RadioDoc Review

Volume 8 • Issue 1 • 2023

2023-01-14

Audio Activism: A Discussion of Mother Country Radicals

Zayd Dohrn, Northwestern University , neil.verma@northwestern.edu

Abstract

This article is a transcript of a speaking event at Northwestern University, USA, in which producer Sarah Geis interviewed writer Zayd Dohrn and podcast producer Misha Euceph about their recent podcast Mother Country Radicals, which concerns the history of the Weather Underground, as well as Black Liberation more broadly, from the perspective of Dohrn, who grew up as a child of radicals from that period. Dohrn and Euceph explain the process and thinking they brought to the project and explore a few key moments that shaped the podcast, reflecting on the complicated relationship between family and activism.

Keywords

Mother Country Radicals, Podcasting, Personal, Political, Misha Euceph, Zayd Dohrn, Activism, Black Liberation, Weather Underground, Family

Recommended Citation

Dohrn, Z., (2023) “Audio Activism: A Discussion of Mother Country Radicals”, *RadioDoc Review* 8(1).

Audio Activism: A Discussion of *Mother Country Radicals*

By Zayd Dohrn, Mischa Euceph and Sarah Geis

The following is a transcript of a public discussion between Zayd Dohrn and Misha Euceph, creators of the *Mother Country Radicals* podcast, and producer and podcast educator Sarah Geis. The discussion took place at Northwestern University, USA, 28 October, 2022.

This conversation was recorded by Brad West, transcribed by Martin Feld and edited by Neil Verma.

Sarah Geis
Zayd and Misha, I'm so excited to get to talk to you about this project; it's my favourite thing that I have heard in the past couple of years. I think you've done such a beautiful job with the storytelling, with mixing the political and the personal—an extraordinary archive and sound design. So, this feels to me, kind of like, really the potential of the podcast as an audio documentary form. I thought maybe we would start out just to refresh all of our memory with just a couple two minutes from the top of the podcast. This is the first couple minutes of *Mother Country Radicals*.

[transition to podcast audio]

> ***Zayd Dohrn***
> *[narrating] In May 1970, Los Angeles radio station KPFK received an anonymous phone call, leading them to a cassette tape hidden in a public phone booth. It begins like this.*
>
> ***Bernardine Dohrn***
> *Hello, this is Bernadine Dohrn. I'm going to read a declaration of a state of war. This is the first communication from the Weathermen Underground.*
>
> ***ZD***
> *Bernardine Dohrn is my mother. She's recording this tape when she's just 28 years old—surrounded by a few friends in a safe house in San Francisco, a one-room apartment they've rented using a fake ID. The place is crowded, and most of the people in the room are even younger than she is: student activists and grad-school dropouts in their early-to-mid 20s. There's a device the size of a lunchbox set up in the middle of a table, an old-school tape cassette player with a red record button.*
>
> ***BD***
> *All over the world, people fighting American imperialism look to America's youth to use our strategic position behind enemy lines to join forces in the destruction of the empire. Kids know the lines are drawn. Revolution is touching all of our lives.*
>
> ***ZD***

They'd written this statement together over a bunch of sleepless nights on a stolen typewriter, revisions marked in pen and retyped over and over to get it right. It's a collaborative effort, a group project, but they all understand as the leader of the organisation, the public face, it would be Bernardine delivering their message.

BD
Freaks are revolutionaries and revolutionaries are freaks. If you want to find us, this is where we are. In every tribe, commune, dormitory, farmhouse, barracks and townhouse, where kids are making love, smoking dope and loading guns. Fugitives from American justice are free to go.

SG
Maybe before we get into the origins of this project and your collaboration—could we just explode the scene a little bit? Because I think so much happens, in this opening: we learn who you are, we learn what your relationship to the subject (or one of the subjects) is, we learn what the subject is, and we also get this really vivid scene. There is this recorder that is the size of a lunchbox and it has this red light on it; we get a stolen typewriter; we get this, this script and there's edits (I think) made in red pen. What elements went into this? What did, what did you know, what did you research? How did you create such a vivid scene?

