted attitudes, although like, those certainly like —that's an expression of those things. You know, I think like, one thing that's really good about the fact that some trans people have become famous—you know, obviously not Caitlyn Jenner -

Maya: [laughter] yeah.

Lakha: —but like, is that like, we have like, people who are like, pretty sharp, and who are like, good voices to like, talk about politics in the community.

Maya: Janet Mock, Laverne [Cox], [inaudible].

Lakha: Exactly. Yeah, I mean, you know, I was like, so grateful for like, Laverne's response to Chimamanda Adichie's like, kind of, you know, comments about how trans women aren't women, basically.

Maya: Yeah.

Lakha: Like, you know, being able to have someone there to like, make that riposte, like, matters.

Maya: And easily, you know? And quickly. Yeah, it's—I think you're right in that it's—visibility is really not the enemy, at the beginning of this conversation, but it is nice to have people who are more than just like, a spokesperson or a physical emblem but are really smart-thinking people—

Lakha: Exactly.

Maya: —who are like, "Nah, gotcha." [laughter] Grab you by that track. Like, it's not where we're at right now. Yeah.

Lakha: Yeah, so, I mean—yeah, I think like, you know, it's—and it's, you know—it's also like, not even necessarily the case though that like, you know like —it's not like all trans people, or like, young trans people, even young trans people of color like, all have, you know, a political vision that's like—that understands things in social terms, but I think that's something that we should have as a goal. I think it's real potential. Like, we—our community of like, people who are willing to like, you know like, live against like, hard against the grain and pressure of reality and be authentic to ourselves, and like—who like, see and experience like, you know, the forces of social pressure, that means like, a kind of intuitive knowledge that I think it's really important to harness for political ends. I don't think like, being, you know, like, you know —I don't think there's any one right way to be trans. I don't think there's one right way to be nonbinary. I don't think it's necessarily inherently political. Like, it's not like you're like, being radical by like, being this, but it gives us an important experience and an important possibility of being able to be like, real leaders. And like, you can see that so clearly. Like, all the big—all the like, you know, major organizing that's happened in the past five years, like, as you said, has been led by queer and trans people of color. That's huge. When has that ever been true?

Maya: Yeah. Or, when has it been true and acknowledged, you know? Where like, that's also the issue.

Lakha: Yeah, absolutely.

Maya: Like, right now, the visibility is—for the most part, I think—or, is starting to lean towards the people who actually deserve it and are doing something with that spotlight, which I really appreciate. What was I going to say? Oh. I just want to talk more—you mentioned really briefly the idea of a militant trans movement?

Lakha: Oh, yeah.

Maya: Yeah. And I just—could you just tell me more? Or if that was just like, an ideal or a vision you had, or if that was a thing you actually see happening.

Lakha: I mean, a little bit of both, you know? I think like—it's like, a little bit of people like, really—you know, people doing the work like, have pretty systematic critique, like seem like pretty—like,

ready to fight. On the other hand, like, you know, it's not articulated together. So, you know, it's more or less what I've been saying, you know? Just like, a like —you know like, we're revisiting our history, you know, revisiting the militancy of STAR [Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries], you know, but like, it's not all together yet, you know? It's something that I think like—what I've been covering and I'm very unabashed about like, making demands or saying like, "This is what's wrong," but it's not as though, like, that message is the one that's dominating when it comes to, you know, what people think about with trans people, I guess. I'm sorry, that's kind of vague.

Maya: No, you're good. No, you're good. I just wanted to see anything you wanted to add. I want to start cycling back, and if you want to move in another direction, just let me know and you can start talking, but you mentioned briefly—and you also don't have to talk about it if you don't want to—but, having a relationship with drugs at a previous point in your life. And you smoke a lot of weed, right? And I'm just curious, like wondering.

Lakha: I don't even remember mentioning that. [laughter]

Maya: Yeah. You know, like, it made you anxious and whatnot, and I'm just wondering: how long did that go on for and what ultimately led you to do it less, or stop, or whatever?

