

2020 OFFICIAL SELECTION **HIFF**  
HUMAN RIGHTS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE  
NOMINEE

BEST DOCUMENTARY Feature  
**WINNER**

OFFICIAL SELECTION  
Luxembourg  
City Film  
Festival  
2021

BEST FEATURE  
AUDIENCE CHOICE  
**LOCAL SIGHTINGS**  
FILM FESTIVAL  
2020  
FROM HERE

OFFICIAL SELECTION  
**PTEFF**  
PORT TOWNSEND FILM FESTIVAL  
2021

WINNER  
**BIFF**  
SWEDEN  
2021

OFFICIAL SELECTION  
**incontro Film**  
Festival Austria  
2021

OFFICIAL SELECTION  
TOP ANNUAL  
PHILADELPHIA  
LATINO FILM  
FESTIVAL  
2021

OFFICIAL SELECTION  
Seattle Asian  
American Film  
Festival  
2021

OFFICIAL SELECTION  
**BENDFILM:**  
-2021-  
EST. 2004

OFFICIAL SELECTION  
**Immigration**  
Film Festival  
2020

*Heimat ist für mich da, wo ich meinen Kopf hinlege.*  
**Mimán Jasarovski**  
Ein Film von Christina Antonakos-Wallace

**FROM HERE**  
DEUTSCHLAND Vorführungen & Gespräch

<b>KÖLN</b> 16. Mai 18:30 Odeon Kino Köln Severinstraße 81, 50678	<b>HAMBURG</b> 18. Mai 20:00 Alabama Kino Jarrestraße 20, 22303	<b>BERLIN</b> 20. Mai 19:00 Movimiento Kottbusser Damm 22, 10967	<b>LEIPZIG</b> 21. Mai 20:00 UT Connewitz Wolfgang-Heinze-Straße 12a, 04277	<b>JENA</b> 23. Mai 18:00 Kino am Markt Markt 5, 07743 Jena
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@fromherefilm | fromherefilm | @fromherefilm | [fromherefilm.com](http://fromherefilm.com) | [withwingsandroots.org](http://withwingsandroots.org)

In Kooperation Mit:



Gefördert durch das:

KURT & MARIA DOHLE STIFTUNG

Autonome feministische Referat für FLINTA\* der Uni Köln



Demokratie **Leben!**

in Rahmen des Landesprogramms





Ein Film von Christina Antonakos-Wallace

89 Minuten | USA, Deutschland (2020)

Deutschlandweite Kinotour im Mai 2022

#### **Pressekontakt**

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Twitter: <https://twitter.com/fromherefilm>

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**Auszeichnungen:** Audience Award, Best Feature Film (Local Sightings Film Festival), Best Feature Documentary (OK Cine Latino Film Festival), Best Feature Documentary (Boden Film Festival), Best Feature Documentary & Best Editing 2022 (nominee, in consideration - New Filmmakers Los Angeles)

**Festivals:** Human Rights Watch London (World Premiere), Human Rights Watch Film Festival New York (U.S.A. Premiere) Human Rights Film Festival Berlin (Germany Premiere), Luxembourg City Film Festival  
See full festival list: <https://fromherefilm.com/screenings>

## Log Line:

FROM HERE ist die hoffnungsvolle Geschichte von vier jungen (post-) migrantischen Künstler\*innen und Aktivist\*innen in Berlin und New York, die in einer Ära von weltweit zunehmendem Nationalismus Zugehörigkeit neu definieren.

## Synopsis:

FROM HERE ist die hoffnungsvolle Geschichte von Tania, Sonny, Miman und Akim – Künstler\*innen und Aktivist\*innen aus Berlin und New York, deren Leben und Zukunft sich im Spannungsfeld von Einwanderungs- und Integrationsdebatten bewegen. Während sich die USA und Deutschland mit Rassismus, Nationalismus und Kämpfen um nationale Identität auseinandersetzen, befinden sich unsere Protagonist\*innen an der Schwelle zu ihren Dreißigern und stehen vor wichtigen Entwicklungen: Sie kämpfen um die Staatsbürgerschaft, gründen Familien und schaffen Räume für ihre eigene, individuelle Kreativität. Über ein Jahrzehnt hinweg begleitet der einfühlsame und nuancierte Dokumentarfilm ihr Leben in zwei der größten Einwanderungsländer der Welt und fängt ihr Ringen um Zugehörigkeit in Gesellschaften ein, die ihrer Existenz zunehmend feindlich gegenüberstehen. FROM HERE bietet vier verschiedene Visionen von Widerstand und Widerstandsfähigkeit, die nicht nur die Kämpfe einer jungen Generation, sondern vor allem ihre enorme Stärke zeigen.





