

The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project
An Oral History with Aziz Fakirani, Kharun Lalany, and Azad Lalany

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Narrator: Aziz Fakirani, Khaerun and Azad Lalany

Researcher: Shezan Muhammedi

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Abstract:

Aziz Fakirani, Khaerun and Azad Lalany were all Ugandan Asian refugees who came to Canada in the early 1970s. Each of them spent their childhood growing up in East Africa in cities like Mbale, Mombasa, Nairobi, and Tororo.

Aziz and Khaerun are brothers and sisters who were separated during the expulsion decree. Since the Fakirani family was particularly large not all of them were eligible to migrate to Canada. Only Khaerun and one of her sisters were able to make it to Canada whereas Aziz, his parents, and 4 other siblings were sent to a refugee camp in Malta. A similar situation occurred for Azad as he was the only member of his family to have attained Ugandan citizenship and rendered stateless by Idi Amin's expulsion decree in 1972. Azad ended up in a refugee camp in Austria before being transferred to Sweden.

Aziz and the rest of his family were subsequently sponsored by Khaerun and her other sister already living in Canada between 1973 and 1974. Azad was also sponsored by close family friends and arrived in Montreal in 1973 where he eventually met his wife Khaerun. After over 40 years in Canada, they all reflected on their childhoods in Uganda, the impact of the expulsion decree, and making Canada their home in the late twentieth century.

This oral history was conducted at the home of Khaerun and Azad Lalany in Vancouver.

Shezan Muhammedi: So this is an oral history being done on July 8th and I'll let you guys take it away with growing up in Uganda and your family history.

Aziz Fakirani: "So you want me to start?"

Khaerun Lalany: "Sure, *PELLA TOUJA NAAM*. [and then say your name]"

Aziz: "You want to me to speak my name at the same time?"

Shezan: "Sure yeah yeah."

Aziz: "Yeah, my name is Aziz, Aziz Fakirani my father's name was Hassanali Rehmtullah Vanji Fakirani, my father was born in Uganda. My grandfather, they immigrated, he immigrated to Uganda in early 1900 and my father was born in Uganda in 1918. So then my father he left for uh for pursuing his studies in India. After completing his studies in India he came back to Uganda, where he got married and had his family and all the children. And then he, when he came to Uganda he was, his profession was like he was a teacher. So that was his first profession there because he was quite well educated in India. He had completed his higher studies over there. And then later on, he went into the business because his uncle, my grandfather's brother, he was there to support him and then he started his own business. So from there on we the family, we were quite a big family, we were 9 kids, he had 9 kids. So we were 5 brothers and 4 sisters. And so everybody, we used to live in a small town but the children were growing so my father decided to move to the bigger city which was Soroti."

Khaerun: "Soroti"

Aziz: "Where my father was born. That was the city where Soroti was the place where my father was born you know. And then fortunately, you know like everybody went to the school you know like all the kids had good educations. You know like primary education and secondary

education and um after that they pursued like went to the college. Um two sisters went to Nairobi. They pursued the studying of”

Khaerun: “Secretary”

Aziz: “Uh yeah and they were successful. They completed their courses, meanwhile another brother he completed his um secondary school, like we used to call.”

Khaerun: “High school”

Aziz: High school so yeah then he wanted to go for higher, higher education and uh it was not very convenient in our city because you know the college was about 4 or 5 miles away from the city. So we decided that we should send him to Kampala, which was, which is the biggest city in Uganda.

Shezan: “Yeah the capital city”

Aziz: “It was not the capital city.”

Shezan: “Oh yeah not at that time.”

Aziz: “But it was almost like it was but Entebbe was the capital at that time but Kampala was where the parliament was. So anyway, my dad's brother's name is Sabdar, he pursued his studies there. He did his higher but he was in the middle of finishing his higher school when this crisis of Uganda happened, the Ugandan crisis. You know of Idi Amin.”

Khaerun: “In 1972”

Aziz: "Yeah of 1972. So in 1972 uh you know like at that time Uganda was very it was a democratically elected government. It was under the British rule when they were given independence in 1962 or something like that. And then from 1962 to 1972, so there was a democratically elected governments but in 1972 the crisis started when this Idi Amin Dada, you know like he came, most of the people know the history there. He was"

Khaerun: "A crazy man!"

Laughter

Aziz: "An army general and he was not well, as they say, he was not very well educated guy. He had a limited education but because he was in the army he was promoted and promoted and promoted and he became the one of the generals no? In the Ugandan army. So he was involved in some sort of you know some problems, you know he was in a little crisis with something that had gone wrong you know. So what happened was when he saw the opportunity that the Prime Minister of Uganda Dr. Milton Obote, he had gone to attend the conference you know. He had gone to was it Singapore or?"

Khaerun: "Yeah he had gone somewhere out of the country."

Aziz: "Yeah it was uh Commonwealth conference right?"

Shezan: "Yeah yeah"

Aziz: "You know like Obote was still at the conference and Idi Amin Dada saw the opportunity to take over the government and he organized his military and the people and all that. What he did was he overthrew the government of the, you know like, it was a democratically elected government you know. From there the trouble started, you know, the crisis of Uganda, you know what we call the crisis of humans of Indian origin from different parts of Asia, Ismailis,

Hindus, and Punjabis, and all everybody who you know were of Asian origin, they were in big trouble. Because Idi Amin Dada was uh he was not very highly educated to know how the economy of the country works and how things you know so he became a dictator type of thing. Like you know, he said I want things my way and what I want to do but then he became very brutal in pursuing his aims of you know like uh wanted to grab everything you know that was already established by the hard work of all these Indian origin people. You know the businessmen and the businesses and all that. So you know everything started collapsing. Because you know he wanted to grab everything, his friend, what we call, a group of people from his own tribe.”

Shezan: “Tribe, yeah yeah”

Aziz: “So uh they were called what uh”

Shezan: “Part of the Kakwa tribe?”

