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BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

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Between Two Worlds

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A 22-Minute Documentary

Master of Journalism E-Scholarship Submission: Class of 2026

Abstract, Treatment, Source List

May 4, 2026

Abstract: Between Two Worlds

By Fuwad Ahamad

Between Two Worlds is a non-linear, character-driven documentary that follows Iranian asylum seeker Hamid Ziaei as he navigates cycles of detention, displacement, and rebuilding within the U.S. immigration system.

The film opens on the day of his detention on June 26, 2025. Through a recorded phone call between an ICE officer and Ziaei's friend Seti Farokhnia, we piece together what unfolds inside the Federal Building in Santa Ana, California. The audio reveals the high-handedness of ICE officials and the refusal to allow Ziaei to see his friends one last time before being taken into custody.

The narrative then moves to one week after Ziaei's release from his ICE detention. In the fragile aftermath, he moves through a disorienting return to freedom—attempting to recover documents, restore legal status, and rebuild the foundations of daily life that were abruptly taken from him again. This moment becomes the emotional entry point of the film, situating the audience within instability rather than resolution.

From this rupture, the film moves through fragmented layers of memory and experience. Ziaei reflects on his life in Iran, where his involvement in the Women, Life, Freedom protests led to persecution and forced him to flee. These memories are interwoven with his arrival in the United States, where he initially sought safety but instead experienced his first immigration detention, lasting six months. Although he is eventually released under an order preventing deportation to Iran, his legal status remains precarious.

In Los Angeles, Ziaei begins rebuilding from nothing, working multiple jobs—as a delivery driver, caregiver, Airbnb manager, and personal trainer—constructing fragile stability through constant labor. Frustration with the U.S. immigration system and political disillusionment shapes his complex political stance, including support for Donald Trump, whom he believes could influence change in Iran. He attends a rally, holds campaign signs, and shares content online.

Between these scenes, audio from detention center calls with Seti Farokhnia surfaces, revealing his emotional state and the contradictions in his political beliefs during confinement.

The film follows his second attempt at rebuilding, moving between legal offices, waiting rooms, and informal work while trying to recover identity and stability. In parallel, he seeks grounding through training at the gym and fleeting moments of freedom, including time at Atrek.

Set against expanding immigration enforcement, *Between Two Worlds* examines detention not as a single event, but as a recurring rupture that destabilizes identity, labor, and belonging, asking what safety means when it is repeatedly revoked.

List of Sources: Between Two Worlds

by Fuwad Ahamad

Cast:

Sudi Farokhnia, President, IADC (Orange County, California)

Seti Farokhnia: Businessowner, Iranian community leader (Orange County, California)

Hamid Ziaei: Iranian asylum seeker detained by ICE (Orange County, California)

Background and research:

Kourosh Ziabari, Iranian Journalist (New York)

Roozbeh Farhanipour, business owner (Los Angeles, California)

Pastor Masoud Massah (Los Angeles, California)

Pastor Masoud Massah's congregation

Treatment: Between Two Worlds

by Fuwad Ahamad

LOGLINE

An Iranian asylum seeker rebuilds his life in California—until ICE detention takes everything from him, again.

SUMMARY

Between Two Worlds is a character-driven documentary that follows Hamid Ziaei, an Iranian asylum seeker who fled Iran seeking safety and a new life in California. He was detained on arrival and spent six months in detention, and was eventually released with work authorization but his asylum request was denied. After living quietly and working under legal authorization, Hamid's life is shattered, again, during a routine 2025 ICE check-in in Santa Ana, where he is suddenly detained and served with a deportation order.

The film captures the visceral, real-time chaos of his arrest through recordings kept by his friend, Seti Farokhnia, and explores the psychological toll of his subsequent incarceration. Set against the backdrop of intensified immigration raids targeting the Iranian community, the documentary chronicles the desperate legal and personal battle to prevent Hamid from being sent back to a regime where he faces certain persecution. It is a story of resilience, the fragile nature of "home," and a man caught in the crossfire of international politics and an indifferent legal system.