ZD
I've heard that scene many, many times now, and it's interesting to go back to like where it all came from. The main thing is we thought a lot about how to start this series. It's a long—you know, it's 10 episodes, eight hours of audio. We thought a lot about where to drop people in and I was pretty adamant from the beginning that... it is a show about the personal and the political. I feel like there's a version of a podcast where you tell the story about how crazy it all is and then five minutes in you're like, 'And she's my mother', and I really didn't want there to be a reveal that tried to milk that. I felt I had to place myself as somebody who had an investment in the story, who was close to the story and really put us in a place where it felt unfamiliar, but that I felt like I could guide people. It's also an amazing tape. When you're making a podcast, you're always looking not only for the writing, but for where you have good audio.

SG
Did you have that, like, sitting around the house?

ZD
That particular one was famous, and it's been on the news and it's a piece of the historical archive. So we had it, we had multiple versions of it, we had versions where the curse words were bleeped out. But you know, we were looking for a moment that could drop us into a scene.

SG

In terms of just those details, was that through interviews with your mom, just getting the real rich details?

ZD
Not just my mom, she remembered some of it and then other people told me about the revision process, the tape recorder. I think I must have interviewed five or six people who were present in that scene. We interviewed maybe 40 or 50 people for the show. And some of them were all in these rooms together, so I got to have a sort of kaleidoscopic look at some of the places.

Misha Euceph
I do feel like that's one of the things—interestingly there's a lot of tweaking that happened throughout the making of the podcast—but that scene is one of the things that stayed pretty constant from the very beginning, from the very first drafts. Why did you know right away that that's the place where we start rather than, say, the townhouse bombing or something a little bit more sensational?

ZD
That does get into the whole personal and political question and there's a lot to say about why I think this show is about both personal and political, that that tension is central to what the show is. But I thought that if we started with a big political moment, the townhouse, the Days of Rage, or, the escape of Assata Shakur from prison or something like that, I thought we would lose the intimacy of what I thought I could bring to the story, which was a connection to the people involved and a sense of them as real people, quiet people, people who, you know, are accessible in their humanity and not just people on the political stage.

SG
Taking a step back, you are a playwright, a screenwriter—why podcast for this project, or was it a process?

ZD
It was definitely a process. I have to tell a funny Misha story. I had a deal with Crooked Media to make this show and then they found (or they had already known about) Misha and Misha's company, Dustlight Productions, which makes a lot of amazing podcasts. They introduced us and we were kind of talking about how to do a show. And I knew nothing about podcasts—I'm a writer—and I listened to podcasts, I love them, but I did not know how to make an audio show. Misha knows everything about how to do that. So the first thing she did, after we talked, is she sent me a division-of-labour questionnaire, and it said: here's the 150 jobs that have to happen to make a podcast, which ones do you want to be involved in? So, it was everything from editing, sound design, composing. I looked at it and none of it made any sense to me. And I checked the box that said 'writing', and I sent it back to her, and that was it, you know. And then she called me, like, 10 minutes after I sent the email, she called me and she was like, 'Zayd, I think you're misunderstanding something'. And I was like, 'What?'
And she was like, You didn't even check the box that says 'hosting, or like, you know, voiceover or any of it. Who's going to talk if you're not going to talk?'

ME
The best part of all of this is Zayd thinks that I knew what I was doing. But at this time, I hadn't even started my company, so this was the very first project that we (as a company) signed on to.

ZD
And I was like, 'You talk!' I really did not want, I mean, I did not see myself as somebody who was going to be narrating this story. I didn't understand the form. I'm a playwright, I write for other people to say the words, right? And so, Misha had to educate me along the way. The writing process was always the part where I felt comfortable. Everything else was uncomfortable.

ME
I knew kind of what I was doing, but I didn't know how to assemble a team. That questionnaire, Zayd is the first person I sent it to. I just was like, 'Oh, maybe this should be kind of an organised process and there should be checkboxes'. So, I do think what made this project unique is—actually having worked with other hosts—was the fact that Zayd was such an incredible writer, that you brought that skillset to the table, and then everything else, like, learning how to narrate a story, learning how to work with producers, learning the role that archival plays, all of that is, is easy and teachable. But writing is, you know, that's the thing that we struggle with, with so many hosts. That's what made you a really, really great collaborator to work with, and you were always so open and deferential to our expertise, but always so willing to stand up for certain stylistic and narrative choices.

