



FROM HERE

A film by
Christina Antonakos-Wallace



fromherefilm.com

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Logline:

Set in Berlin and New York, FROM HERE is a hopeful story of four young visionaries, all children of immigrants, decolonizing their own lives in an era of rising nationalism.

Synopsis:

FROM HERE accompanies Tania, Sonny, Miman, and Akim, four dynamic artists and activists in the crosshairs of immigration and integration debates. As they move from their 20's into their 30's, they face major turning points that bring questions of identity to the fore: fighting for citizenship, creating family, surviving violence, and finding creative expression. This intimate documentary captures their journey to define belonging for themselves in societies that are increasingly hostile to their existence. Filmed over a decade in two of the world's largest immigration countries—the U.S. and Germany—their individual stories echo the millions of young people from immigrant families coming of age during this era of rising nationalism. FROM HERE offers four distinct visions of resistance and resilience—showing not only their struggle, but enormous power.



The Protagonists



SONNY: Sonny is a full-time musician, whose rock-band recently signed with Warner Brothers. They are being preened to be next big political rock band. He excitedly ponders, “This country has never seen a dude with a turban in popular culture!” It’s a dream come true, but it comes to a grinding halt.

Sonny’s three white bandmates

insist on recording a song that insults religious people, against his wishes. He quits the band and plunges into an unexpected journey into the Sikh community. When he accepts a day job at a Sikh civil rights organization, he is tasked with learning Punjabi. Sonny travels to India and returns to establish himself as mentor to Sikh youth and a critical voice from within the community, where he long felt an outsider. Along the way, he finds a new musical home in a Bhangra-funk band, Red Baraat.



MIMAN (Berlin): “Why should I have to justify applying for German citizenship?” Miman asks, leaning over the long and complex paperwork. Born in Germany to Roma parents from Macedonia, has no right for citizenship as the child of immigrants born before 2000. But with his first baby on the way, he has decided it is time for

him to be able to vote. A social worker with Roma refugees, Miman is a fierce advocate for his community, but struggles with the weight of the collective trauma. He is the only “out” member of his family, who fear losing their jobs or homes. When Miman’s first child is born, he holds his baby and beams with love. But there is also a new strain. Will he be able to give his child the sense of identity that he holds so dear?



TANIA (New York): When Tania was brought to the USA from Bolivia at age four, her parents never imagined that she would still be living without papers. Despite her master's degree and obvious talents, being undocumented affects everything from her ability to pick up a package at the post office to entering into serious relationships.

Her recent decision to come out as undocumented and campaign with others has simultaneously exposed and protected her from the possibility of deportation. Tania volunteers full-time with an activist network of immigrant youth on top of her restaurant job. In meetings, at rallies, and to reporters she declares: "I am undocumented and unafraid." When Obama responds to this activism by offering temporary status to "Dreamers," Tania must weigh out the risk of an executive order. Her fears are fulfilled as Trump takes office, but so is her resolve to keep fighting. This journey is not only one papers but for a dignified life in which she and other immigrants are treated as human beings, and have the opportunity for love and flourishing.



AKIM (Berlin): For well-known Berlin street-artist Akim, integration isn't about "fitting in" but making one's mark on the world. "That's also a kind of integration — to take up space, to infiltrate it." As the film's poet philosopher, Akim shares his experience as the child of Vietnamese "boat people" as he travels between the two cities

that comprise the backdrop of the film. He embeds these urban spaces with his three-dimensional installations and graffiti art, while reflecting on his choice to transform tragedy into art, and claim his life for himself. His moving recreations of the vessel his family used to flee Vietnam as "Boat People" are an apt metaphor for not only the traumas of displacement but also the home that travels within us.

A DISCUSSION WITH THE DIRECTOR

Why did you start to make this film?

FROM HERE is more than a decade in the making, but the questions about belonging that gave rise to the film came from my childhood. I grew up in a tight-knit Greek-American community and became a youth organizer for racial and gender justice in middle school. The Greek-American community is centered around the Orthodox Church, an unapologetically conservative institution. I was a girl. I was queer. I was a young artist and discovering my leftist politics. I didn't feel I could ever be accepted as myself.

Stepping away as a teenager from the church also felt like stepping away from "Greekness," a sense of identity that my family had worked so hard to pass on to me. To add to my confusion, the anti-racist activist groups I was a part of framed assimilation as a capitulation to white supremacy. Both seemed to suggest to me that I was "selling out." There is nothing remarkable about this story—I see it as incredibly common—but it set me out on a journey.

After years of searching to understand my relationship to my identities, including living in Greece, working in various capacities for immigrant and refugee rights, studying theories of identity, and interviewing dozens of people, I began the project that eventually became "From Here." I had experienced the growing nationalism in Europe firsthand and was witnessing the anti-immigrant movement grow in the U.S. It seemed clear to me that deep fear of demographic change was blocking efforts for immigration reform and greater justice for immigrants on both continents.