Lakha: Yeah. I mean, you know, it was like—yeah, my parents hated, hate weed. I remember in middle school, I would like, say bye to my friends and be like, "Don't do drugs!" My best friend like—one of my best friends—like, he didn't tell me about like, his life or his experiences smoking weed for like, six months afterwards, 'cause he was like, afraid that I would've said something. It's like, uhhh. You know, I mean, I went to school in Seattle, you know? Like, high school kids like, smoke weed. Like, it's like, pretty normal, whatever. I guess like, I started smoking like, you know, sophomore year of high school, just a little bit, whatever. Eventually like, my parents like, kind of like—I actually—it was like—I was like—I came home, like, one night, just kind of drunk with my friends, my senior year. It was like, the week before my prom, and my like—I come home and like, I don't really say anything to my parents. Like, I just walk up and like, my parent—my dad like, comes up and is like—start like—he's like asking me if I was like, smoking weed. And I hadn't been, you know? I was just drunk. But I was like, "No, not tonight," and like, he got so mad—and like, you know, they like, really—they were really, really strict with me, like very cold with me for a long time after that. They wanted me to like, take drug tests while I was in school. Like, whenever I'd come home to visit or something it'd be like, one of the first things that happened. It's pretty whack. But it also like, kind of like, drove me towards smoking weed, you know? It was like—I was like, "Literally, fuck you." And at the time like—you know, I'd—at some point I'd started taking Lexapro, and it didn't mix well with alcohol for me, so I really couldn't drink without being very depressed, so I just like, you know, started smoking more and more weed. It really came to a pitch like, the summer and fall of 2015—again like, just that time leading up to me leaving school. I started smoking every day, and I got—you know, it started in the summer. I was like, "Oh, yeah, whatever, it's summer." I was just like, working at a library for seven hours a day so I was like, "I don't have much to do, you know?" I'd just sit in the library for like, hours and hours reading or shelving books, so. Yeah, and I mean, you know, I kind of

continued into the year. My friend, who I was talking to you about, who I had this complicated relationship with—like, she smoked a lot of weed, so we'd just chill and smoke a lot. And then, you know, as I started to get more and more depressed, it was like, the only thing I could do was like, smoke weed to feel like I was okay with anything. When I went back to Seattle it was like, I literally lived down—it was like, my first time home since legalization happened, and like—literally like, down the street I could go—I was 21—I could go and buy like, whatever kind of strain I wanted to do, and it was like, a really fun kind of like, adventure, to, you know, learn all the different strains, whatever.

Maya: Taste testing.

Lakha: Figure out what was like, the best possible weed. [laughter] Yeah, it was kinda dope. Like, you know, you can like, kind of like, set your consciousness, you know? Like, different strains have determinate different effects, and, you know, you know that you can think about, this is what kind of mood I wanna be in. Kinda weird. But anyway, like, you know—I like just like, would smoke all day, and I was like, pretty miserable. I like, didn't really leave my bed or do much besides like, to leave my house for the first like, two, three months I was off of school. It's like, I sat at home, played video games, and started teaching myself how to use Logic and Ableton [Live]. I didn't like, really like, do much, hang out with people. And it was definitely like, you know, like, starting to transition that really helped me. And I had like, a couple of like, really traumatizing experiences during the year with my parents and with other people that like, kind of held me back, and like, kind of pushed me back into smoking a lot, but like, the more confidently I was like—the more confidently I was able to be myself, the more comfortable I was, like, the less like—the more I felt like I had energy and happiness, and I felt like I didn't need it. I know it sounds kind of cheesy to say like, you know, transitioning kind of like, like, like got me off my dependency, but like, that's more or less what happened. And I mean, you know, I still smoke weed once in a while. I think right now, like—you know, I smoked weed like, most days in the last two weeks and I'm a little like, "Fainan, what are you doing," but, you know, it's also like I'm in a better place, too. So…

Maya: Doing different things for you.

Lakha: Exactly. But, yeah. I mean, I was miserable and just wanted to escape. I really smoked weed because it helped me dissociate.

Maya: Yeah.

Lakha: Like, I just literally would like, float out of my body, and I couldn't bear to do anything. Everything was so painful.

Maya: What is—I guess, what was your relationship with dissociation?

Lakha: Yeah. I mean, as things started to get you know, —yeah, okay. So, when I was living in the summer, I had some good friends—

Maya: What year was this?

Lakha: Same year. 2015.

Maya: Okay. 2015, yeah.

Lakha: I had some really good friends who, you know, were like both kind of—they're really good friends of mine, both very smart, both smoke a lot of weed, and they could—they also like, both have like, kind of an antisocial bent to them. And I like—I lived with them for a while, and it'd be like, kinda weird, 'cause, you know, these are people that I really, like, liked, enjoyed talking to, but like—you know, like, sometimes they just like, wouldn't want to talk to me, or like, they'd like kind of just ignore me in this very cold way. I didn't have, like—I couldn't like, bring it up to them where I could talk through whatever I was feeling, and it was like living with people in that kind of environment where I first started like, dissociating a lot. Before then, it would happen to me if like, I had a fight with someone or if I got really stressed out—you know, then I'd need to like, kind of float off and need to lay down.