## Die Protagonist\*innen

**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.



**SONNY** (New York): Sonny ist Rockmusiker und amerikanischer Sikh aus Brooklyn, dessen Band gerade einen Vertrag mit Warner Brothers unterschrieben hat. "Dieses Land hat noch nie einen Typen mit Turban in der Popkultur gesehen!", kommentiert Sonny begeistert. Damit scheint zunächst ein Traum wahr zu werden – bis er schmerzlich zerplatzt, als Sonny klar wird, wie seine weißen

Bandmitglieder konsequent über seine Meinungen hinweg gehen. Sonny steigt aus der Band aus und begibt sich spontan auf eine unerwartete Reise in die Sikh- Community. Er nimmt eine Stelle bei einer Sikh-Bürgerrechtsorganisation an und reist nach Indien, um für seine neue Arbeit Punjabi zu lernen. Dort wird ihm sein Amerikanisch-Sein eindrücklich vor Augen geführt, während er gleichzeitig seine Verbundenheit mit spirituellen Traditionen vertieft. Nach seiner Rückkehr etabliert sich Sonny als Mentor und Aktivist innerhalb der Sikh-Community, in der er sich zuvor lange als Außenseiter fühlte. Schließlich findet er eine neue musikalische Heimat in der multi-ethnischen Band Red Baraat, die punjabische Musiktraditionen mit Jazz, Funk, Rock und Hip-Hop verbindet und mit der Sonny durch die Welt tourt.

**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.



**MIMAN** (Berlin): "Warum sollte ich mich rechtfertigen müssen?", fragt Miman mit Blick auf eine Frage im komplizierten deutschen Einbürgerungsantrag vor ihm. Obwohl er in Deutschland geboren ist, hatte er als Kind von aus Mazedonien eingewanderten Roma-Eltern bei seiner Geburt kein Recht auf die deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft. Aber nun, da sein erstes Baby unterwegs ist,

sei es an der Zeit, wählen zu können. Miman unterstützt als Sozialarbeiter geflüchtete Rom\*nja aus dem Balkan. Energisch setzt er sich für die Rechte seiner Community ein und kämpft parallel persönlich mit der Last eines kollektiven Traumas und gegen Depressionen. Er ist der einzige in seiner Familie, der sich öffentlich als Roma bekennt, denn die Angst ist groß, dann den Arbeitsplatz oder das Zuhause zu verlieren. Nach der Geburt seines Babys hält Miman es, vor Liebe strahlend, in den Armen. Doch gleichzeitig bereiten ihm große Fragen Kopfzerbrechen: Wird er in der Lage sein, seinem Kind das Identitätsgefühl weiterzugeben, das ihm so wichtig ist? Was kann die Beziehung zu seiner Frau alles aushalten, die auf Grund dieser kultureller Unterschiede extrem belastet ist? Während Miman's Familienleben sich drastisch ändert, stellt er seinen Wunsch in Frage, überhaupt zu Deutschland gehören zu wollen.

**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.



**TANIA** (New York): Als ihre Eltern die vierjährige Tania aus Bolivien in die USA brachten, konnten sie sich nicht vorstellen, dass ihre Tochter mit 27 Jahren noch immer ohne Aufenthaltspapiere leben müsste. Trotz Tanias Masterabschlusses und ihrer offensichtlichen Talente beeinträchtigt dieser Umstand alles – von der Möglichkeit, ein Paket bei der Post abzuholen, bis