SG
Misha, what is it about the project that made you decide, 'Yeah, this is one of the first ones I want my company to produce'?

ME
I started Dustlight Productions in January 2020 after having a terrible experience working for a bunch of public radio stations and private audio companies. I felt like there wasn't a single place out there that prioritised people, that prioritised culture. I felt like a lot of companies said that they cared about diversity and equity, they said that they cared about telling stories that elevated the voices of quote, unquote, marginalised people. But when it came to putting their money where their mouth is, they weren't actually doing that. I think I felt like I had nothing to lose. And I started a company because I had something very distinct and specific to say. I had no idea who the Weather Underground were, I didn't know that this was a very significant part of American history. And I think that's what appealed to me: as an immigrant in this country, I feel like there's a propaganda history that you're taught. And then I realised this is one of the few pages of history that had really been purposefully obscured, and I delight in bringing those types of stories to life. So it felt like the perfect first project. I thought it would make the right kind of statement and really set the tone for who we are as a company.

SG

This event's called Audio Activism, and we're talking about political and personal and a work of, a work of activism and about activists. What do you hope folks get out of it?

ZD
We had three audiences in mind that we knew would at least have some interest if we did it right. One was people who knew the history, mostly Boomers, who were alive at the time and had seen it on the news, some who were directly involved, people who understood the history of the American left, and some who just saw the headlines in the newspaper and kind of vaguely remembered it. We thought those people might be interested. Crooked Media has an audience through *Pod Save America*, progressive, liberal, engaged political people. We thought they might be interested in their own way. But really, for us, I think the central audience was thinking about young people who might not know this history at all, who might be interested in making change in some way, and understanding a story like this, not just the Weather Underground story, but the larger story of the Black Liberation Army, the Assata Shakur story, all these stories that have been obscured in a lot of mainstream histories. We thought: podcasting is an interesting medium to reach those people and it might be surprising to them that these histories exist and we thought if we did it right, people might listen to it and say, you know, 'There are a lot of things happened that I don't agree with'. There may be mistakes made along the way, but that there's something inspiring about this story that can help us think of out whether change is still possible in this country.

ME
A lot of people were thinking about how can they be more involved and how can they show up (not just in name only) as allies, but actually putting things on the line. This is a story that really, we felt like it would help people see that there are others who have done that work before them, that they're not the first that they're not alone and it actually is possible to make a dent in the system.

ZD
As I was doing the interviews for this series, one of the things that kept coming up is that basically everybody I talked to, had been radicalised in some way by the killing of Black people by police in America. I mean, my mom talked a lot about Fred Hampton's death. Jamal Joseph, who was a big part of this series, told us the story about this 10-year-old boy named Clifford Glover, who was killed by police in New York in the early '70s. And I was literally having those conversations about, you know, 'How were you radicalised?' And people would say, 'Well, the police killed this kid, who was unarmed and they shot him in the back'. And then four days later George Floyd was killed. We were already thinking about those issues of police violence and racism and white supremacy, but doing the interviews during the pandemic, over Zoom with people who had this vivid recollection of history, and then seeing this echo of history unfolding, was a big part of what steered the series toward what it became.

SG
You say this thing, right after the clip I just played actually that the story of the Weather Underground is one of the only examples in America of middle-class, young, white people working to overthrow

their own government. Something that I think you all did very effectively is weave in these other histories, that this is not a 10-episode series about a group of young white people, but also about these groups that in many ways, they're in support of the BLA, the Panthers. There are a lot of characters, there are a lot of interlocking social movements and there are a lot of factions between in each of the social movements. How did you start to think that through and map it out?