FINAL TREATMENT

Hook

The film opens inside an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility at the Federal Building in Santa Ana, California. Through audio recordings, we hear the moment everything changes. In June 2025, what was supposed to be a routine check-in becomes a trap. Hamid Ziaei, who was report at the ICE facility as required after his release, is told he is being detained again and prepared for deportation. Officers provide little information. In a phone call, his friend Seti Farokhnia is told he must submit fingerprints, voluntarily or by force, and that she cannot see him. There will be no goodbyes for them.

This moment sets the tone for the film: uncertainty, distance and the quiet violence of bureaucracy.

Act I



The first act follows Hamid after his release from a six-month detention. Instead of returning to stability, he finds his life further fractured. During his detention, his friend's home was robbed. A safe box containing his Social Security card and work permit, documents that prove his allow him to legally work in the U.S., were stolen. Without them, he struggles to exist within the system. He moves between offices, searching for answers, but receives none.

Through verite scenes and recorded calls, we learn that Hamid is not alone. He is one of hundreds of Iranians detained during a wave of arrests following heightened tensions between the United States and Iran. Many were released months later to find their lives dismantled—homes lost, jobs gone, legal status uncertain.

As Hamid tries to rebuild, the film shows the fragility of his situation. He had begun working multiple jobs—delivery, in-home services, and personal training—to support himself and build a future. But that progress is easily undone. Without documentation, even basic survival becomes difficult.

This act portrays a man caught in suspension—physically free, but structurally trapped.

Act II



The second act turns to Hamid's past, grounding his present in the life he left behind. Through his own voice, we learn about his identity as a bodybuilder, his community, and his participation in protests in Iran. He describes being arrested and tortured for what he calls "a simple, regular life"—for socializing, for drinking, for resisting.

His involvement in the Women, Life, Freedom movement following the death of Mahsa Amini marked a turning point. He was identified as a protest leader, detained and abused. Eventually, he fled—traveling from Turkey to Brazil, then entering the United States through Mexico in January 2024, where he was detained again for six months. His asylum claim was denied, but he was granted protection from deportation to Iran.

The film also explores contradictions within Hamid's identity. Despite his experiences, he expresses strong support for Donald Trump, believing U.S. leadership can help bring change to Iran. This tension—between vulnerability and political belief—adds complexity to his character and resists easy categorization.

Through calls from detention, we hear his fear and confusion. He describes harsh conditions—lack of food, water and basic care—and questions the system he once saw as a

refuge. Meanwhile, his friend and legal advocates work urgently to prevent his deportation, racing against a tightening legal timeline.

This act situates Hamid’s story within larger systems—of migration, politics and power—while keeping the focus on his lived experience.

Act III



In the final act, we see Hamid return to a version of life that feels both familiar and altered. He resumes his efforts to rebuild—searching for work, reconnecting with his community, and participating in political rallies for Iran. Publicly, he appears active and engaged.

Privately, however, the sense of loss remains. He cannot return home. He cannot bring his family to the United States. He speaks of his parents and brothers with distance—people he cannot touch, hug or see.

Yet there are moments of quiet gratitude. Walking outside, seeing people, feeling ordinary life—these become meaningful again. “Freedom,” he says, is essential, even in its most basic form.

The film closes in this space of contradiction: a man who has escaped one system of repression only to encounter another form of instability. His life remains unresolved, shaped by forces beyond his control, yet grounded in small, persistent acts of survival.

ARTISTIC APPROACH

Between Two Worlds is a non-linear, character-driven documentary that blends observational vérité, interviews, archival material, and audio recordings to construct an emotionally immersive and fragmented portrait of displacement, detention, and survival. The film's form mirrors its subject: a life shaped by cycles of rupture, uncertainty, and attempted reconstruction.

The visual language is grounded in cinéma vérité, following Hamid Ziaei in intimate, real-time moments as he moves through daily life in Los Angeles, works multiple jobs, attends legal appointments, and navigates the aftermath of detention. These observational sequences are interwoven with interviews with Hamid and his close friend Seti Farokhnia, offering reflection and emotional counterpoint to lived experience.

A central structural device is the use of audio as narrative memory. Phone call recordings from Hamid's time in detention—particularly conversations with Seti—form an emotional backbone of the film. Layered over present-day imagery, they transform detention from a physical space into an ongoing psychological condition that extends beyond confinement.

The film also incorporates archival material from Iran, including footage related to the Women, Life, Freedom protests, situating Hamid's story within a broader political movement and collective memory. Private videos of Hamid's farewell with his family further ground the narrative in the emotional reality of exile and separation.