Maya: Like, emotional distancing from whatever—okay.

Lakha: Yeah. But at that point, like, once it started becoming regular it'd be like, I'd just like lay down and not do anything, or I'd like, try to watch TV and just like, kind of feel—I'm making like, a blank face. You know, and it like—you know, it's more like —more times like, being with people I didn't want to—it started getting to the point where I like, I didn't want to be alone ever 'cause I'd feel really bad, but then I'd be with people and I'd smoke, and I'd just totally like, float off into space. And part of like, the thing—you know, I was like—this bad relationship with my friend who I, you know, in the fall, like—it definitely like—it was definitely like—it's not like I was like, a perfect—I was like an angel or anything like that. It was like, I did bad stuff, too. And one of the things that was really bad was like, you know, I'd just like, kind of come over and like, just like dissociate on the couch, and just be like, laying there, like, maybe saying something sometimes, but… Yeah. And I mean, you know, it's like—like now it's like, you know, if I start to feel that way, it's like very keenly aware—I associate that with the feeling of dysphoria, but that's not really how I understood it at the time. But it was definitely like, you know, coming off weed involved like, understanding dissociation as dysphoria, and working on that. That's not easy. You know, I'm like a very, you know, mental person. It's not easy for me, you know—like, 'cause I'm an Aquarius. I'm like, in the air, you know? It's not easy for me to feel like, grounded in my body, even as a, like—even like, today, you know. But I do feel anchored now in a way that I didn't before.

Maya: So I'm really interested in affect, and just kind of how people experience the world, because I am an incredibly dissociative, like, antisocial person. I don't know. Anything that's going on. And so I'm just—and if it is in any way triggering you don't have to do it, or just weird—but is there any way you know how to describe what it feels like for you to be anchored, like right now?

Or like, when you're grounded, and when you're feeling really good, and like, home in yourself. What does that feel like for you? Like, yeah.

Lakha: Yeah. Well, you know, right now I'm feeling very emotional, because I feel like I've gone through a whole bunch of history. The difference between like, feeling anchored and feeling that way, and not feeling anchored, was like, not panicking right now, you know? And how I feel feels like a very like—something very like, distinctive, singular, like, kind of nuanced kind of feeling. Like, something I'm aware of, you know? Like, I can feel what I'm feeling. Whereas like, you know, in another time, like, I might've been like—really felt like I needed to run away, really just shut myself off. So like, you know, that that's some kind of thing. You know, when I feel like, really good—you know, the opposite of dysphoria is euphoria. You know?

Maya: Yeah. Which is also interesting because euphoria is still being, like—or "ecstasy" or "ecstatic" is like, being out of your body. It's just different types of not being home, I guess, when you just—yeah, sorry.

Lakha: Yeah, yeah. Totally, totally. Yeah, there just needs to be "phoria." [laughter]

Maya: Yeah, just "phoria." [laughter] Yeah.

Lakha: Like, yeah, I mean, I do feel like—actually, yeah, with that in mind, like, you know… I feel good when I don't feel manic and I don't feel sad. You know? And I'm not bipolar, you know? I don't like, have like cycles of mania and like, depression. I get depressed sometimes. But I do like—you know, I have this like—you know, when I'm like—I get like, you know, when I'm around people, sometimes, like, I get very excited when people are really affirming me. It kind of like—you know, I'm like—I get a little outside of myself, and then, you know, I get depressed and dysphoric. But like, it's kinda like just being able to be calm and in the world, be able to take time to say something. It's a big difference between how I speak when I'm excited. I kinda like being—you know, it feels good once in awhile. And being kinda like, deliberate, I really value. You know, I think that one of the things that—one of the things I was talking about when I said like, you know, learning how to think through things clearly, was like, having some fragment of that being deliberate. I—yeah, being able to be where I am and like, take in what's happening. It's like I need to think through a proposition, only like that—but I'm like, in touch with what's happening, as opposed to off in my own world.

Maya: Yeah, no, that's—thank you. Thank you for sharing that. Yeah. I was curious about—you've brought it up a couple times in a vague sense, but how transition was for you, how the beginning was for you. You talked about—I mean, you had that toxic friend who wasn't really supportive of you, and—but, yeah.