hin zu ernsthaften Liebesbeziehungen. Infolge ihrer jüngsten Entscheidung, Aktivistin zu werden und sich als undokumentiert zu outen, ist Tania stärker von einer möglichen Abschiebung bedroht, aber gleichzeitig auch mehr davor geschützt. Auf Versammlungen, Kundgebungen und gegenüber Journalist\*innen erklärt sie: "Ich bin ohne Papiere und unerschrocken". Als US-Präsident Obama auf diesen Aktivismus reagiert, indem er den sogenannten "Dreamer-Act" einen vorübergehenden Aufenthaltsstatus ermöglicht, muss Tania das Risiko einer Abschiebe-Anordnung abwägen. Sie kommt zu dem Schluss, dass eine Registrierung die beste Option ist – trotz der Sorge, dass sie dadurch in Zukunft womöglich leichter abgeschoben werden kann. Doch mit der DACA-Regelung ist sie in der Lage, einen "richtigen Job" zu bekommen und voranzukommen. Mit dem Amtsantritt von US-Präsident Trump bewahrheiten sich Tanias frühere Befürchtungen, aber ihre Entschlossenheit, weiter zu kämpfen, ist ungebrochen. Ihr Ziel ist nicht nur, einen Aufenthaltsstatus zu erhalten, sondern auch, dass sie und andere Einwander\*innen wie Menschen behandelt werden und ein würdiges Leben führen können.



**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.

**AKIM** (Berlin): Für den bekannten Berliner Straßenkünstler Akim bedeutet Integration nicht, sich "einzufügen", sondern Spuren in der Welt zu hinterlassen. "Das ist auch eine Art von Integration — sich Raum zu nehmen, ihn zu infiltrieren." Er weigert sich, seine Identität oder Lebensweise für irgendjemanden anzupassen und weist die Bitten von Journalist\*innen, Galerist\*innen oder Freund\*innen ab, seine Arbeit zu erklären. Als Poet und Philosoph des Films bewegt sich Akim zwischen Berlin und New York, widmet sich seiner Kunst und erzählt seine Geschichte als Kind vietnamesischer Geflüchteter. Er kam allein nach Deutschland, trug enorme Verantwortung und wurde zwischen Haushalten und Systemen hin- und her gereicht, die ihn nicht verstanden. Akim bettet dreidimensionale Installationen und Graffiti in urbane Räume ein. Seine Gedanken kreisen dabei um seine Entscheidung aus Tragödien Kunst zu machen und sein Leben für sich zu beanspruchen. Seine bewegenden Nachbildungen und Zerstörungen des Boots, mit dem seine Familie als "Boat People" aus Vietnam floh, sind eine treffende Metapher für das Zuhause, das immer mit ihm reist - etwas das Trauma auslöst und Freiheit bedeutet.

## Über das Filmteam

### **Regie/Produktion/Schnitt/Kamera, Christina Antonakos-Wallace**

Christina ist Filmemacherin und langjährige Aktivistin. Zu ihren Auszeichnungen gehören der Euromedia Award for Culture & Diversity (2011), ein Media that Matters Change Maker Award (2012) und eine Anerkennung durch das deutsche Bündnis für Demokratie und Toleranz (2015). Ihre Kurzfilme und interaktiven Arbeiten wurden in über einem Dutzend Ländern durch Festivals, Schulen, Galerien, NGOs und Unternehmen ausgestellt. Zu ihren Aufträgen und Stipendien gehören die New America Foundation, das Seattle Office of Arts and Culture und die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. Sie war Fellow in Hedgebrook (2017) und beim Port Townsend Film Festival (2015) und hat einen BFA/BA von der New School & Parsons School of Design. Ihre Arbeit wurde mit einem fünfjährigen Stipendium von MTV Fight For Your Rights (2002) und einem Stipendium für "Humanity in Action" (2006) ausgezeichnet, das sie beim Hochkommissariat der Vereinten Nationen für Flüchtlinge in Berlin absolvierte. FROM HERE ist ihr erster abendfüllender Dokumentarfilm.

### **Creative Producer, Canan Turan**

ist Filmwissenschaftlerin und Dokumentarfilmerin aus Berlin. Seit über einem Jahrzehnt arbeitet sie in der Produktion von Dokumentar- und Spielfilmprojekten unter der Regie von Jeremy Xido, Neco Çelik, Döndü Eylem Kiliç und anderen. Ihr Regiedebüt "Kıymet" (2012) war auf internationalen Filmfestivals zu sehen, darunter Documentarist Istanbul, und wurde ein Jahr lang im Kino Movimiento in Berlin gezeigt. Für ihren Dokumentarfilm

Kaya - The Rock and the Sea erhielt sie ein Gerd-Ruge-Stipendium der Film- und Medienstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen. Canan hat Arbeiten auf dem Gebiet des deutsch-türkischen Kinos und des intersektionalen Feminismus veröffentlicht. Sie organisiert und hält Vorträge auf Filmfestivals und in Kulturzentren sowie Vorlesungen u.a. an der Kunstuniversität Braunschweig und der Philipps-Universität Marburg.