Aziz: “No not Kakwa, I forgot that one but I just remember that one. So what happened was then he was dreaming every time something very different. He said, “oh I had a dream that oh people from Asian origin should leave within 90 days.” So he just declared that within 90 days I don't want no people from Asian origin people to be in Uganda anymore. So only those who were, those who were Ugandan citizens and there were quite a few because you know like people who were born in Uganda and so he could not kick them out. But indirectly he was already putting pressure on them, like “I only want a black Uganda, no Asian people there.” So it was, you know like they were quite frightened. People, even of Ugandan origin were frightened because most of them you know somewhere Indian passports, some had British passports. And mostly they were from British passport and Indian passports you know. So people who were with the Indian passports, ok they decided to go to India or somewhere. Some of them they were successful in joining the United Nations because United Nations at

that time, when he declared all that. So at that time United Nations jumped into that to rescue all the people of Asian origin, because they were going to become refugees anyway.

Like where will they go, especially those who were citizen of Uganda they become stateless, you like they were thrown out also indirectly but directly if you wanted to stay there you stayed there to die. What would you prefer, you would prefer to keep your life then to lose everything that you have. You know, rather than keeping on like you know, you're looking after your worldly things there which you will not have. Everybody knew they were in trouble because after 90 days everyone that would stay there, they were threatened that they would be sent to remote areas, like this place called Karamojong, Moroto, you know these places. You know the people are just like Masai kind of. Like I don't know, you wouldn't really understand what kind of Masai because they are not fully covered you know. They are very tribal people and very backward. So Idi Amin just gave a hint to this saying ok, those who think they are Ugandans”

Khaerun: “Ugandans”

Aziz: “and they want to stay here, you know, I'm going to do”

Khaerun: “I'll show you”

Aziz: “I'll show you what to do. I'm going to send you over there and you develop in that area of there you know. So it was kind of a scary thing for, everybody was scarred you know.”

Khaerun: “Even if you were Ugandan, he you wanted to get out”

Aziz: “So everybody thought that the best thing for you was to get out and the United Nations was very much willing to”

Khaerun: “to help out”

Aziz: "You know accommodate anyone that wants to go. People with British passports there was no problem because Britain was willing to take them. But some of them they were British protected and Britain still did make an exception for people who were British protected persons, to take them. But those who were stateless who were Ugandans, who were like you know, they became stateless, you know"

Shezan: "They had no where to go"

Khaerun: "No where to go"

Aziz: "So United Nations made the documents for us. For all those who were stateless people, you know. Though even if you have your passport with you but because you are kicked out or you know you are thrown out from the country that means your passport is not valid anymore. So the United Nations gave the passport to everybody, all those who wanted to leave the country. No what happened was, some, all the countries, United Nations had so many different countries to accommodate the refugees, not for permanent, but for."

Khaerun: "a transition period nah?"

Aziz: "a transition you know. So the country like Malta, like Italy, uh Sweden, uh Copenhagen."

Azad Lalany: "Austria"

Khaerun: "Austria"

Aziz: "Austria"

Shezan: "I think there was Denmark"

Khaerun: "Denmark"

Aziz: "Denmark, and Copenhagen, mostly you know they took, they were very very good they took the people with handicap. People who are not able to you know"

Khaerun: "special needs"

Aziz: "special needs, those were the countries which really, I know we appreciate them what they did. You know like they took that group of people. Now in our family because since I am talking about it. 5 of us, like my mom, my mother my father and one sister and four brothers"

Khaerun: "3 boys oh no"

Aziz: "So 7 of us, mommy, dad, me Sabdar, Nizar, and Laila, so 6 of us."

Khaerun: "and Laila"

Aziz: "So 6 of us we ended up in Malta"

Khaerun: "Malta"

Aziz: "camp. Now the camp, it was when we came to Malta it was in an army barracks to they had turned the army barracks into, they cleaned up the barracks and they accommodated 365 people in that camps. Now, out of 365 people, we were, the Ismailis were 165. Now it was a good thing that you know the, the people who were in charge of the camp. They were very helpful in settling us within the barracks, within the refugee camp. So they were looking after us, they provided us with all our immediate needs like you know, people were so kind they just brought all the clothing, and warm clothing because we were going to end up in winter time and all that. And uh"

Khaerun: "it was the beginning of the winter"

Aziz: "You should see the way how the whole the place like it was a big hall and it was full of clothing. Some were used clothing, some were good you know. Because you know like most people like when we came out at least we had decent clothing on us. It was not that you know we came out with nothing. But still you know like Maltese government, I'm just talking about"

Khaerun: "We had all summer clothes right so we came here like you know we needed winter coats you know?"

Aziz: "Yeah the reason I'm talking about Malta is because I was there so I'm telling you about my experience but Azad is going to tell you his experience also."

Azad: "and she will tell her story"

Aziz: Yeah so anyway so when we arrived at Malta it was in the morning at 3 o'clock. 3 o'clock in the morning and our plane touched down in Malta and uh the Prime Minister of Malta was at the airport. He was there to receive us, all the refugees. And then when the, when he saw the group of people coming, he says well these are the best refugees we are going to have. You know when they saw people you know like nice clothing

Khaerun: "properly dressed up"

Aziz: "Most of the Ugandans were as Khaerun mentioned before they were quite educated people. Like young people, old people, they were very well educated. they could speak French, I mean English very well and you know like fortunately you know Malta was under Britain so they spoke English"

Khaerun: "English"

Aziz: "there you know. So the Prime Minister came in to meet and he was shaking hands with everybody. Nobody knew who this guy was"

Laughter

Khaerun: "Nobody knew"

Laughter

Aziz: "Nobody knew because he just said welcome and welcome and hello and hello. In the newspaper in the morning, when the newspaper came you know the newspaper came to our camp and they distributed it to everybody and there was a picture of the Prime Minister shaking hands with all the refugees and it was Prime Minister Mentov receiving refugees from Uganda and all that was the headline in all the newspapers from Malta. But they really gave us a really good reception there and then um United Nation High Commissioner because in Malta we were not allowed to work, no refugees can work. They will stay just like that, it was how the United Nation arranged with them because the Maltese said our own people aren't employed, they was high unemployment and we cannot let any refugees to work.