ME
There are a couple of people who are not here, who deserve a lot of credit for the series: Ariana Lee, who is the senior producer; Arwen Nicks, who was the story editor; and Stephanie Cohn, who was the producer. And I think they all (and you, Zayd) fought very hard for not making it a story just about white people. I think even when we took it on as a company, we're like, 'Yes, this is an important story'. The fact that it was middle-class white people, young white people, willing to put their lives on the line is really important, because it's that kind of intersectionality and interconnectedness that's actually going to affect change. And at the same time, it can't just be about that, right? Because I don't even think the Weather Underground or the Weathermen themselves were trying to have the spotlight in that way. I think the goal was always to focus on the Black people who are being treated unjustly and being oppressed systematically in the United States. So, I think that's the thing that Ariana especially fought for really hard. And then I think Zayd was the person who started to really think through the fact that the Black Liberation Army and the Black Panthers and Fred Hampton and, like, all of these undergrounds were interconnected.

ZD
Crooked was nothing but a great partner but they were saying to us, like, 'What is this? This was supposed to be a family story about your life and the Weather Underground and why is episode three suddenly about this Black Panther, who is not connected to you in that way?' And we had to argue to say, 'No', you can't tell this story without this; it won't work if it's just this', and, 'That story has been told before and the important part about this story right now is what did solidarity look like? What did comradeship look like when people actually tried to take that on?' It meant we had to tear up all our outlines and think: how can you tell a story with this many characters who aren't all in your family, and weave them together and tell a story that's bigger?

SG
I found it really inspiring. I'm working on a project now with a lot of figures in it, a lot of, there's sort of a main narrative and there is this whole constellation, and I'm a story editor, a lot of what I do is say, too many names, too many names, cut the names! And I'm like, alright, you did it! That you know that the listener doesn't necessarily need to track and follow every single name, but you make sure to give enough details about the people they'll need to, but if not, to give us this bigger, more kaleidoscopic view of things...

ZD
You're looking for stuff that is really compelling audio, right? And so, one thing I remember pretty vividly is when you're doing a documentary, you always have white elephants that you're chasing, like,

‘if I could only get that that would be amazing’, or ‘if I could only talk to this person’. Two things happened, as we were having these arguments with Crooked about whether the show could be that big. I had this series of conversations with this guy, Jamal Joseph, who if you've listened to the series, the whole third episode is about him and much of the rest of it. And he's just such an unbelievably good storyteller himself. He's a playwright and a professor at Columbia University. I would have these conversations with him and just think, 'I... this story is too good, I can't not use this!' And I was already thinking, how can we weave these things together? And then at the same time, we finally managed to talk to Kakuya Shakur, who was Assata Shakur's daughter. I wasn't sure we'd ever be able to talk to her. She's a very private person. But that was one of those things where I'd been hoping, kind of like, if we can get that, this whole series will be changed by it. When she agreed to talk and we had those two interviews, it was a lot easier to go back to them and say, 'Look, this is going to be amazing; these people have stories to tell that are crucial to what we're talking about'. That's my main memory of how it came together.

SG
I want to follow the Kakuya line, and I'm gonna play this clip that you sent me of your interview with her—anything you want to say to introduce that?

ZD
Assata Shakur was a member of the Black Liberation Army, which was this radical anti-racist group operating mostly on the east coast in the 1970s and early '80s. She was arrested during a shootout with the New Jersey State Troopers; the man who was in the car with her, Zayd Shakur, whom I'm named after, was killed in that shootout. Assata was arrested. She then became pregnant in jail, she was imprisoned with a comrade in the Black Liberation Army and gave birth to a daughter, Kakuya, who is now my age and, and in a weird way, we had very similar childhoods and also very different childhoods.

[transition to podcast audio]

> ***ZD***
> *When the BLA breaks Assata Shakur out of prison, her daughter Kakuya is five years old too—the same age I was when my mom went to jail. And for a long time, she doesn't see her mother again, or even hear from her.*
>
> ***Kakuya Shakur***
> *I really thought that she had died, and that I probably wouldn't see her again. You know, as a kid, it was just really difficult to try to process all these things. But I remember really not understanding all the explanations about you know, my mother was fighting against racial oppression and... that there were systemic forces that had imprisoned her unfairly. You know, I still just wanted my mom.*
>
> ***ZD***

And then after five years of waiting, 10-year-old Kakuya gets her wish.

KS
I remember my aunt Evelyn just told us, you know, had a sit-down and was like, 'Your mom has been granted political asylum and she's living in Cuba'.

