



*"This is my home. I belong here and I'm going to fight to stay."* Tania Mattos

# FROM HERE

A film by Christina Antonakos-Wallace



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89 minutes | USA, Germany | 2020

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## Logline:

Set in Berlin and New York, FROM HERE is a hopeful story of four young artists and activists from immigrant families redefining belonging in an era of rising nationalism globally.

## Synopsis:

FROM HERE is a hopeful story of Tania, Sonny, Miman, and Akim - artists and activists based in Berlin and New York whose lives and futures hang in the balance of immigration and integration debates. As the US and Germany grapple with racism, nationalism, and a fight over their national identities, our protagonists move from their 20s into their 30s and face major turning points in their lives: fighting for citizenship, starting families, and finding room for creative expression. Spanning a decade in two of the world's largest centers of immigration, this sensitive and nuanced documentary captures their journeys to redefine what it means to "belong" in societies that are increasingly hostile to their existence. FROM HERE offers four distinct visions of resistance and resilience—showing not only their struggle, but enormous power.





## The Protagonists



**SONNY:** Sonny is a Brooklyn-based Sikh-American rocker whose band has recently signed with Warner Records. He excitedly reflects: “This country has never seen a dude with a turban in popular culture!” It’s any musician’s dream come true, but comes to a grinding halt when Sonny’s white bandmates bulldoze his opinions. Sonny quits the band and plunges into an unexpected journey deeper

into “his own” community. He accepts a day job at a Sikh civil rights organization and is required to travel to India to study Punjabi. There he is confronted with his own “American-ness” head on, while also finding himself connecting to his spiritual traditions. Sonny returns to establish himself within the Sikh community as a mentor and organizer, a place where he had long felt an outsider. Moving full circle, he finds a new musical home touring the world with Red Baraat, a multi-racial band that brings together Punjabi musical traditions with jazz, funk, rock, hip-hop.



**MIMAN (Berlin):** “Why should I have to justify myself?” Miman asks, stumbling over a question in the complex German citizenship application. As the child of Roma parents from Macedonia, he had no right to citizenship when he was born in Düsseldorf. Now his first baby is on the way, and he has decided it is time to be able vote. During the day, Miman is a social worker with Roma refugees from

the Balkans. He is a fierce advocate for his community, but struggles with the weight of their collective trauma and depression. He is the only member of his own family who publicly identifies as Roma because they fear that sharing their identity will lead to losing their jobs or homes. When Miman’s baby arrives, he holds him close and beams with love but he is struggling with deep questions: Will he be able to give his child the sense of identity that he holds so dear? Is the strain with his wife due to their cultural differences? Miman and his partner separate. As his domestic life frays, he questions his desire to belong in Germany at all.



**TANIA** (New York): When four-year-old Tania was brought to the USA from Bolivia, her parents never imagined that at 27, 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 become an

activist and come out as undocumented simultaneously exposes and protects her from the possibility of deportation. In meetings, at rallies, and to reporters she declares: "I am undocumented and unafraid." But when Obama responds to this activism by offering temporary status to "Dreamers," Tania must weigh out the risk of an executive order. She decides that registering is the best option, despite the fear that it will increase her risk of deportation in the future. With DACA she's able to get a "real job" and move forward. Her earlier fears are realized when Trump takes office, but so is her resolve to keep fighting. Her journey is not only one to procure papers, but to live a dignified life in which she and other immigrants are treated as human beings.



**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." He refuses to flatten his identity or narrative for anyone, rejecting the requests of journalists, gallerists or friends to explain his work. As the film's poet-philosopher, Akim travels between Berlin and New York,

creating art and sharing his story as the child of Vietnamese refugees. He came alone to Germany, carried tremendous responsibility, and was passed between households and systems that didn't understand him. Akim embeds urban centers with three-dimensional installations and graffiti while reflecting on his choice to transform tragedy into art, and claim his life for himself. His moving recreations and destructions of the vessel his family used to flee Vietnam as "Boat People" are an apt metaphor for the home that travels within us, releasing trauma and claiming our own liberation.

# The Filmmakers

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



Christina 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). Holding screenings in a dozen countries—her work is shown in diverse contexts from Google Headquarters, to NGOs to film-festivals including Dok Leipzig and the Human Rights Watch Film Festival London. Commissions and grants for her work 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). With a BFA/BA from the New School &

Parsons School of Design, she graduated with honors. 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 a personal project that grew from questions of how to advance racial equity in an era of globalization, and the search for her own sense of belonging in the context of generational migration.



## Creative Producer, Çanan 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 Kiliç and others. Her directorial debut “Kıymet” (2012) was featured at international film festivals including Documentarist Istanbul and was shown at the Kino Moviemiento 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.



## **Amy Benson, Co-Producer**



Amy owns Nonfiction Media, a production company based in Seattle where she produces, shoots and edits films telling the stories organizations around the globe. Since 2008, Amy has been working on a doc trilogy about one family in Nepal. *DRAWING THE TIGER*, the first film, was a granted project of the Sundance Institute and premiered at Hot Docs in April 2015. It was awarded the Best Feature Jury prize by the Northwest Film Forum, the Documentary Feature Award from CAAM Fest, the Jury Award for the 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. Amy is a founding member of the Seattle Documentary Association is passionate about supporting filmmakers in their process.

## **Theresa Navarro, Co-Producer**



THERESA NAVARRO is a Pinay cultural worker and Independent Spirit Award-nominated producer. Over the past decade, she has managed development, communications and public program initiatives for award-winning media arts organizations, including cause-marketing collaborations with Disney, HBO, Macy's, MTV, Toyota, and Verizon. Her independent producing credits include *DAYLIGHT SAVINGS* (SXSW '12), sports documentary *9-MAN* (DOCNYS '14) and sci-fi feminist film *ADVANTAGEOUS* (SUNDANCE '15) which received a Special Jury Prize for collaborative vision. Theresa recently

served as associate producer for the Emmy-nominated documentary series *AMERICA REFRAMED* on WORLD Channel and is currently vice president of external affairs at American Documentary, the producer of *POV* on PBS. Born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, Theresa holds undergraduate degrees from the University of California at Riverside and completed her graduate work at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She was nationally recognized as one of 15 Asian Pacific American Women Leaders for her work in the media arts in 2011.

## **Composer, (Elizabeth) Alex Guy**

is a Seattle-based composer and string performer. Her work ranges from 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-DIRECTION (Miman's Story)**

Jaqueline Görgen

**ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS**

Liese-Lotte Schulz

Marc Holland-Cunz

Olga Gerstenberger

Amanda Nguyen

Karen Maniraho

**CO-PRODUCER**

Heather Posten

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Kevin Murphy

Ute Seitz

POST PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR

Roman Safuillin

ADDITIONAL CAMERA

Irati Elorietta Aguirre

Sophia Wallace

Christian Pirjol

Sonny Singh

Chrystian Rodriguez

CONSULTING PRODUCERS

Michael Truckenbrodt

Chris Donaldson

SOUND MIX

David Richards

COLOR

Kettle Media Concepts- Nigel Kettle

OPENING ANIMATION

Moment Films - Julien Scherliss

MUSIC

Sonny Singh

Grupo Rebolu

Red Baraat

Outernational

FEATURED ORGANIZATIONS

The New York State Youth Leadership Council

The Sikh Coalition

Lebenswelte

UnLocal