So the United Nations says that find no problem, you know just look after them, feed them, we'll give you the food to feed all of them and on top of that they were giving us allowance of 20 pounds, or something like that, I don't remember exactly. But each and every member who was a refugee were given an allowance for pocket expense to buy your needs. You know like uh after shave or this or anything was. Some small items for the food what you want your cookies and so on. So that money was helping us to just get by you know. It was not a big income but when you know when we were 5 members of the family getting \$20, 20 shillings each you get 5 pounds or something, I don't remember."

Khaerun: "I don't think so"

Aziz: I don't remember exactly, it was in Maltese pounds but then see they used to send us uh everyday there were one or two buses coming for our entertainment just to keep us busy. They were taking us to, you know you become like a refugee tourist kind of thing”

Laughter

Aziz: “You know, it's not a matter of laughing because the reason why they did was because you know we were, all the Ugandans were very depressed”.

Khaerun: “yeah depressed.”

Aziz: “Depressed in a sense that you know when I am talking about good things, the good things were just, they were doing it just to keep us”

Khaerun: happy

Aziz: “forget what we had gone through the crisis there. So they used to send the buses, they used to load all the buses and took us to the beaches and visit different-different places. Meanwhile when we were there, they made the facilities for people to have their own worshipping area.”

Khaerun: “prayer halls”

Aziz: “prayer halls like we had our jamat khane. They gave us a hall for jamat khane where we had 165 people going to jamat khane every day you know. “

Khaerun: “Yeah, it was”

Aziz: "165 or something like that"

Khaerun: "We had the same thing at the hotel, you know. Although we were a very small group, we were only about 20-30 people but they also gave us a room where we could do our prayers you know so this was one of the best things that they, you know, that they acknowledged, you need to do your prayers so it was a good thing."

Aziz: "You know like the Hindu community, they were given a temple, a room for praying. So they had their prayers every evening. They used to have these Hindu prayers and all that. You know most of the Ismailis we were just supporting them too because they were inviting us to go and join them for their celebrations or anything like that you know. We had our own celebrations. We used to invite officials from our camp to attend our celebrations like Imamat Day [an Ismaili Muslim celebration that commemorates the day Aga Khan IV was inaugurated as the 49th Imam of the Ismaili community] or something you know, like that you know. They were very very helpful, now what happened was we had the restrictions. You know like when you go out you have to sign out and when you come in you sign in. So at the end of the day"

Khaerun: "They had to keep a record"

Aziz: "So at the end of the day they have to know who is not in the camp you know. Who has gone out and come back you know"

Khaerun: "come back"

Aziz: "And even the doctors, we had doctor's facilities, the doctor used to come for 3 or 4 hours. I was very fortunate that I was appointed to assist the doctor in the medical office. So I, instead of doing nothing, I used to go every day for 3 or 4 hours helping the doctor since some people were having a little difficulty explaining or something like that. I used to translate, you know, ask something like that. So I was just there as a backup kind of thing but most of our

Ugandans were able to speak because it was in English you know. So they were able to speak and communicate with the doctors you know. But sometimes you know if they were finding it difficult or anybody elderly person who doesn't really, could not express, they could tell me to tell the doctor what's happening and all that you know. But during our, unfortunately, during our stay there we lost one, one Muslim guy who passed away. Uh that was very sad because you know in spite of all the good medical facilities and all that, what happened was that uh very unfortunate, nobody could do anything. When uh his parents had informed me, I went down there to report that somebody is very sick you know. So the doctor came, and the doctor took this guy and he called the ambulance you know. The doctor went with him to the hospital and when they reached the hospital, the doctor left with the other doctors in the hospital. He came back and he got the news that this guy passed away. And then uh we had the funeral ceremony, that guys is still in Malta cemetery, so we lost one refugee there.”

Khaerun: “It happens right you know?”

Aziz: “It happens but it was very sad because you know his family was in Nairobi and was going to join him and he was here to look after his parents and he left his parents and he went over you know. He had another brother also. His brother was a very good friend of Sabdar and Nizar and then what happened during that time uh everybody was they were trying to process people to go and settle in different countries”

Khaerun: “and join with the countries you know”

Aziz: “join with the families you know. It took almost one year for everybody to join the family in England and in Canada mostly, in America, you know so like for us, for my family we were lucky that you know my two sisters they were in Montreal already you know like in Canada. So Zarine the elder sister of uh, my younger sister.”

Khaerun: "yeah I came with my sister Zarine nah. And we were the two ones who, we were lucky that we found jobs very quickly and we had both done secretarial studies in Nairobi so we found you know, we could sponsor them if we had a good you know income coming in as well right. Because how can we support these nine people with nothing, no jobs you know so. Anyways after as soon as we found the jobs then we applied with the immigration thing that we want to call our families, so one by one they started coming."

Aziz: "Ok, so Zarine sponsored 5 of them. My parents, my two brothers and one sister. So 5 of them they, she managed to sponsor at once. And then my, Khaerun, my sister Khaerun she sponsored me. So 6 of us we were sponsored from Malta to Canada. So we came, we ended up as refugees in Malta but we ended up in Canada by landed immigrant"

Khaerun: "yeah landed immigrant"

Aziz: "because Canada has already closed the door at that time. After 90 days, what happened in Uganda, they had to assist everybody to come but once that period was gone you know. But still Canada was quite helpful for bringing in"

Khaerun: "They were very lenient, you know"

Aziz: "Very lenient for the family to join. So when you go to the immigration that I want to bring my family from the refugee camp, they will do everything possible to help. So then we fortunately we ended up, everybody ended up. Now one of my brothers, my younger brother, while we were in Uganda when the crisis happened, he was studying in India. And uh"

Khaerun: "That was Alim's dad"

Aziz: "His name is Badur, Alim's dad you know. He was doing aeronautic engineering in South India, South of India, it was a place called Cochin in Kerala state. So he had already finished and

he wanted to come back to Uganda but we told him that no the crisis has already happened here so you are no longer able to come back so you better stay. So then he stayed in Bombay, in Mumbai and he took a job without pay at the airport just to get the practice. So he was working at the Bombay international airport but uh for free you know like without pay. Just to get some experience you know. Which was good, you know, they wanted to offer him and he wanted to know more, which was a good thing and we were supporting him from Montreal. We used to send him money to stay and eat and feed himself and everything because that was important to do because he had got no job.”