KS
And I was like, 'Oh, OK...'. And it all happened really quickly. Like, as soon as we can get the passport, like we were gone.

ZD
She gets off the plane in Cuba and there's a woman waiting for her on the tarmac.

KS
She's a little different. Like she, the way she had her hair braided, you know, I think she's probably into some tropical ways of dressing. And I just remember thinking, she talks really funny. Like, she didn't have like an American accent anymore. I'm just like, she sounds, you know, really? That's my mother? It was like meeting a stranger, honestly. And next thing I know, it was, I was in school there. And I was living with my mother. I couldn't emotionally, I couldn't let her in. I was very mean to her. Like, I remember the first Christmas there, I was just so upset, right? Like, I need a Christmas tree. And my mother and my godmother, they were trying to make me happy, trying to figure out how in the world to get a Christmas tree when there was no such thing. So they went and got some little tropical pine tree or whatever. And it looked like Charlie Brown, you know, it looks a hot mess. And I just was like, 'Oh, this does not look like a Christmas tree!' She wanted me to accept her and she wanted me to feel that, that she loved me. But I just was rejecting it, you know, for a good two years. You know, people would say things to me about taking care of your mom, this revolutionary, like, 'Well she needs to take care of me, OK?!'

ZD
I'm struck by how similar these experiences are: for me, Kakuya and Chesa, all of us when we were kids feeling like we lost our mothers to the cause. The distance that comes from that, the confusion and anger...

KS
You know, I remember people trying to take our picture, and I was like, 'I don't even want to hold her hands'.

ZD
Kakuya is asking her mom similar questions about why she thought she could be a parent and a revolutionary at the same time.

KS

Why would you have a child? You know, like, why did you decide to have a child? You know, why would you do that when you knew you couldn't raise me? You know, growing older, I began to understand the political struggle that my mother was so passionate about. I think my mother has always kind of been one to like, move to a different beat, a little bit, you know, kind of like those people who are a little bit ahead of their time? You know, a little bit awkward, a little bit different? She questioned things and felt injustice very deeply within her. Almost like air, you know? Like reaching a point where you need to struggle, because you can't live with yourself if you don't...

ZD

When is the last time you saw her like, late, like as an adult?

KS

Ah, let's see. I'm just thinking about kids' ages... I think it was probably 22 years ago. I think about that a lot, that she remembers me as, as a 15-year-old, like, wow, my mother really doesn't know who I am now, as a woman, you know? And then of course, with my children, she never... she doesn't know my children. I think a long time ago, I sort of came to the, you know, to the conclusion that they would never, you know, be able to meet their their grandmother. There's this deep feeling a loss.

SG

Tell me about that interview with Kakuya, what it brought to the podcast, but also what you learned from it.

ZD

Once I knew that I was going to try to tell the story of the relationship between the white underground and the Black underground, there were a couple people who I thought were central to that story and Assata Shakur is one of them. And for those of you who don't know, Assata is still alive, but she's still underground, presumably, in Cuba. When Trump was President, he announced another bounty on her head and the FBI I think is offering a $5 million reward for her capture. She's living under political asylum in Cuba, but also underground and not doing anything public. I knew it'd be very, very hard to talk to her. I've known about Kakuya my whole life, just kind of knowing her name, knowing her as another person who grew up a child of the underground. But I didn't know her, I've never talked to her. And as we were doing our research, I found out she lived in Chicago and very close to where I grew up. And in fact, we live fairly close to each other now. And it's just one of these weird things. Our producers reached out, tried to find her, we didn't have much luck. And it was kind of a year into the process before I found my way from my parents to other people who might know her and asked if she would talk to me. And she hasn't really spoken publicly about her experience. So, I wrote her a long letter, just explaining what this project was, and who I was and saying why I thought it'd be important to talk to her. And she was just unbelievably gracious and nice about it and agreed to talk, and we had

maybe two, two-hour conversations, kind of going back over our own memories of childhood. And she's just one of these people who's an incredibly great interview, because she's not only brilliant and insightful about her own experience, but very open and kind of in the moment of trying to figure it out, and honest about her own recollections and funny when she's talking about very sad things. It was just an amazing conversation. And we basically tore up the scripts for episodes nine and 10 and rewrote them around her.

