

PRESS KIT

CPH:DOX 2021



THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER

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نهر

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A FILM BY
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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER



(c) Antonia Kilian

SYNOPSIS

19 year-old Hala escapes an arranged marriage by crossing the Euphrates River to find a new home at a Kurdish Women's Protection Unit - a unit which soon after liberates her hometown of Minbij from the Islamic State. For her female fellow soldiers, the enemy is not just IS, but patriarchy in general, with the ideal of marriage as the ultimate oppressive institution. The brutalities these young women have experienced at the hands of their husbands and within their own families lead them to the other side of the river where they are trained in combat and educated in the feminist ideals of the Kurdish Women's Movement. Hala is deeply inspired by these teachings and resolutely dedicates herself to the promise of not only freeing more women, but also liberating her sisters at all costs. Yet is there still space for freedom and even love in Hala's life when her mission is all-consuming?

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER intimately chronicles the determined, revolutionary path of Hala while shedding light on another parallel journey: the director's own reflections on being a feminist and cultural outsider in a situation where the term "militant feminism" could be understood quite literally.

A film by Antonia Kilian
Germany, Finland 2021 | 92 min | Arabic,
Kurdish, German | Documentary

<https://theothersideoftheriver.com>
<https://facebook.com/othersideriver>
TRAILER: <https://vimeo.com/514647315>

POLITICAL BACKGROUND – SYRIA, ROJAVA AND MINBIJ

By Antonia Kilian

In 2011, massive protests against Baschar al-Assad's dictatorship began in Syria as part of the Arab Spring.

Assad mobilized his entire military force to fight the protests. His military troops retreated from the northeast of the country, the Kurdish areas known as „Rojava.“ The PYD (the Democratic Union Party allegedly close to PKK) was then able to use this moment to take power there. At the same time, Assad released many Islamists from prisons who then began to take over the rebellious areas and fight the Kurds. The PYD believes it has established a third alternative in Syria: Neither Assad, nor the Syrian revolution, but rather “Rojava,” which stands for self-governance in co-existence with the Syrian state.

The Kurdish Autonomous Administration „Rojava“ became internationally known for its claim to grassroots democracy, its feminist politics and its successful fight against ISIS and other Islamist forces with a large participation of women fighters.

This film primarily takes place in the city of Minbij, which was one of the major centers of the Syrian uprising in 2011. Back then, Assad also left this city and the Syrian revolution established revolutionary councils there quite quickly. They were able to administer the city until ISIS took control of much of Syria. ISIS ruled Minbij for three years with a brutal system. Minbij was the first major city outside Kurdish areas, west of the Euphrates River, where Rojava military forces took over. This was exactly the moment when I traveled to Syria and began making this film.



(c) Antonia Kilian

DIRECTOR'S MOTIVATION

I went to Northeast Syria in the summer of 2016 exactly when the Syrian Democratic Forces (the forces of the Kurdish autonomous region called "Rojava") took over the City of Minbij from the Islamic State. I was part of a solidarity movement for Rojava that was formed among leftist activists in Europe. As a feminist, I was intrigued by their promise of women's liberation based on grass-roots democracy and I wanted to see how these promises would be put into praxis.

When I met Hala, we immediately developed a strong connection. She urgently wanted to share her story with me and I found her strength and positive energy remarkable. Hala allowed me to

accompany her on her revolutionary journey, her training and education at the academy, her struggles with her family, the fight for her sisters' emancipation and the liberation of all oppressed women in her city, Minbij.

Hala represents a generation of young women seeking an emancipated life in the middle of the Syrian war with conflicts between many front lines.

What does freedom and self-determination mean to these women and how can they achieve this ideal in the middle of one of the largest conflicts of the 21st century?



(c) Antonia Kilian

BETWEEN FILMMAKING AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM: INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Why did you travel to Syria and where did the idea to make THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER originate from?

In 2016 I went to Syria and it was clear from the beginning that I wanted to make a film about the Kurdish women's movement in Rojava. I had been quite engaged in wanting to understand more about Kurdish politics for about two years before this project began and I was part of a solidarity movement here in Germany. I knew there was an area in northern Syria that was self-governing within the Kurdish Administration, a place where a very strong, autonomous women's movement had been established. My goal, or, rather, my hope was to find a protagonist there who was seeking this kind of training and education within these "Women's Protection Units" (YPJ). I wanted to see how she would emerge from the academy, how those ideological lessons and that type of military training would be translated into reality – for her personally, within her family structures and overall, within the women's emancipation movement. It was directly on my first night there that I met Hala. She was so headstrong, so determined and full of positive energy. She had just escaped from her parents in Minbij and arrived at the military academy on the other side of the river. She said to me: „Now if you stay here longer, I will tell you my whole story.“

How were you received there within the women's movement and in the society? What kind of support did you encounter while making the film?