Khaerun: “He had no money”

Laughter

Aziz: “He had no money you know, but you know it was good that we had no, like we had a little bit of money from uh all the sources, two sisters working and then like you know we are getting money from here and there. I was, I studied first you know when I came to Montreal”

Khaerun: “So they were giving the French courses because Montreal you had to learn French. So they were paying you to go to learn you know”

Aziz: “So I went to French school you know like for 6 months but I couldn't complete because the teachers they went on strike so my studies were interrupted but then I continued in the evening too. Because at that time I wanted to work there too, so I started to find jobs here and there. It was tough you know?”

Khaerun: “It was very tough in the beginning you know”

Aziz: “They used to send me, one day they sent me to the place where, he said I'm hiring you as a salesperson it was a company working washers. And then I thought it was good because I told

the immigration that I had been, my profession is a salesperson. I have experience in sales you know like back home I was selling, doing the sales you know. I knew it was going to be tough to get the sales job, so I said we have to try anyways. So this guy he hired me, he says meanwhile I want you to work in the warehouse. I said you are hiring me as a salesperson to go, give me the training for the salesperson rather than putting me in the warehouse”

Khaerun: “the warehouse”

Aziz: “And it was very tough the big big rolls of the thing there which I was not even, I was half of what I am now, and I was not strong enough to lift all that. So, and those guys they were ruthless”

Laughter

Aziz: “You know the guy was working there, they wouldn't have no mercy. They said you are hired so you have to work you know. So at the end of the day, I went home and I told them I don't think this is a job for me. I cannot do it, they all said it's ok don't worry about it.

Khaerun: We were good family support because if you are on your own then it's tough.

Aziz: If we didn't have the family support it would've been very tough you know. They said don't worry about it, don't go to work. I was not paid for that. That day he didn't pay me because I worked very hard and broke my back over there and I was not paid for it. So I found another job and it was sales in the tobacco kind of thing there. He did the same thing too. He started sending me in the warehouse there but I did it because I said somehow I'll have to work hard to bring some money home you know. At the end, he gave me a ten hour shift and he gave me half of my minimum pay. That's what he offered me, this one here, would you like to work or not you know? So he gave me an ultimatum like that. I said well at least I'll make a little bit of money. But at the end of the ten hour shift, I was not able to function anymore, hahaha. So I went home and I told them again this is not a job for me. They said don't worry look for another one.”

Laughter

Khaerun: "it was rough in the beginning"

Aziz: "It was tough because he didn't pay me for that day. But I didn't even bother, I said if you don't want to pay me, it's ok don't worry about it. At the end of the day he asked me how was your day? I said well I don't have anything to say, I'll tell you tomorrow. Tomorrow morning I just phone him and I said thank you very much but I will not be able to continue with you. Then gradually I started finding it a little better. I ended up with a company called hardwood company which is in Pascale Montreal. I worked for them for a little while and then I continued my French and then I ended up getting a good job at a furniture company which was called Bad Boy furniture. I worked and I was making good money there, it was nice you know and I did very well. Fortunately, what happened was that after some time they decided to close the store and then I ended up working for another furniture company which was not that great because I already had a little bit of experience I continued with that you know. Well after that I ended up coming back to, I moved here."

Khaerun: "Vancouver"

Aziz: "Vancouver and since then I continued working with the furniture company, in different-different companies and all that. So I had a lot of background in furniture sales you know. And then finally I opened my own business which I ran for 6 years and then you know what happened was I was running out of lease and they didn't want to renew my lease. So then I ended up working with the Home Depot which is a Canadian chain, home depot you know. And I was trained in the electrical department and uh plumbing."

Khaerun: "Plumbing no?"

Aziz: "So they trained me because they knew I had a lot of experience and uh in the sales, so they said don't worry about your experience in electrical, we'll train you. And so they trained me for 3 months you know. So then I became quite familiar with that. I started working on the floor and I started learning more and more but then meanwhile when I was, when I was working as a uh salesperson in uh furniture sales and all that, I pursued my studies to become the um in home decorating you know. So I got my diploma in interior decorating. So that was my, it was good success, at least you know like uh you have opportunities here to learn. If it was Uganda or anywhere else you know."

Khaerun: "So you know what? We consider it, it was a blessing in disguise you know because we would have never come to Canada had this hadn't happened. It was a bad experience, the three months were horrible but once we came here and we took everything in stride and you know? So it's good now"

Laughter

Aziz: "You know, see you can study, you can continue your studies, you can train"

Khaerun: "Good opportunities, here you know?"

Aziz: "You can train at the work, you know the companies were training you. That fear you know that we had in Uganda when the crisis happened. That you know what are we going to do there. You know because Canada"

Khaerun: Never heard of it you know?

Aziz: "It was a very scary thing just to come here and then you know"

Khaerun: "And I remember I was in the plane with my sister and you know the plane is landing. It was around night time and you see such a huge city, you know like, it was mind boggling, you know. Like where are we going? And it was November the 5th at that time I think."

Aziz: "It was winter time"

Khaerun: And you could see the little snow flakes you know, hahaha. And you said oh my god you know? And it was so cold when we landed. I twas freezing cold when we landed. But they were good you know. The first thing they did was to take us to pick up our winter coats and the boots you know?

Laughter

Aziz: "That was the biggest thing, the change was the climate. Because in Uganda, the climate was such that sometime for the whole year you don't need to put any jacket or any sweater. 365 days is just like a"

Khaerun: "It's a tropical weather"

Aziz: "Yes it's a tropical weather"

Khaerun: "So you don't need any"

Aziz: "It's almost like a summer time, you know. There are some cold little bit, evenings were cold you know but not that severe cold."