SG
Misha, this was actually one of the topics you suggested we discuss, so curious if you have thoughts about it. The series ends, really, on the kids of this generation, and on what that meant, on that struggle between parents who have these incredibly strong values that sometimes come in conflict with and sometimes work hand in hand with child raising. How did you figure out how to land the plane?

ME
I was on a campaign from the very beginning to get Zayd to make this more and more personal.

ZD
That's true.

ME
I think that's what makes this story incredibly unique, right? Is his experience being a child of revolutionaries and being a contemporary of others who've gone through a similar experience, and wrestling with those questions in his life and wrestling with those questions with his partner and with his kids and with his parents throughout his life. I felt like the most compelling part of the podcast was this, because I think every parent has to decide how much they are going to raise their children within an insular vacuum and hope that they just make their children good people and let the world take care of itself, versus how much are they going to actively try to change the world in which they're bringing their children up. Everybody could relate to it. To me, as a storyteller, that's the part that felt like, 'Oh, this is going to allow us to access people who we would have otherwise never reached'. You opened up to it slowly, but you did warm up to the idea.

ZD
It's definitely true that I resisted the personal. Like I said, I started out by thinking, I'll write a story that will be about this political history and then Misha will narrate it. So even being a voice was a struggle for me, or was something I hadn't thought about going into it: a first-person voice. I'm a playwright mostly and a screenwriter, and I think in terms of third person. I write for other people. But I warmed up to it, partly because I felt like talking to people like Kakuya, talking to my brother Chesa, other children of revolutionaries -- they all had stories that kind of resonated with mine and rhymed with mine, and I got more interested in mine through talking to them. You talked about landing the plane, Sarah – one of the penultimate moments of the show is my daughter talking to my dad over dinner, about revolution and the consequences for families, and John Brown and slavery, and that was really one of the gifts of doing a non-fiction project. When I'm writing fiction, I agonise over the end...

endlessly. I think it's the most important part of the story. I get it wrong, I rewrite it, I get it wrong again, and it's a constant struggle. So I had written all 10 scripts, they were done. I think we'd even sound-designed the first four or five, and I was still tearing up episode 10, over and over again and trying to find the ending. And we happened to be having dinner at my house, and my dad and my daughter got in a fight about John Brown.

SG
We have that clip, actually.

[transition to podcast audio]

ZD
While I was working on this series, our 13-year-old daughter got into a debate with my dad over dinner. Our daughter had been studying John Brown at school, and she thought he seemed crazy for giving his life and the lives of his sons for a political idea. Keep in mind: my dad literally has a tattoo of John Brown on his back. For him, the radical abolitionists are heroes and role models: white people willing to risk everything in the fight against slavery.

L. Dohrn
I mean, I don't want to diminish his sacrifice. Like, that's amazing. And he made a difference, but, like, come on. I mean, it's not really a rational thing to give up your family and then yourself.

ZD
Well, I mean, they were, they were adults, but he did raise his sons to...

L. Dohrn
Lamb to the slaughter type of deal.

Bill Ayers
No, the point is, when you say, he was a fanatic, he was an extremist—that's true, and it's also true that the rational thing to do was to just let slavery be. I mean, what are you going to do? That's crazy. To me, that's crazy.

ZD
What do you think?

LD
I don't like it; it unsettles me to think about you or Bill, caring about a political issue more than you care about me. I feel like it's a weird to think about a father, who cares more about, like sticking it to the man, than his sons.

ZD

Yeah, that is the kind of conversation we have in my family at dinner. It's not rare. But because I was agonising over the ending and kind of thinking about how to land the plane and all that stuff, as they were having this conversation, I just hit record on my iPhone and slid it into the middle of the table. And it's actually the only time in the whole series that I recorded anybody without prior permission; it was just spur the moment. And I thought, this is weird that I'm thinking about generations and revolution and consequences and they're literally fighting about that at the table. So, I started recording, they didn't notice, they had the fight. I was part of it. And then I just thought, without necessarily concluding anything, it just summed up two parts of my own feeling about it: the dialectic of thinking about family and revolution and what it means and they had done it for me. It's the kind of climactic moment of the series in a lot of ways. I still think of it as like a gift of non-fiction. As a writer, whether you're writing fiction or non-fiction, you have to keep yourself open -- especially if you're obsessed with a project, like I was with this, and like I often am. Everything you see becomes part of what you're working on. And this was a particular example of that – the world has sort of given me the ending that I needed.