### **Co-Produzentin, Amy Benson**

besitzt Nonfiction Media, eine Produktionsfirma mit Sitz in Seattle, wo sie Filme produziert, dreht und schneidet, die die Geschichten von Organisationen rund um den Globus erzählen. Seit 2008 arbeitet Amy an einer Dokumentarfilmtrilogie über eine Familie in Nepal. Der erste Teil der Trilogie, Drawing the Tiger, war ein vom Sundance Institute und Fork Films gefördertes Projekt. Es hatte im April 2015 bei Hot Docs Premiere und erhielt den Documentary Feature Award vom CAAM Fest, den Preis der Jury für den besten Dokumentarfilm beim Asiatica Film Festival und den UNICEF-Preis bei Film South Asia. Die Fortsetzung, Der älteste Sohn, hatte 2017 auf dem Kathmandu Mountain Film Festival Premiere. Der letzte Film, Literate, befindet sich in Produktion.

### **Co-Produzentin, Theresa Navarro**

ist eine in Brooklyn ansässige Produzentin, die für den Independent Spirit Award nominiert ist. Sie ist Vizepräsidentin für auswärtige Angelegenheiten bei American Documentary | POV. Zu ihren jüngsten Produktionen gehören die Fernsehserie AMERICA REFRAMED, der von CAAM finanzierte Sport-Dokumentarfilm 9-MAN und Jennifer Phangs Sci-Fi-Spielfilm ADVANTAGEOUS, der beim Sundance-Filmfestival 2015 mit dem U.S. Competition Special Jury Prize für kollaborative Visionen ausgezeichnet wurde. 2011 nominierte das CAAM sie als eine von 15 weiblichen Führungskräften, die zu Ehren des National Asian Pacific Women's Forum anerkannt werden.

### **Filmeditorin, Aletta von Viettinghoff**

ist eine in Berlin ansässige Filmeditorin, die seit fünfzehn Jahren in den Bereichen Dokumentarfilm, Spielfilm und Fernsehen arbeitet. Ihr jüngster Film, Reise nach Jerusalem, wurde bei den Berliner Filmfestspielen Achtung Berlin 2018 als Bester Film ausgezeichnet. Ihr erster abendfüllender Dokumentarfilm, Audre Lorde: Die Berliner Jahre, wurde bei den Berliner Filmfestspielen 2012 gezeigt und war auf über 100 internationalen Festivals zu sehen. Im Jahr 2013 redigierte sie den Dokumentarfilm Creative Despite War, der im schwedischen Staatsfernsehen ausgestrahlt wurde. Im Jahr 2015 wurde sie bei den Berliner Filmfestspielen als Talent ausgewählt, wo sie nun jedes Jahr den Schnitt organisiert.

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



ist ein in Seattle ansässige Komponistin und Streicherin. Ihre Arbeit reicht von Solo-Kompositionen für Film, Theater und Tanz bis hin zur Fertigstellung von drei Alben in voller Länge mit dem Projekt Led to Sea, das von Alex selbst geschrieben, arrangiert und ko-produziert wurde. Als Improvisatorin hat sie mit Musikern wie Wayne Horvitz, James Knapp, Samantha Boshnack und Susie Ibarra zusammengearbeitet. Ihre Soloprojekte führten sie durch ganz Europa und die USA. In den letzten zehn Jahren war sie außerdem als Streicherin und Keyboarderin mit Musikern wie Angel Olsen, Laura Veirs, Lemolo, Mirah, Sera Cahoone, Thao and the Get Down Stay Down und Danny Barnes auf ausgedehnten Tourneen unterwegs.