I was hungry for complex and empowering stories about diaspora and identity that offered an antidote to the idea that immigration is a threat, and broke the myths of cultural and racial purity. As a visual artist, it began as a video-art installation but resonated with so many people that I decided to let it grow. The installation grew into a film and around the film few an ongoing educational and media initiative.

My approach to filmmaking was always informed by my background in visual art and community organizing. I let the project take many forms beyond a film project. As someone from a more privileged experience than the film's protagonists, (a white US citizen from an earlier wave of European immigrants), it was essential for me that the

project be collaborative with people in both countries who are directly impacted by migration and racism. It was also important to create opportunities for ongoing feedback from immigrant communities and young people. It took time.

Ultimately, I started to make the FROM HERE because it was the film I needed as a young person.

What got you interested in creating a film about belonging?

We are surrounded by the idea that cultures are static, pure, fragile, and have clear boundaries. The unspoken (or sometimes spoken) logic is that we don't follow the rules and maintain group loyalties, we are traitors. This flawed logic is expressed in many spaces, including white nationalist movements, currently on the rise. We are in the midst of a political atmosphere where the question of who is considered to belong is at the very heart of our political divides.

My personal experience of feeling unable to belong within the community I was supposed to belong, created a deep thirst for understanding my own "roots," and the tension between tradition and change. I wanted to understand the relationship between assimilation and racism, and how we might work skillfully with our identities in pursuit of justice.

The process of making FROM HERE led me to new questions and some clarity. I came to understand migration as a core human experience. I came to believe that reinforcing rigid boundaries around any configuration of US and THEM is preventing those of us active for justice from effectively building movements that can be liberatory.

Advancing belonging for all became a goal for me, but it was not my language in the beginning. In 2014, I started using 'Reimagining Belonging' as the tagline for the film, inspired by a conversation with one of the film's protagonists, Tania Mattos. In embracing that word, I didn't yet realize that we were part of a larger cultural movement in which the concept of belonging was gaining intellectual form and force. It is guiding work for human flourishing and transformational politics across disciplines - from racial justice leaders like john a. powell, to spiritual leaders like Rev. angel Kyodo williams, to pop-culture thought leaders like Brené Brown.

There are millions of people who are being denied meaningful belonging, but whose political participation and social vision are profoundly needed. I hope that FROM HERE counters the culture of fear with a culture of possibility.

What do you want this film TO DO in the world?

As storytellers, we know that stories don't just reflect reality: they create it. In the face of narrow nationalism, we need an avalanche of counter-narratives. Stories that connect us to our interdependence, challenge the fiction of cultural purity and loss; and open our imagination to a future where all of us belong. In contrast to a rapid-fire news cycle, FROM HERE explores deep questions that are vital for our future. What approaches to identity are emerging from the margins that eschew rigidity, and offer new forms of belonging? Can we invest in US without creating THEM? Can we see cultural change and plurality not as a threat but an opportunity, even if it is not always easy?

I am motivated by how film can create space for people with a shared experience to gather, heal, discuss, break isolation, build solidarity and tap into collective power.

The protagonists are on-the-ground change-makers in different ways—from crafting policy to mentoring children, to creating works of art. Each offer models of resistance and resilience, and I hope in doing so, they spark audiences imaginations of the many ways there are to make changes. Their individual stories echo the millions of young people coming of age during this time of polarization, showing not only the struggles but enormous power.

Why is it important for this film to come out now?

Politicians have decided immigrants are the most convenient THEM to exclude from the US. Anti-immigrant politics is currently the most effective tool of the fast-growing far-right in the United States and Europe. Donald Trump has consistently chosen to target immigrants as the most reliable tactic to galvanize his base. The far-right “Alternative for Germany” party shifted their focus away from economics to anti-immigrant rhetoric to win unprecedented gains the last election year. Both resulted in far-right political victories not seen for generations in either country. The combination of rhetoric and political power has emboldened racists, and deadly hate crimes have skyrocketed.

Meanwhile, we know that migration will only continue. Humans have always migrated to survive and thrive. And while migration is as old as humanity, its speed is increasing. Our political systems have not caught up. Goods, weapons, capital, pollutants, and information can move ever more freely, but humans cannot. Millions are denied basic dignity because of being born on the wrong side of a border or trying to cross one.

If we want politics that are liberatory and meet the urgent crises of our times—whether that be the climate crisis, the increase of refugees, or the rise of authoritarianism—we need to find better ways to build solidarity. The protagonists of *FROM HERE* grew up with “a border running through them.”* All of them have grown up with double vision, multiple mother tongues, and a sense of connection to a larger world. They have operated as translators for their families and bridges between cultural worlds. Through the position of being an insider/outsider in both the dominant society and their parents’ cultures, there is no easy belonging, and therefore there are new possibilities of how we can come together.

Over ten years since this project’s inception, as immigrants are under attack from politicians in both continents, the urgency to get this film out feels enormous.