Khaerun: "No, no, no. It was quite interesting you know?"

Shezan: "And then you guys started working where when you first started working?"

Khaerun: Actually, you know we were very lucky. I started working for Bell Canada

Shezan: "Oh wow"

Khaerun: "Yeah it's BC Telephone here and um I started first and then my sister later one like she applied too you know. And then after a couple of months they hired her as well. So we were both working for Bell Canada, you know. And um, people were really really good you know. I mean we did not even see any discrimination or anything. Interesting you know? Although we didn't even speak any French you know? But yeah they were, maybe they knew that we were refugees and we needed some help or whatever but they were really kind you know. And I guess maybe we had good work ethics as well right you know? Whatever work they gave us there was no, we would just do it and uh you know. So and and funny thing you know, that was the only job I had, we both had until we, until I got married and we moved here. And then when we came to Vancouver, I applied to the Bank of Montreal and they hired me right away, hahaha. So I was there for 20 years, you know. So I haven't had too many changes in my jobs kind of thing. You know I had a steady job in Montreal for 6 years and then 20 years at the bank."

Aziz: "That was good you know, and you know one good thing what happened to our family, as I mentioned that we were a big family 5 brothers and 4 sisters, you know like apart from my elder brother Sultan and me, you know, all the rest of them they were all studying when the expulsion happened. And we left, and fortunately when we landed here, they were fortunate to get into the university."

Khaerun: "In the high school yeah."

Aziz: "So like uh, Sabdar, you know who became the dentist. He got accepted in university, they accepted him right away without, uh, they took his exam and they said you qualify."

Khaerun: "You qualify for it you know."

Aziz: "So his first year he started in the university right away. And Nizar who became the lawyer, who's a lawyer in Toronto, he did his 2 years of higher."

Khaerun: "High school"

Aziz: "Well he completed his Cambridge, we used to call it Cambridge exam over there, high school over there but then we do the college. So he did 2 years college."

Khaerun: "He did two years here"

Aziz: "After two years college he got an entrance into university and he pursued and became a lawyer you know. And Badur the one I talked about the aeronautic engineering, who was sponsored by"

Khaerun: "Me"

Aziz: "Khaerun you know, and when Badur, the younger brother came he got in Pratt and Whitney, it was an aeronautic company and he got a job right there and he stayed there a year or so and then he was offered a job in Rolls-Royce. And now Rolls-Royce, he has been working there for the last 40 years now."

Khaerun: "30 years"

Aziz: "yeah 35 years"

Khaerun: "He literally retired now."

Aziz: "Since he came to Canada, only one or two year he worked in Pratt-Whitney"

Khaerun: "And then he worked"

Aziz: "Yeah he was a supervisor there, haha, you know in Pratt and Whitney he did so well. He performed well he became a supervisor you know. And then he says never mind. Roll-Royce."

Khaerun: "So we all, you know pursued our careers and went to school. Everybody seems to be doing quite well now you know."

Aziz: "And then my nephew, whom you know, Salim, you know like he studied in uh Kitchner, Waterloo and then he became a lawyer. His wife is a lawyer so right now we have 5 lawyers in our family."

Laughter

So it's a sad story and uh"

Khaerun: "good ending"

Aziz: "This is why we say that oh Idi Amin did a favour to us for throwing us out. Hahaha. I wouldn't say kicking us out, you know because it's not a good work to use, kick us. But indirectly it was something unfortunate."

Khaerun: "You know the thing was it was a very sad situation. The three months that people were going through, leaving behind all your belongings and everything and not knowing where you are going. So it was not an easy, and half the things we don't even know, they were having these roadblocks and robbing people off and you know. Killing so many people, which we didn't even see. Like I don't remember seeing any, all I know that I had no idea where I was going and

I was just put in the plane. So but the stories were horrible. Everybody has such a different situation and different stories you know.”

Aziz: “There are quite many Ugandans they have even very sad stories because they lost some of their relatives over there. They were killed over there, so they lost their life you know and as Khaerun said that you know like roadblocks from our town, like from we were in Eastern Uganda which is called Soroti. Traveling to Soroti to Kampala it was challenging you know. There were maybe 10-15 army blocks. Every time they come they check you, where are you going? They interview you. So taking a trip from Soroti, I took two trips so the first time I went, I wanted to find out what was going on and the second time I went back to bring our belongings and all that you know. So I went two times but then you know like because we had to bring the whole family to Kampala. Fortunately, we were safe and sound but some of them were beaten you know.”

Khaerun: “On the road”

Aziz: “On the road. You know they would take away your jeweler and everything but you know if you are a little polite with them. They would say ok you know let them go. The first time I went, there was an agricultural officer from Serere when I was going to Kampala. And I told him I would like to go, would you take me. I wanted a ride with him and he said ok you can come. It was a good thing because he was an agricultural officer and he had his I.D. with him. So wherever we used to go, he shows his I.D. that I'm an agricultural officer, then they let me go. But the second time I went, the fortunate thing that happened was that the 90 days were almost over and they were relaxed, like the blockage. So there was not too much, it was very smooth going. Maybe one or two or three blocks you know.

So one funny thing happened like you know, I was traveling from, going to Kampala, and uh what happened was uh you know suppositories for medication, so I had those from the hospital because I was having some problem. So when we arrived at the uh check point where the army

was he says what is this. Because when he opened my bag he saw that. He goes what are these bullets, hahahaha. Where did you get these bullets, so I told him no it's not bullets, it's medication so I opened one and I showed him. I said this is dawa, when we say dawa it means medication you know. Oh ok, alright you know. But they were crazy you know because he thought they were bullets because sometimes they can just hit you. He said, why are you carrying the bullets you know. You know like when Idi Amin took over, he declared um, uh curfew. So when the curfew was declared at 7 o'clock, 8 o'clock you could not go out.