Lakha: Yeah. I went back—I don't know what was the day—there was some day when, you know, I knew I needed to like, be more serious about this, when I realized like, "I really need to like, figure it out." I—I don't know what I did. One of the things that really set me off—I can't believe I forgot to mention this before, actually—I had a childhood friend. Emerson, is his name, and we

had a long friendship. We were really tight in elementary school for a few years, fourth and fifth grade, and then in middle school he moved down to Portland—in like, sixth, seventh grade—it was maybe third and fourth grade and then sixth and seventh grade, we were friends. And then he moved back to Seattle—Seattle area—and his father died, committed suicide. And he—you know, like, this was like, a really like challenging and trying time for me. All this other stuff was going on. Like, so much stuff. But like—it was like—you know, he was like, really depressed, and like, we were all there in this like—at his house, like, a really sad kind of space. And so like, you know, we kind of got out of touch at some point. I became like, pretty good friends with two guys he dated. But yeah, like, that year, like, I got back in touch and he'd transitioned. He had like, started T like a month before, something like that, maybe a little bit more. And it was like, really—it was a little hard for me like, seeing him, like you know? Like, not in the sense that there was anything like, problematic about him, but about—like, for me, it made me very anxious. Like, I felt very confronted by these feelings, you know? And I think it was really, really seeing him that forced me to reckon with myself. Like, a few weeks later I was like, "Yeah, me too." So yeah, I mean, it was seeing like, a very close, long, long friend of mine transition that like, kind of inspired me to. First steps, I don't know. Like, I bought like kinda unisex sportswear and, you know, I told some people to start using they/them pronouns with me exclusively. And then very quickly I realized like, I wasn't really, really like—you know, like, strongly nonbinary. So, I don't know. I guess I like, painted my nails, or I started dating a girl who was gay. Like, that was like, you know, really affirming for me, although she met someone else and like, left me, and that was kind of heartbreaking. But, yeah. At least I got left for another girl, you know? My parents were like—really had a big problem with me. Is that what you were looking for?

Maya: I'm trying to turn off the air conditioner. It's okay. It's fine. I'm just gonna [inaudible].

Lakha: Oh, yeah, I'm sorry. I'm so—

Maya: It's okay.

Lakha: Yeah, what was I saying? My parents were having like—you know, I was having like, really big problems with my parents. I was smoking weed all the time. I'd like, have people over late or overnight. That really didn't sit well with them. And so eventually, like, they basically—it became so bad, like, although they didn't kick me out formally, like, they forced me out, you know, by like, creating such a hostile environment. So I went and moved in with my cousin, and he like, lives in an apartment in downtown Seattle, and this was like, twenty minutes from where a lot of my friends live, which is in a neighborhood called Capitol Hill. So then I was like, a lot closer to people. I like—you know, I had like, a lot more time. I was able to come out to my cousin. I didn't come out to him immediately. It took a little while, but like… You know, because he's just like—he was like, kind of like an older brother to me, he's like kind of—even though he's much older, he was like always like, very "bro bachelor" kind of person. Very, you know, like, is affable, I guess. Amiable? You know? It's like, always a fun time. And so you know, it was like, not exactly like, totally easy to kind of like, break that for him. 'Cause like, you know, it was like, always tough for me, like—but, you know—even very contradictory. Like, you know, I enjoyed myself 'cause he's so fun, but also I had to like, act so much, like, being with him, in a like, very painful kind of way.

Actually, I know I told him so many lies over the years, like, so much shit I made up. [laughter] Yeah, I mean, you know, I guess like—yeah. Different clothes, different pronouns, different hair. I dyed my hair. I'd had long hair for so long at that point, though.

Maya: How long was your hair? Was it the same length as it is now?

Lakha: When I dyed it, I cut it, but it had been longer before. Yeah, yeah. I had a goatee. Shit! That was the thing. That was the first thing I did. That was the fucking thing. I shaved my goatee. And after that, it was like—

Maya: Just immediately, came home and [whoosh noise]. Amazing.

Lakha: I was like, "Transition begin!" Yeah. I mean, those were like, all kind of external things, but yeah. I mean that's kind of how it was.