Zayd Dohrn is a writer, professor, and director of the MFA in Writing for Screen and Stage in the Department of Radio/Television/Film at Northwestern University.

He is creator and host of the original documentary podcast **Mother Country Radicals**, which won the Audio Storytelling category at the Tribeca Film Festival. Dohrn's plays include *The Profane* (Playwrights Horizons), *Outside People* (The Vineyard/Naked Angels), *Want* (Steppenwolf First Look) and *Reborning* (The Public / Summer Play Festival). **See published plays.**

He is the recipient of the Horton Foote New American Play Prize, the Kennedy Center's Jean Kennedy Smith Award, the Sky Cooper American Playwriting Prize, and Theatre Master's Visionary Playwrights Award, and is a two-time winner of Lincoln Center's Lecomte du Nouy Prize. He is currently writing films for Netflix and FilmNation and developing a television series for eOne. Zayd

attended Brown University, received his MFA from NYU and was a Lila Acheson Wallace Fellow at Juilliard.

Misha is a Pakistani-American writer, podcast host and producer, on a mission to make things that inspire awe. She is the founder and CEO of Dustlight Productions, 2022 Tribeca and Webby winner, and Ad Week's 2019 "Producer of the Year."

She's currently writing a book which will be published by Little Brown. Misha's nonfiction debut will unveil a progressive, largely ignored vision of faith, and how her understanding of Islam is not only compatible with modern ideas around sex, politics and everything in between, but informs them in ways we've never considered before.

Misha is also hosting and executive producing season 2 of Hello, Nature by REI Co-Op Studios & Dustlight, presented by Subaru. The show tells the history and present day story of nature in America

through BIPOC voices. It was selected as a Webby honoree for Best Sustainability and Environment podcast in 2022. Season 2 of the podcast drops in Summer 2023.

Previously, she was the creator and host of Tell Them, I Am, presented by Higher Ground Audio and Spotify and produced by Dustlight. In Ramadan 2021, she hosted and executive produced season 2 of the podcast, which was announced in Rolling Stone. The second season is a 2022 Webby Honoree for Best Series, and winner of Best Diversity and Inclusion podcast, and has been featured in Vogue, It's Been a Minute with Sam Sanders and The Tamron Hall Show. In its debut year— 2019— the LA Times called Tell Them, I Am "quietly revolutionary." The New York Times called it "hypnotic listening" and TIME, The Atlantic, Esquire, Cosmopolitan, Huffington Post and the NYT Podcast Club named it one of their best podcasts of 2019. The series is about the small defining moments in our lives— the voices are all Muslim; the stories are universal. You can learn more about season one from this interview on All Things Considered.

Misha is an Executive Producer on Renegades: Born in the USA and The Michelle Obama Podcast, produced by Dustlight, in collaboration with Higher Ground Audio and Spotify; and on the Tribeca-winning podcast, Mother Country Radicals produced by Dustlight in collaboration with Crooked Media and Audacy.

Before starting Dustlight, Misha produced The Big One: Your Survival Guide, named one of TIME, The Atlantic, Thrillist, Vulture, IndieWire and NYT Podcast Club's best podcasts of 2019. The New Yorker's Sarah Larson called it "riveting" and "strangely reassuring." All this podcasting started in 2017, with her autobiographical series, Beginner, about learning to belong as an immigrant in America.

When Misha wants to give her ears and voice a break, she hosts Quran Book Club on IGTV, makes jokes on McSweeney's and writes serious things for the Wall Street Journal. Sometimes, she naps. But that's not featured anywhere.

Misha got her B.A in Philosophy from UC Irvine, and got her Masters in Journalism at Northwestern University. She has taught as an adjunct professor at USC Annenberg, and at the Transom Radio Workshop.

Sarah Geis is a producer, editor, and teacher based in Chicago.