### **Impact Producer, Olga Gerstenberger**

Olga Gerstenberger ist Politikwissenschaftlerin und setzt ihren vielseitigen Erfahrungshintergrund in Projekten für soziale Gerechtigkeit, wie z.B. Verwobenegeschichten.de und Visionary Europe, sowie die Entwicklung innovativer Bildungsmaterialien, wie den Audioguide Unfreie Arbeit und Rassismus und das Spiel Wendepunkte ein. Sie hat einen vom DAAD geförderten Master in Ideologie und Diskursanalyse von der University of Essex. Aktuell lehrt sie an der Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin zu den Themen Rassismus, Migration sowie Bewegungs- und Widerstandsgeschichte und arbeitet an ihrer Promotion zum Thema Antislawismus aus intersektionaler Perspektive. Olga ist seit 2011 Teil von With Wings and Roots/FROM HERE. Zur Zeit, entwickelt sie die strategische Vision für den Filmstart von "From Here" im Jahr 2022 mit und wird die Impact-Aktivitäten auf deutscher Seite leiten.

**Der Verein With Wings and Roots:** Die Produktion des Dokumentarfilms ging einher mit der Entwicklung des Vereins With Wings and Roots. In Zusammenarbeit mit Mitstreiter\*innen aus den USA und Deutschland bietet der Verein Workshops, Installationen, Bildungsmaterialien und Podiumsdiskussionen an. Auf der interaktiven Webplattform der Initiative können User\*innen ihre eigenen Geschichten teilen und sich über die Migrationsgeschichten Deutschlands und der USA informieren.

<https://withwingsandroots.org/>

# **Additional Credits/ Würdigungen**

CO-DIRECTION (Miman's Story)

Jaqueline Görden

## **ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS**

Liese-Lotte Schulz

Marc Holland-Cunz

Olga Gerstenberger

Amanda Nguyen

Karen Maniraho

## **CO-PRODUCER**

Heather Posten

## **CONTRIBUTING EDITORS**

Gisela Rosario Ramos

Cheree Dillon

Gregor Bartsch

## **ASSISTANT EDITORS**

Liese-Lotte Schulz

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

Lebenswelten

UnLocal

## **Zusätzliche Credits**

CO-DIREKTORIN (Mimans Geschichte)

Jaqueline Görden

ASSOZIIERTE PRODUZENTEN

Liese-Lotte Schulz

Marc Holland-Cunz

Olga Gerstenberger

Amanda Nguyen

Karen Maniraho

CO-PRODUZENT

Heidekraut Posten

BEITRAGENDE HERAUSGEBER

Gisela Rosario Ramos

Cheree Dillon

Gregor Bartsch

## REDAKTIONSASSISTENTEN

Liese-Lotte Schulz

Kevin Murphy

Ute Seitz

## POSTPRODUKTIONS-AUFSICHTSPERSON

Roman Safuillin

## ZUSÄTZLICHE KAMERA

Irati Elorietta Aguirre

Sophia Wallace

Christian Pirjol

Sonny Singh

Chrystian Rodriguez

## BERATENDE PRODUZENTEN

Michael Truckenbrodt

Chris Donaldson

## TONMISCHUNG

David Richards

## FARBKORREKTUR

Kettle Medienkonzepte- Nigel Kettle

## ERÖFFNUNGSANIMATION

Moment-Filme - Julien Scherliss

## MUSIK

Sonny Singh

Grupo Rebolu

Red Baraat

Outernational

## UNTERSTÜTZENDE ORGANISATIONEN

Der New York State Youth Leadership Council

Die Sikh-Koalition

Lebenswelten

Unlokal





# A DISCUSSION WITH THE DIRECTOR (English)

## Why did you start to make this film?

FROM HERE is more than a decade in the making, but the questions about identity and 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. It felt as though there was no space to be my whole self.

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 my particular belonging journey.

After years of searching to understand my relationship to my identities, including several long visits in Greece, working in various capacities for immigrant and refugee rights, studying theories of identity I began a project called “With Wings and Roots” that eventually produced the film “From Here.” I had experienced the growing nationalism in Greece 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 in both the United States and Europe. We needed new narratives about immigration. 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.

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 personally connected to the topic but 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 community partners and young people. This process was rich and took time.

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

### **Why did you choose Berlin as the European counterpart to New York?**

The intention of having both German and U.S. stories in the same film was first to bring a global approach to conversations about migration.