Break

Where were we? We were talking about the curfew you know. So my younger sister you know she had a toothache and uh it was uh like we were under curfew. Now she was under so much pain that you know we didn't know what to do. So everybody is afraid to go out, because if they see you on the street you are in big trouble. Because the army they were just going around but there were not too many in our city, like in Soroti. There were but there weren't too many but we were still under curfew that we still couldn't go out. But I took the risk because she was so much in pain. I said I have to take her to the doctor you know. Fortunately, I walked very safely and came back home, and I was even scarred that they would catch me on the road and say why are you breaking the curfew. And they have no mercy you know, they would hit you. There was a guy there, you know like our neighbour he opened the door just to see what happening outside. As soon as you open the door the army already saw that they came out and they were there. They harassed him you know.”

Khaerun: “Anyways um this is what it was. You know?”

Shezan: Ok so then Azad uncle then what happened? Now it's your time to shine.”

Aziz: “Azad uncle was a teacher, he can tell you his story.”

Azad: "Oh my god, where do I start?"

Shezan: "You can start with where you were born in Uganda."

Azad: "I was born ok, my grandfather came from India and my dad was born in Nairobi, in Kenya. My nanabapa [Azad maternal grandfather] and nanima [Azad maternal grandmother] also they came from India and my mom was born in Kenya. This is going way back, I don't have the dates."

Khaerun: "Umm your mom was born the same time as dad, *panja dedi* [your father] 1918?"

Azad: "Dad was born 2-3-4 year earlier than that, whatever. So they were both born in Kenya. Um, I was born in Uganda in a town called Tororo. My dad at that time used to own what was called a cotton ginnery."

Shezan: "Oh yeah, ok ok"

Azad: So he used to own a cotton ginnery and that's where they process the cotton, they took the seeds out and processed the cotton and sold them again. And um we were there, I don't remember living in Tororo very much. My *dadabapa* [paternal grandfather] and *dadima* [paternal grandmother], my dad's mom and dad, they were living in Mombasa and my *nanabapa* [maternal grandfather] and *nanima* [maternal grandmother] were also living in Mombasa at that time. Then after my mom and dad got married we had moved to Uganda and we had been living in Tororo, the town where we had the ginnery. And then from there we moved to Mbale in Uganda but my dad sold the ginnery and when he was selling the ginnery, I remember we, my elder brother Shiraz, he was about 7 and a half or 7 and I was 3 and a half years old and we were visiting him there. There was this pool outside where they cooled the water, the water cooling pool for the ginneries and Shiraz and I were playing making these boats with uh"

Khaerun: "paper boats"

Aziz: "Yes paper boats and putting them in water and he used to go pick it up from me and bring it back to me. So he went in to go pick it up and then he didn't come out so he kind of drowned in the pool. So I ran to my dad he was in the office and I told him that Shiraz has gone in the water and he's not coming out. I was only 3 and a half years old. So my dad came running and I don't remember what happened next but then there was a doctor who had come and they tried to resuscitate him, apparently he had already drowned in the water, the water cooling pond. So that was my memory and then of course by that time we had already moved to Mbale and my dad was owning a garage, where they repaired the cars and all that. And then my brother Iqbal was born, we are about 5 years apart. I think he was born in Mombasa because that's where the grandparents were and in those days it was normal to travel and we used to travel by train. It took us two nights or something to go to Mombasa from Mbale.

Anyways so he was born there in Mombasa and so Mombasa was quite a place for us because both the grandparents were there. Mom's dad and dad's mom and dad and we were living in Mbale in Uganda. And then I remember my dad selling his garage and then he bought a bar. It was where you would sell liquors and stuff, people go to drink. And he was running that for a long time, I don't know how many years and I went to school and secondary school, elementary school and secondary school. And um then my sister was born, so we are 10 years apart and she was also born in Mombasa or in Nairobi, I can't remember, oh in Nairobi. My dad's sister used to live in Nairobi so we used to go and visit her and I think that's where my sister was born. Anyways so going back to Mbale, I did my school there, my elementary schooling there in the Aga Khan school. We were quite a big jamat [community of Ismaili Muslims living in that area] 6-7-800 people, I can't remember and we had quite a nice small jamat khana. And then they had built a bigger jamat khane later on. There I did my high school was after you did your secondary school what do you call it here, I dunno, we call it, we used to call it high school after your grade 10 or was it grade 12 here."

Shezan: "Here it is grade 12."

Azad: "We used to have it until grade 10."

Aziz: "Then we had college."

Azad: "Then we use to call it high school after that, after your secondary school you went two years extra to high school we called it there. And I did my high school in Mbale and then I went to Makerere University and I went in there and I did my bachelor of science. BSC and then after the BSC I did a diploma in education and then I became a qualified teacher. Makerere was in Kampala and I use to travel back and forth a bit to Mbale on the weekends and go by taxi and that's how it used to be. It's about two hours drive, three hours drive, Mbale to Kampala, I don't know, 3 hours maybe?"

Khaerun: "3 hours?"

Aziz: "From Soroti to Kampala it was about 5 hours."

Azad: "So it was about 3 hours drive and I was teaching my brother after he did his, we call it high school certificate, HSC. He went to England and he was doing his diploma in hotel management and catering. So Iqbal did that and in the process that we were going through, when I was going to university, my mom and dad separated. So my dad was living in a different town and my mom was living in Mbale still. So I used to go and visit her quite a bit from the university back and forth but it all worked out in the end. And so after I finished my diploma, after the university, I was teaching there in Mbale as a Ugandan citizen. My mom was still a British citizen and my sister was still young so she was under her passport. And my brother was already in England in 1972 doing his hotel management and catering and he was supposed to come back home within December or January when he finished his course. And there's this

mount Elgin Hotel where he had applied and he was going to be one of the managers there. But of course in '72 things didn't happen. Idi Amin kicked us all out.