Maya: Was there more of like, an internal process as well, or were you just having to—I'll back up. I think there's a lot of a rhetoric of people being like, "Yeah, I'm trans now. I'm 'trans now,'" quote unquote, and then being like, "Yeah, everything's hunky-dory," and like, that's never been my experience, you know? Like, there were a lot of—at least in the beginning—like—well, I never had a coming out moment, like, yada yada. Right? But there are still times when I'm like, "Man, this is really lame," you know? And so I'm curious as to—for you was it just a solid like, "Okay, here I am now. I'm gonna keep going" or…? You know?

Lakha: No. You know, I am kind of very like, tactile, you know? I imagine if, you know—I imagine someone that has a very visual—and maybe this is not true—but I imagine that someone with a very visual, like, kind of consciousness, might've seen a goal for them. But it's not like that for me, you know? It's like, thinking is a lot like touching a surface and feeling for, like, points of like—you know, where like, something sticks out, or like, what the texture is like, and finding the right thing. So, you know, like going through like transition was a lot of like, exploring with my hands, you know? Like, trying to find what looked—what like, looked or made me feel like, right at a given time. And it changed, you know? It was like, always a balance. And there was like, really times when I'd feel frustrated. 'Cause once I started like, really like, being pretty femme, it was like, "How femme should I be?" That's something I still like, reckon with, you know? It's like, there's some things I can't wear, even though, like—you know? Like, I don't know, they're femme-y things. And I just have to like—you know, that's like, part of being an individual, you know? But like—

Maya: They're not for you.

Lakha: Exactly. Exactly. And you know—so it's like, it has been and will continue to be like, really like trying to feel out what's right in a given moment. And I don't feel the best every single day. Some—you know, I only have like—you know, like my voice doesn't always sound the way I want it to. I only have so many clothes. You know, sometimes I hang out with people, and I, just—you know, I don't have like—there's experiences I don't have, you know, that like, really come up for

me, that I might have in the future, you know? That might be like—might be easier for me to connect with. But like—yeah, there's things that are like, you know, not there yet. I have to like, find what's right, what's not, and I think like, the thing that really helps me is like, thinking of myself as an individual. And it's like, there are people like me in this way, people like me in that way, and not in both these ways, and that's how they are with other people, too. And it's cool. Like, I'm glad— like you know, I'm like—I'm not like other people, and I can connect to other people and belong with other people, and still have that be the case.

Maya: That's good. That's beautiful. So, I still have so many questions I wrote down from when you grew up in the Tony Robbins, and the—Godman? Goodman?

Lakha: Oh, Godman is a term for—

Maya: It's a term for it.

Lakha: —people like this. Oneness University, yeah.

Maya: Yeah. I just have more questions. You talked about going to seminars and having them being filled with—the rhetoric being, learning how to kind of work, I guess? Or how to pursue the world around you, and this idea of being like—a push towards ambition and exceptionalism, and I was wondering how that affected you growing up, and now.

Lakha: Yeah, I mean—well, you know, I started with saying, like, it was easy for my parents to make me wanna go to Columbia.

Maya: Yeah.

Lakha: Yeah. Yeah, I mean like, this is the kinda shit that was shoved down my throat. And my religious community is pretty neoliberal, kind of success kind of rhetoric, and then in like, the Tony Robbins shit my parents taught me—it's like, you know, Seattle's like rising tech industry, this culture is totally there. Like, you know, all this shit about like, working. You know, like—it's like, Silicon Valley's where people have this like, fake Buddhism, right, where they like, you know—mindfulness in order to work hard, whatever. Yeah, like—it was like, terrible. I was like, pretty terrible about pretty terrible things that hurt me a lot and that made me judgmental. And it was like, bad, 'cause like, instead of being able to think through things, I had like, standards I held myself to. I had to act as though I fulfilled these standards, as though like, I am this like, perfect person that I'm being told I have to be. 'Cause like—you know, it was like, he made—Tony, like, would make you like, feel really bad about yourself if you like, resist what he says. If you resist what he says, so it was like—you know, like—it's like, there's a way I had to be, and I didn't have a choice in it. I had a way I had to think about things. I didn't have a choice in it. I was very dogmatic, and… You know? I still like being right, but like, I like being right because I'm persuasive. Back then I liked being right 'cause it made me feel good about—you know, because I felt confident in what I said, and that was like—that was everything. Yeah. Does that answer the question?

Maya: Yeah, no, it does. So, I wanted to shift the gears a little bit. I think you mentioned that you make music, and I think you said something about poetry, or you're just interested in it, and I wasn't sure, but… Yeah. Can I hear more about that?