On a statistical level, Berlin and New York were obvious choices. Germany is the largest immigration country and economy in Europe—and the German approach to migration has an enormous impact across the EU. Likewise, the United States is the largest immigration country and economy in the world. Young people from immigrant families, like the protagonists in FROM HERE, make up a major portion of youth in each country: well over half in New York, and more than 40% in Berlin.

Our diversity is an enormous part of what makes Berlin and New York so dynamic! Migration has always been part of the human experience, but our future inevitably includes even more migration if for no other reason than the climate crisis. The West is and will be more diverse. For many of us, that diversity is a good thing. We see that the exchange between cultures, disciplines, and experiences produces creativity and innovation. This is certainly true of Berlin and New York. However, we also know that this diversity scares a large segment of society, especially white Europeans and Americans who are consciously or unconsciously afraid of losing a dominant position during a time of tremendous change. These are the anxieties being manipulated by the far-right through deliberate scapegoating.

There is also a personal reason why I chose Berlin. I was invited to Germany through a mix of luck and happenstance. I was deeply interested in migration in Europe and received a human and minority rights fellowship from the organization Humanity in Action in Berlin. I was placed in an internship with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Immediately, I had an inside view of refugee politics in Germany and Europe. It was 2006, shortly after the passage of the integration law, and the conversation in Germany was very active. However, very quickly, I witnessed the coded way that the word “integration” was being used—often implying that immigrants were not doing enough to deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Although the U.S. is in no way free from racism, the ways that racism plays out differently in Germany made it very obvious to me. I witnessed White Germans, especially, constantly referring to cultural differences of immigrant groups as the reason for the persistent social inequality in Germany, rather than the policies and structures that had kept communities and schools segregated, without rights, and in precarity.

Because I had already begun developing this film in the US, I started speaking to people about the possibility of creating a bi-national project that featured young people challenging the borders of belonging. There was an incredible response. So many people said “Yes! You must do this, here and now! We need to have our voices and perspectives as part of the conversation!” At that point, it felt like Germany picked me.

### **How would you describe the political context of this film?**

FROM HERE offers a vital window into how young people are living an alternative to the growing nationalism in two Western countries at the center of contemporary immigration debates. In both places, 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. We need a bigger vision about migration and belonging if we are to meet the demands of this moment.

### **How did you find the protagonists of the film?**

The criteria for looking for protagonists started pretty simple and got more complex. The most obvious criteria were young people who had grown up in either the US or Germany and who were directly impacted by immigration (1.5 or 2nd generation). Essentially I was looking for people who had been confronted by the question “where are you from?” their entire lives, and through that experience had been able to ask bigger questions of belonging. Most importantly, I was excited about individuals who were not accepting the limited identities and binaries imposed on them from both dominant society and their communities—but rather approaching with creativity. I wanted stories that broke the standard ways of talking about migration, so I looked for voices that had something different to add to the conversation. Political timeliness was also something I considered, but for me, this project was always both of this moment but much bigger than this moment.



The pre-production team worked together to reach out to many community organizations. In Berlin, we spoke with well over twenty different immigrant community organizations, got sixty names, and went from there. Through those recommendations, as well as our networks, we ended up video interviewing over 50 young people in New York and Berlin. Excerpts from those interviews are viewable at [withwingsandroots.org/stories](http://withwingsandroots.org/stories) and we will continue releasing more excerpts, as well as welcome the submission of visitors' stories as well.

Once we had an amazing group of interviewees, it became about focusing on who had major life events that we could track as they unfolded that would give us insight into both the structural and personal questions of belonging. The stories needed to be complimentary—different enough to bring in a new perspective, but enough overlap to feel into the concept. Because I wanted to explore how our identities change over time, we needed to give the process time. One challenge was that I filmed more people that we were able to include simply because of the limitations of a 90-minute film. Some more brilliant people didn't make it into the final film.

### **How did you choose the title FROM HERE?**

Actually, for many years the film had another title -With Wings and Roots. That title had represented the possibility if we reject the false binary between tradition and agency. While working on the film, a larger education initiative developed. We released two short films, created curricula, and offered events and workshops. We developed a web-platform with an interactive immigration history timeline, and it was all being done under the title With Wings and Roots. I realized we needed a new name for the film itself. After a lot of brainstorming with colleagues, I finally landed on a great title with a friend in the U.S. Ironically, when I came back to tell my German colleagues that the film newly titled FROM HERE, they laughed because there had just recently begun the campaign in Germany #vonhier started by the journalist Ferda Ataman. It was amazing synchronicity but also developed independently.