* phrase borrowed from Arundathi Roy



Filmmaker Christina Antonakos-Wallace (left) with Protagonist Sonny Singh (on mic)

About the Filmmakers

Director/Producer/Editor/Camera, Christina Antonakos-Wallace

is a filmmaker and cultural organizer. Awards include the Euromedia Award for Culture & Diversity (2011), a Media that Matters Change Maker Award (2012), and recognition from the German Alliance for Democracy and Tolerance (2015). Her short films and interactive work has been exhibited in over a dozen countries—in contexts from schools, to festivals, galleries, to corporations. Commissions and grants include the New America Foundation, Seattle Office of Arts and Culture, and the German Ministry for Civic Education. She was a Fellow at Hedgebrook (2017) and the Port Townsend Film Festival (2015), and holds a BFA/BA from the New School & Parsons School of Design. Her work was recognized with a five-year MTV Fight For Your Rights Scholarship (2002) and a Humanity in Action Fellowship (2006), which she completed at the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, in Berlin. *From Here* is her first feature-length documentary.

Creative Producer, Canan Turan

is a film scholar and documentary filmmaker from Berlin. For over a decade, she has worked in the production of documentary and fiction projects directed by Jeremy Xido, Neco Çelik, Döndü Eylem Kılıç and others. Her directorial debut “Kıymet” (2012) was featured at international film festivals including Documentarist Istanbul and was shown at the Kino Moviemento theater Berlin for one year. She received a Gerd Ruge Grant from the Film and Media Foundation North Rhine Westphalia for her feature documentary *Kaya — The Rock and the Sea*. Canan has published work in the field of German-Turkish cinema and intersectional feminism. She organizes and gives talks at film festivals and cultural centers, and lectures at universities including Braunschweig University of Art and Philipps University, Marburg.

Producer, Amy Benson

owns Nonfiction Media, a production company based in Seattle. Since 2008, Amy has been working on a documentary trilogy about one family in Nepal. *Drawing the Tiger*, the first film was a granted project of the Sundance Institute and Fork Films. It premiered at Hot Docs in April 2015. It received the Documentary Feature Award from CAAM Fest, the Jury Award for Best Documentary at the Asiatica Film Festival and the UNICEF award at Film South Asia. The sequel, *The Eldest Son*, premiered at the Kathmandu Mountain Film Festival in 2017. The final film, *Literate*, is in production.

Producer, Theresa Navarro

is an Independent Spirit Award nominated producer. She is the Vice President of External Affairs at American Documentary | POV. Her recent producing credits include the public television series AMERICA REFRAMED, CAAM funded sports documentary 9-MAN, and Jennifer Phang's sci-fi feature ADVANTAGEOUS, which won the U.S. Competition Special Jury Prize for collaborative vision at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival. In 2011, CAAM nominated her as one of 15 women leaders to be recognized in honor of the National Asian Pacific Women's Forum.

Editor, Aletta von Viettinghoff

is a Berlin-based editor who has been working in documentary, fiction, and television for ten years. Her most recent film, "Riese Nach Jerusalem" won Best Film and the Special Ex-Berliner Prize at the 2018 Achtung Berlin Film Festival. Her first feature documentary, "Audre Lorde: the Berlin Years," was featured in the Panorama section of the 2012 Berlin Film Festival, and has screened at over 100 festivals internationally. In 2013 she edited the feature documentary "Creative Despite War," which was broadcast on Swedish Public Television. In 2015, she was selected as a Talent at the Berlin Film Festival, where she now organizes the Editing track of the Berlin Talents.

Composer, (Elizabeth) Alex Guy

is a Seattle-based composer and string performer. Her work ranges solo compositions for film, theater, and dance, to the completion of three full length albums with the project Led to Sea, written, arranged and co-produced by Alex herself. She has collaborated as an improviser with musicians such as Wayne Horvitz, James Knapp, Samantha Boshnack and Susie Ibarra. Her solo projects have performed across Europe and the U.S. She has also toured extensively over the last ten years as a string and keys player with musicians such as Angel Olsen, Laura Veirs, Lemolo, Mirah, Sera Cahoone, Thao and the Get Down Stay Down and Danny Barnes.

Impact Producer & Education Director, Chrystian Rodriguez

is a New York-based filmmaker, educator, and program manager with over 15 years experience. Chrystian has committed his work to creating inclusive and empowering learning spaces for filmmakers, artists, educators, and community organizers. He currently serves as the Workshop Director at Third World Newsreel. Chrystian recently managed capacity building programs and learning networks with the Mozilla Foundation and Youth INC. Chrystian has also worked as a program leader and educator with organizations such as Global Action Project, Free Arts NYC, the Tribeca Film Institute, and Manhattan Neighborhood Network.

Additional Credits

CO-DIRECTOR (Miman's Story)
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CONSULTING PRODUCERS
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SOUND MIX
David Richards

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Kettle Media Concepts- Nigel Kettle

OPENING ANIMATION
Moment Films - Julien Scherliss

MUSIC
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Grupo Rebolu
Red Baraat
Outernational

FEATURED ORGANIZATIONS
The New York State Youth Leadership Council
The Sikh Coalition
Lebenswelte
UnLocal