Select observational sequences place Hamid within public political spaces in the U.S., including moments connected to national-level immigration discourse, contrasting institutional rhetoric with lived experience.

The structure is intentionally non-linear, moving between present-day struggle, memory, and rupture without strict chronology. This reflects the psychological reality of detention and displacement, where time is fragmented rather than sequential.

THEMATIC STATEMENT

Between Two Worlds is situated within the urgent global context of forced migration, political persecution, and increasingly punitive immigration systems in the U.S. At its core, the film examines what asylum means today—not as an abstract legal category, but as a lived condition shaped by political rupture, family separation, and ongoing instability. By following Hamid Ziaei's journey—through detention, release and the fragile process of rebuilding—the film brings context, dignity and emotional depth to a life often reduced to legal status and statistics.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for this documentary includes both general and specialized viewers interested in human rights, migration, and the lived realities of asylum seekers within the U.S. immigration system.

Primarily, the film is aimed at audiences engaged with stories of displacement, political asylum, and the long-term psychological and social effects of exile. This includes festival audiences, independent documentary viewers, and communities involved in social justice and immigrant rights advocacy.

A key audience is the Iranian diaspora, particularly in California. For this group, the film speaks to questions of memory, survival, and the ongoing emotional and political consequences of leaving Iran under threat of persecution. It also reflects the complex experience of rebuilding identity in the United States while remaining connected to struggles in the homeland.

The film is also intended for policymakers, legal advocates, and organizations working in immigration and asylum systems. By grounding abstract policy debates in a personal narrative, it aims to deepen public understanding of how detention and asylum processes impact real lives.

Principal Photography Schedule: Between Two Worlds

by Ahamad Fuwad

1. **Dec. 22, 2025:** Hamid Ziae's visit to Social Security Administration and Federal Building in Santa Ana
2. **Dec. 23, 2025:** Film Kourosh's arrival in Los Angeles.
3. **Dec. 25, 2025:** Kourosh working from home, making calls to find sources.
4. **Dec. 26, 2025:** Interview with Roozbeh Farhanipour in West Wood.
5. **Dec. 28, 2025:** Interview with Seti Farokhnia and Sudi Farokhnia in Orange County.
6. **Dec. 30, 2025:** Kourosh's calls to pastor Masoud and interview with his congregants.
7. **Jan. 1, 2026:** Interview with Kourosh in Los Angeles.
8. **Jan. 8, 2026:** Film b roll of Los Angeles.
9. **Feb. 13, 2026:** Filming with Hamid at the gym and his friend's place where he is staying.
10. **Feb. 14, 2026:** Interview with Hamid and at the Los Angeles protests against the Islamic Regime.
11. **Feb. 15, 2026:** Hamid's day out, hiking and meeting with Farokhnia sisters.
12. **Feb. 20, 2026:** Democratic convention in San Francisco, filming Sudi Farokhnia's speech.

Budget: Between Two Worlds

by Fuwad Ahamad

Category	Line Item	No.	Unit	Rate	Budgeted (No. X Rate)	Notes	Actual (with receipts)
Travel							
	Airfare	2	people	\$100.00	\$200.00	SFO-LA (Return Trip)	
	Accommodation	2	people	\$1,000.00	\$2,000.00	For two weeks: An AirBnB would cost around \$2000 (the lowest available price atm). But I'm working on subletting a room/a one BR apartment/studio for two weeks.	
	Taxi/Uber/Lyft	12	fares	\$100.00	\$1,200.00	For 12 days, \$50 per ride, to and from location. This is a big expense for me, because I don't have car or a driver's license.	
	Baggage Fees	2	fee	\$100.00	\$200.00	United: \$50 per bag up to 99.9 lbs.	