### **What are some of the similarities and differences between the U.S. and Germany?**

I have to start by saying that this film is not a scientific study to compare these two countries. My observations are those of a filmmaker who has spent a lot of time listening to people's stories, not a social scientist. There are so many differences and similarities.

That being said, let's start with the similarities. White supremacist ideologies were part of the colonial project, and have been cross-pollinating between Europe and the U.S. for centuries.

Citizenship is very difficult to acquire in both countries, and both countries have many people living with inhuman legal statuses. In Germany, I see the Duldung status as a kind of purgatory—it does not allow those who hold it to participate and be protected in society, and this is exactly what I mean when I say we have to fight for all of us to belong. Even still, Germany has a far more human social safety net than the U.S. The 10+ million people in the U.S. who are undocumented (living without legal status) live without so many basic elements of human dignity, however many industries such as agriculture, construction, and others are entirely reliant upon undocumented workers to exploit.

The German social welfare system makes many of the daily indignities experienced by low-income people, particularly undocumented US Americans, look like human rights travesties. On the flip side, it continues to be easier for immigrants and people of color to be seen as an “American” than as a “German”. However, that is due not to some inherent pluralism in the U.S., but long struggles for racial justice and civil rights have enabled communities of color to gather political power. This political representation is a growing reality in Germany, which is very exciting. I hope that more Germans will shed the belief that it is so essential for immigrants to “integrate” or behave according to white German cultural norms to have a place in the conversation.

### **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 if 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?**

I would summarize the film has to have some simple goals: Firstly, to break the isolation and build the sense of solidarity for anyone who experienced being treated that they don't belong, or has felt forced to choose between fixed identities. Secondly, I hope the film offers some conceptual inspiration to embrace the bigger vision around migration, citizenship and belonging 1) migration is a global reality and an expression of our desire as humans towards freedom, 2) Identity itself is fluid and constructed, 2) belonging is something that we all inherently need and deserve as living beings, and we can create structures that build it or break belonging 4) our current systems of regulating migration through citizenship practices are inhumane and broken.

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?**

There are two reasons - the need and the opportunity.

We may have officially exited the Trump era in the U.S., but scapegoating immigrants has a long history in the U.S. and continues. Indeed, the first piece of legislation to ban the entry of a specific racial group was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This racial caste system continues to terrorize communities and undermine our aspirations for true democracy in Europe and North America. This is bigger than any one political party - for example, more people were deported under Obama than any previous U.S. administration. Now is not the time for people of conscience to sit back and trust that everything is OK, but to demand our governments work towards the multi-racial democracies we long for.

For the last decade, anti-immigrant politics has been the most effective tool of the fast-growing far-right in both the United States and Europe. In Germany, often thought of as a country that has reckoned with its violent, racist history, the far-right “Alternative for Germany” party entered parliament in 2017 as the third largest party. They did this by shifting their focus to aggressive anti-immigrant and anti-refugee rhetoric, a thinly veiled expression of structural racism. Consider how differently Ukrainian refugees are currently being received at European borders from their Syrian, Afghan, Somali, Roma and other non-White counterparts fleeing conflicts no less brutal.

The combination of escalating rhetoric and increased political power has emboldened racists, and deadly hate crimes have skyrocketed. Who is or is not allowed to immigrate or access citizenship has everything to do with our racial caste system, and who is allowed to have political voice and rights.

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 build solidarity and a sense of our global interdependence. 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.

Many young people have been politicized in the past years, between the inequalities laid bare by the pandemic to the global uprisings for racial justice, more people than ever are looking for ways to build a more just society. I believe that FROM HERE resonates with this urgent energy of young people, and offers stories of various people building that future.

Over the more than ten years since this project's inception, as immigrants have been under attack from politicians in both continents, the urgency to get this film out has felt enormous. In 2021, three major pieces of legislation that would help provide pathways to citizenship for millions of U.S. Americans are being brought to Congress. While I deeply hope that these laws will pass, we need far more to find longer term approaches to migration, citizenship, borders and identity that treats all of us with dignity and respect.



*Filmemacherin Christina Antonakos-Wallace (links) mit Protagonist Sonny Singh (am Mikro)*