What he said was you are Indians, you came here because of the British so you are Britain's responsibility not ours. Even if you are a Ugandan citizen you are not African. You are not a Ugandan, you are British responsibility. So I was British, I was Ugandan, I had a Ugandan passport and I became a refugee. In the meantime, my mom, and my brother was already in England, my mom and my sister they had the British passports so they ended up going to London England. And I was a refugee, so I ended up going to Austria.

Yeah we went to this, I forget the name of the town where we ended up but we were living in this huge, huge hall. There were I dunno, 70-80 people in one hall and there were 2-3 halls like that with beds. Ok when we left Uganda, what I had was my suitcase. It just had clothes, we used to own a house, we had to leave behind our house, our property. Everything that we had, the car, the whole nine yards. So just a suitcase and with a tropical clothes, so we ended up in Austria. It was November sometime I think, October-November, and very cold, bitterly cold. And then the first thing they did was they gave us jackets and overcoats. Because we were in this big city we ended up going to a smaller city, I forget what it's called. Then we were put up in a motel, no it was a hotel, it was two stories. We stayed in families and I stayed with this group of people I knew from a very small village in Mbale, they were also called Lalanis like my last name but no relation. We knew them very well so I stayed with them, in a big room with them, with their mom and dad, and their brother and sister. And so we stayed there for about three months in a small town and then the Swedish government had sent to acquire landed immigrants. So we applied, we went for the interviews, and then I ended up with those Lalanis in Sweden as landed immigrants.

So when we went there as landed immigrants we were not given accommodations because we were still from a refugee camp we ended up staying at a school where the classrooms were converted into bedrooms. But it was on a big location and they had so many different buildings

on the same location, on the same schoolyard and there were about 10, 10-12, or 10 rooms in each little building. So each room was allocated to the families or the seniors or whoever the landed immigrants were. So we were there in the landed immigrants area still and getting our Swedish passport and Swedish processing done and they sent us to school to learn Swedish. So we ended up, I think was there for about 6 months and for those 6 months what we did was go to Swedish schools to learn Swedish and in the meantime they took us to other areas to see if we could get a job. But because we didn't speak any Swedish at all, there were no jobs. And then in the meantime these friends of mine, the other Lalanis, they had other people that had already come to Canada straight from Uganda as landed immigrants. Like Khaerun had come so what they did was they sponsored their family to come to Canada from Sweden. We were already landed immigrants in Sweden and we already had Swedish passports so they said ok, we're going there, and they said ok why don't we also sponsor Azad. And so they also sponsored me because we knew each other, so they sponsored me and because of them I also came to Canada with them in '73. Yeah in '73 summer of '73. And we ended up in Montreal because they were all living in Montreal. So you come to Montreal, totally different city, we went to Austria, totally different, and then we go to Sweden and oh my God so different!"

Laughter

Aziz: "This is a real Ugandan you know."

Azad: "Because I had never traveled out of the country ever. So I had learned Swedish and I come to Montreal and mon Dieux you have to learn French.

Laughter

So ok, and so because I had just come and I went through the process with the government whatever the process was. So I applied to learn French so I was learning."

Khaerun: "They were giving courses for 6 months you know"

Azad: "6 months. So I go this 6 months course to learn French. And after that, I was staying with the guys who sponsored me and then I got a job as a stocking clerk, as a stocker in uh, what do you call it?"

Khaerun: "In a grocery store."

Azad: "Some grocery store, I forget the name"

Khaerun: "Worshow"

Azad: "Yes Worshow that's where I was working"

Khaerun: "I remember"

Azad: "I was working there with the stock"

Khaerun: "As a grocery store clerk"

Azad: "You know you stock all the stock in the grocery store."

Aziz: "At that time we had to take any job. Even if you are a teacher or anything like that."

Azad: "I was not a teacher"

Aziz: "Yeah whatever your profession was"

Azad: "But I was not a teacher, that was at home, here it was discounted. So I was working there and I knew this guy from Makerere who I went to university who had already come here as a landed immigrant before me and he was working at McGill University in the library system. So eventually he told me to apply and I applied and I met him in Montreal again, and of course he showed me around in Montreal. So I had applied at McGill University libraries, undergraduate library and I got accepted there as a - my initial entry was when all the books come in you stock them - as a book stocker. Yeah so that was the job and from there, um I worked there and then I went to Edmonton where a friend of mine had bought a big business so I went to Edmonton. I was there for two years and then I got fed up with this, I didn't like Edmonton, it was just too cold, hahaha. And then I came back to Montreal, we got married and my brother had already come from England to Vancouver. He had applied from there to come to Canada and when he came into Canada he came straight to Vancouver. So when I was in Edmonton he told me that, I'm here in Vancouver, why don't you move to Vancouver. So we did that, I went back to Montreal, we got married and we went to Vancouver. And we came to Vancouver and what was my first job? My first job was oh god, so long ago."

Khaerun: "Well you had done little bits here and there."

Azad: "I had so many little jobs."

Aziz: "You also did the federal government"

Azad: "I worked for three months for the government"

Khaerun: "You worked in a restaurant in North Van."

Azad: "Oh yeah I worked as a cook's assistant in North Van sort of thing."

Khaerun: "Sous-chef"

Azad: "Hahaha, so I worked at 3-4 different places as a chef and then I got a job with um a care home where I worked as a cook, as the head cook, and I worked there for two three years, four years or so. Yeah and then"

Khaerun: "You worked with the government a little bit *nah* [right?]?"

Azad: "I worked with when Khalil was just a little baby, for two-three months it was temporary."

Khaerun: *Pachi* [then] you bought the business *nah* [right?]?"

Azad: "*Pachi* [then], what yeah after working as a cook in the care home we bought a business, dry cleaning. So we ran it for what?"

Khaerun: "10 years?"

Azad: "10-12 years, something like that and we sold it because we got so tired, haha. And then I was home for a little bit and then Khaerun got laid off from her work and then we bought another business in a medical building in a restaurant. So this was Monday to Friday 8 to 5 or 8 to 6 or 8 to 5 I think. So we ran that for 5 to 6 years and then we sold it and then my son was working in security, so he said once you are home why don't you apply. So I applied, and I worked in the security system for 10-11 years or something like that about that long."