Lakha: Yeah. You know, I play—I started out on guitar when I was like, thirteen or something. I played a lot. Got pretty—I got pretty good, you know? I was like—I got really into playing jazz, like, you know, I—

Maya: Really? What did you like to play in jazz?

Lakha: I really liked—you know, my favorite thing to do was like, you know, just like learn kind of weird standards. I really liked Wayne Shorter stuff. Not necessarily, like, you know—I didn't like, you know, playing like, straight ahead stuff, or like comping—kind of found comping kind of boring. But like, playing kind of very dissonant chord structures, or like, playing solos like that, that was really fun. But like, jazz would kind of like, you know—it was like—it was either like, go to school or really start like, doing it seriously, or like give it up. So I kind of—just like, kind of stopped when I was sixteen, seventeen, playing jazz. And now I like—I remember like, how to play stuff, but I don't remember like, my theory at all, and I like, can't like put together like, the right sequence of chords anymore when there's like, all this weird harmonics happening. Although I feel like now, I could learn theory—like, music theory—pretty easily because of the way my mind works, which was not true then. But anyway, yeah. I started like, you know, playing kind of like, more experimental stuff—like, more noisy stuff—with some friends. Other friends started getting into bands. I didn't really like, really play in a band, but like, you know—I was like, playing with people in the kind of Seattle punk/hardcore scene. So I'd do a lot of that, you know? But I—I didn't really find a place there. I found it to be really judgmental. I kind of dressed like, sort of preppy in high school. Like, I wore sweaters. Kind of a weird thing to do in Seattle, you know?

Maya: Yeah, I'll bet.

Lakha: Yeah. It's like, I wasn't comfortable with myself, you know?

Maya: No judgment.

Lakha: Oh no, of course, of course. Yeah, and like, you know, these punks, they fucking judged me, you know? It didn't matter that they were like, basically all white and mostly men, but… You know? I—I had like stopped really playing music when I got to college, and—I don't know, like I'm in a—like, I mentioned to you that like, I do music, but it's like, really for me, and it always has been. I like—you know, I got off school, I taught myself how to like, make music on a computer. And that was like, really exciting, you know, 'cause like, suddenly I was able to do like, all kinds of different things. But usually when I sit down to like, do music, it's like—I like just feel like improvising, and that's like, basically all I do. And it's like, sit there for a while with like, some instrument and I'll like, sit there playing until I find something, make it into like, a loop or

whatever, do that with another layer, keep going, eventually like, just like, record vocals, and like, just record vocals and whatever, like, comes to mind at the time. At first, the first things I came up with are like, really painful to listen to. It'd be like, really kind of weird unconscious things that I was thinking. It'd be like, "Ooh, yeah, I don't really want anyone to hear that." And some of my recordings have a little bit of that cringeness to them, like, ooh. But, you know, I think like—yeah, like, you know—I like—I guess like, making music is like, nice for me because like, I don't like forms, and I can do things without forms when I do music, and you know, maybe it's not like, for everyone to listen to, but it's like, very exciting to be able to like, really like, feel like I kind of exist in a piece. Because when I like, am kind of like outside of everything, I feel like I'm like—that's more like me. You know? I never really felt like I had the context, or exactly knew like, all the social rules, you know? If I come to something, that's like—I have to figure it out in my way and come at it from the angle that makes sense to me, and I like being able to do music to like, make that trace. I wanna be able to like, you know, write more intentionally—it's like, you know, I know I have it in me. Both like more literary works, but also like, you know, political writings. Like, most of my writing's like, on Facebook and Twitter. It's like, you know, polemicizing or whatever, and, you know, like, that's nice, but the real reason is that like, while I can make music for myself, I can do that like, improvisationally, in the moment, and like, then work on it, but I can't be like, deliberate about like, "I'm gonna write this piece for myself," or, "I'm gonna like, really compose this piece of music for myself," or, "I'm gonna write this like, essay because, you know, this is something interesting that I want to explore and share," like… And so like, you know, doing those things for myself is something I want to really be able to do in the future.

Maya: Yeah. So is that what you are currently working towards?

Lakha: Yeah, yeah.

Maya: That's awesome. That's a really good goal to have, I think. Is there anything else you wanted to say, or talk about? You can also do a follow-up one, if you were like, "Wow, I wanna talk about something so much," later.

Lakha: Nah. Yeah, I feel like that's basically—that's basically all the things.

Maya: Cool. Awesome. Well, thank you so much.

Lakha: Yeah, thank you.

Maya: This has been really awesome.

Lakha: You asked me a lot of great questions.