	Travel Subtotal				\$3,600.00		
Production							
	Batteries	2	AA	\$50.00	\$100.00		
	Tape	1	roll	\$30.00	\$30.00		
	Production Subtotal				\$130.00		
Post-Production							
	Music	1	score	in kind	0		
	Color	1	color	in kind	0		
	Sound	1	mix	in kind	0		
	Post-Production Subtotal				\$3,730.00		

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Scene List: Between Two Worlds

by Fuwad Ahamad

- <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1C43GgsC4uJF0ZmM9Wq9rktXnmSB4mW40/edit?gid=859337781#gid=859337781>

Lookbook: Between Two Worlds

by Fuwad Ahamad



The film blends handheld observational scenes with intimate character footage and formal interviews to create a textured, emotional portrait of a journalist documenting lives disrupted by ICE detentions in Los Angeles. The visual approach is rooted in closeness and intimacy: staying physically near Kourosh as he moves through the world while allowing quiet, static moments to reveal the weight carried by the families he meets.

All verité sequences — including meetings between characters — will be filmed handheld, while tripod setups will be used for non-moving, reflective scenes and formal interviews. Handheld camerawork conveys instability, uncertainty, and the feeling of following a story as it unfolds, while locked-off tripod shots anchor moments of grief, reflection and absence.

Visual inspirations include *The Octopus Murders*, *The Undocumented Lawyer* and *Writing With Fire* for its intimate, character-driven focus on a journalist.



Scene: Kourosh meeting Farokhnia sisters





Setareh Farokhnia:

50mm lens, f/2.0 for an intimate portrait

Close-up: A sombre and intimate interview frame, showing her connection to Hamid



Sudi Farokhnia:

50mm prime, f/2.8 for shallow depth and gentle background falloff with a portrait feel.

Wide: A sombre and natural interview frame. Feels for the community but not personal.

Arthur Sahakyan: 17–55mm lens around 35mm, f/4–5 to keep the environment visible but soft.

Wide: Framed wide to show family photos, children's drawings, and toys. To also show the vastness of the space. Similar frame but will be shallower.





Anonymous detainee: 70–200 around 100mm, f/5.6 to maintain silhouette.

Wide: No identifying features visible; hands partially visible but out of focus. He is invisible, representative of thousands who have been detained.



Kourosh Ziabari: 50 mm, f/2.8 for intimacy

Close: Direct-to-camera. Clean, controlled background (office desk, laptop, or empty wall with warm light.



Scenes: Wide and c

Kourosh's FaceTime With Family



Setareh's Call With Hamid



Arthur's call with Arpineh

Locations

LOS ANGELES





WESTWOOD





Locations

LOS ANGELES





WESTWOOD





Locations

LOS ANGELES





WESTWOOD





Additional Visual References



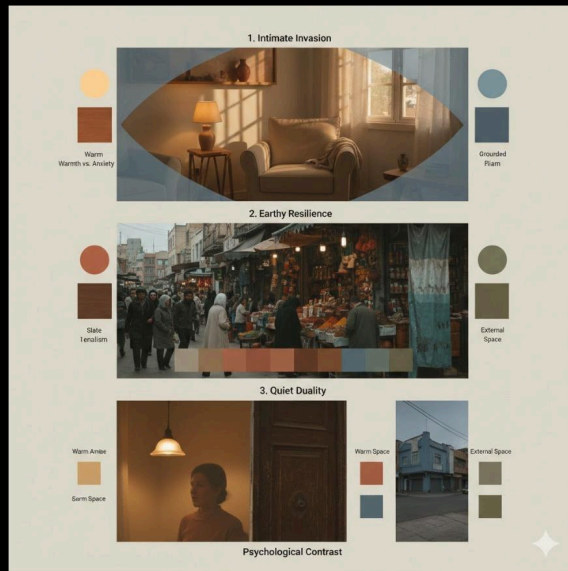
The image displays three visual references for the character, arranged in a collage format against a black background. The top-left reference shows a woman with long dark hair and black-rimmed glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light-colored shirt, standing in an office environment. The top-right reference is a close-up of a red folder or bag, showing a blue folder inside. The bottom-right reference is a close-up of the woman's face, showing her looking upwards with a concerned expression, wearing the same glasses and suit.



Additional Visual References



Color Palette



Family spaces like homes: Use warm colors like amber or soft beige achieved through natural light or warm artificial lights to emphasize safety, intimacy and the emotional warmth of domestic life.

When referencing captivity: For Hamid's video calls from the detention center or his voiceover describing life in confinement, shift subtly into cooler tones. The anonymous source interview will be framed in slate blue, reinforcing the emotional distance, isolation, and starkness of captivity.