Khaerun: "Too many jobs"

Laughter

Aziz: "Unfortunately, what happened was you know like people who came directly from Uganda to here, they had a little better opportunity. There were so many people I can see right now

who I met them here in Vancouver they worked in federal government. Even smaller jobs you know, there was a couple that was counting some coins or something like that in the federal government. But when they retired, the benefits and all that are so huge and so big they are so happy, they are laughing. Like for us who came from refugee camps we didn't have that opportunity you know because at that time the federal government had opened the doors for people from Uganda. So then when they see because the people spoke very well, the conversation language was not a barrier at all. Like for Azad for example with his qualification, some people got a very good job at the federal level you know. Like for example Gulshan from uh Mbale, Parekh she ended up getting very good job. Noorjan and *inji* [her] husband coin count *nah* [right?]? *Pachi* [then] misses Budhwani, there were so many of them I didn't even know that were working for the federal government. But they all worked very hard you know yeah?"

Azad: "So this is my story"

Khaerun: "So this is his story, it was very long wasn't it?"

Shezan: But it was good, I have some more questions. I have some fun ones, how was raising your children here?

Khaerun: "Raising the children was a bit difficult, challenging."

Azad: "challenging"

Khaerun: "In a sense because I guess everybody has different situations because Azad was working in a care facility and somewhere in Langley so then uh it was difficult to wake the kids up early in the morning. At that time there was one son, you know so we used to wake him up early and drop him to the babysitter and then for me, we had only one car so I had to take a bus you know? It was not easy. And I had no family here, like everybody was in Montreal and

Toronto you know so? We were sort of bringing the kids up on our own you know. It was a bit challenging but then the first child was, you then because after finishing off at the care facility then he had his own business, we had our own business so even that was 7 days a week and working 12 hours you know so it was a bit hard. But after the second child, Reshma was a little bit easier because we had moved to this coop housing and the babysitter was right here. So little bit easier that I could just come and drop her here and then take the bus you know. So but uh yeah I mean we adapted quite well because both Khalil and Reshma they played lots of hockey and lots of sports. Like basketball and I used to take them swimming all the time and take them skating and you know so it kept them very busy you know. And it worked out good because they're all level headed and all doing good, you know.

But I mean bringing up the kids is challenging for any parent. It has gotten even worse now, you know, that people struggle with the challenges at work and you know? At the same time some people are able to work from home too so it makes it a little easier. But of course it was challenging because you know with transportation and taking the buses and getting to work, you know then rush home and pick up the kids, and you know so but we didn't, it went well, hahaha. I think so you know. It's a blessing too right you know when your kids turn up good, you know it's a blessing. Yeah so all good now, we are almost ready to retire. He's still working."

Laughter

Shezan: That's good, I guess sort of my last question is kind of a tough one. Is how would you guys identify yourselves. So if I said what are you? Would you say your a Canadian-Ugandan, Ugandan-Canadian, Ismaili-Canadian, a mix of things there's no right or wrong answer sort of.

Khaerun: "For me it was not a problem at all, when people asked me at work like whatever, it is difficult to identify yourself. We are not from India, like I would tell them that I'm East Indian but I'm not from India. I would have to explain, that I'm from Uganda but I have been here in Canada for a long time so I'm really a Canadian you know. So Azad had a difficult time when

people asked him where are you from. So he would not like that being asked, like why are they asking me you know? But for me, people are curious to know, your nationality you know but now we have people from all over the world you know so it's uh easy to sort of explain to them.”

Aziz: “People, now they understand. They would just try to figure out that when they see our skin, they think we are from South India.”

Khaerun: “But I don't tell them I am Ugandan. Well I am Ugandan but I'm originally, like I'm East Indian, you know but I'm a Canadian.”

Aziz: “How I explain is that my forefathers are Indian origin but we immigrated to Uganda a long time ago, almost 100 years ago you know. And from Uganda we came down here, so we are here almost more than 40 years so we are more Canadian than Ugandan because we have already transformed ourselves. Adopted Canada as our country, we don't forget Uganda was a very good country for us you know like we enjoyed it there. The weather was nice, my forefathers really, our forefathers they really worked very hard. They worked night and day to bring their country up. You know the country at that time when we left, you should see it was just like a Canadian standard at that time but then since when we left you know because of the crisis the country started going down. It must have gone almost 40-50 years down. Now it is coming up again but it's not the same when our forefathers were there. You know they were working hard to develop it, it was growing big and big. So when you, if you ask me, I would say well I have no, I would say I'm a Ugandan and I'm more Canadian but still my roots were there because I was born there and brought up there. I was going to school there and there were Africans sitting with me at the school, like we were studying the same. You know Earnest was my neighbour, he was of African origin. So you know like our skin is like that but we are still black Ugandan you know?”

Azad: "I'm Canadian. Unless they ask me what country do you come from I never tell them. I say why, I'm a Canadian, what's your problem? And the current day is very multicultural. Totally."

Aziz: "So we identify ourselves as a Canadian because we have more than 40 years here. And if they, people want to know a little more, usually people you know they want to know a little more about you. You say my ancestry goes back to East India but I am from Uganda. But we are always grateful to Canada because Canada really took care of us you know. Like Canadians, initially when we came here, they really looked after us. Even the Canadian government, even the people, they really helped us to be what we are."

Khaerun: "Where we are right now"

Aziz: "And with our hard work, you know, people working very hard you know. Some of, I remember, some of our people from Uganda, the refugees when they came they were working night shift cleaning the buses, no? Cleaning the buses"

Khaerun: "Which was a job"

Aziz: Yeah they took any job, even it if was a very hard working job they took it. But now everything is getting much better for everybody you know.

Shezan: "Is there anything you want to add?"

Khaerun: "No we are done! Aren't you bored?"

Laughter

Aziz: "You don't ask anymore"

Laughter

Khaerun: "You must be bored now!"

Shezan: No no, this is so intriguing for me. I love hearing these stories.