You cannot move around freely in a war zone like that and I had to earn trust on many levels - from Hala and her family as well as from the

women in the movement. My political views and motivation were closely scrutinized. It was a precarious balance of factors. On the one hand, it was important for Hala and the women's movement to feel that I wanted to represent their struggles, their revolution in the film and that, of course, this can be seen in a critical light. I believe my initial, perhaps naïve enthusiastic approach towards Hala and the women's movement allowed me to gain this trust and an access to certain situations that were not self-understood. It should be noted, that the more I observed, the more the problematic and even sometimes repressive aspects within the movement and other contradictions came to light. Yet, without the support of the women's movement there, I would not have been allowed to move to the region and live there, to have that kind of closeness and realize this project the way I did. Once I had overcome this hurdle, there were many people who helped me.

The Kurdish-Syrian filmmaker, Sevinaz Evdike, introduced me to her artist's family, with whom I de facto lived for a year and who supported me in my film project. Sevinaz is herself the co-director of the film commune called the "Komina Film a Rojava". This is a self-organized film collective that produces films, teaches film making and runs a festival.

They also supported my project, yet I shot most of the film on my own, without translators by my side. In fact, most of the time I was just there alone, observing and then, when possible, having the footage I shot translated every few days. After a while I also met the Iranian filmmaker and writer, Arash Asadi, who, back then, was active as a journalist in the region. Arash and I intensely explored

the themes in the film. He became a co-author and also edited the film. We have continued to work together on various film projects in Germany. In Berlin I met the Kurdish Syrian Filmmaker, Guevara Namer, who travelled to Syria with me for a second trip to shoot more with Hala. Guevara also became a co-author and producer. In many ways this film was a total collective effort and the level of intimacy, the trust and depth of understanding I gained with Hala, her family and the women's movement there, would not have been possible without this collaboration.

Did you have a feminist motivation for the film?

Absolutely. I went there because I wanted to know more about the Kurdish women's movement firsthand. And not only out of a political, theoretical or journalistic interest, but also out of a deep personal interest. Being a feminist myself, born and raised

in Germany, growing up here in this kind of privileged environment – it was important for me to acknowledge my position, to reflect on it, on my own feminism and what activism means in this context. How can women organize autonomously to be empowered and somehow build an alternative to patriarchal society? I was quite convinced in theory that this was happening in Rojava in a very impressive way. I still find the militant determination behind the women's movement there quite remarkable in its own way. But not only in a military sense, but also in the very consequential, self-understood way in which it is enforced. In this sense it was an absolutely emancipatory moment for me to go there as a woman, to initially travel alone to an area that is considered quite dangerous and to encounter the structures of the women's movement there, structures which ultimately made it possible for me to live, work and make a film there in the first place.



(c) Antonia Kilian

ABOUT ANTONIA KILIAN

Antonia is a director, cinematographer and producer. She studied Visual Communication as well as Art and Media at the Berlin University of Arts. She studied Cinematography at the University in Potsdam Babelsberg and at the ISA in Havana, Cuba. She has served as DoP for numerous films, both shorts and feature-length, fiction and documentary that have screened at festivals worldwide. She has created video installations and directed several documentary shorts. She lived in Northeast Syria for over one year, where, during this time she shot the footage for her directorial feature-length documentary debut, **THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER**. She currently lives and works between Kassel and Berlin and manages her own production company, Pink Shadow Films.

FILMOGRAPHY

The Other Side of the River (Director, DoP, Producer)
92 min., documentary, 2021, World Premiere
CPH:DOX in F:ACT Award competition

Ashes to Ashes (Director)
2-Channel-Installation in the exhibition: House of Cultures in Berlin for the exhibition: „architecture and ideology“

10 Years (Director and DoP)
University of Arts Berlin, 2011, 30 min., nominated for the „Golden Herkules“ at the 28th Documentary Film and Video Fest Kassel

All Roads Lead to no Home (DoP) by Afraa Batous
2021, 90 min., documentary, Tondowski Films & Kleines Fernsehspiel (in post-production)

Familiar Places (DoP) by Mala Reinhardt
2021, 80 min., documentary, Filmuniversität

Konrad Wolf (in production)

Der Container (DoP) by Gitti Grüter
2021, 8 min., fiction, Filmuniversität Konrad Wolf, (in Post-Production)

A Letter from Raqqa (DoP) by Arash Asadi
2020, 9 min., documentary, Pink Shadow Films, Festivals: Vision du Réel, Kasseler Dokfilmfest, Lichter Filmfest Frankfurt, Sehnsüchte Potsdam Babelsberg, Award: Willi-Münzenberg-Preis

XWEBÜN – Frauenwiderstand in Amed (DoP) by Frauenfilmkollektiv
2016, 60 min., documentary, Kurdish Filmfestival Hamburg, diverse Screenings in alternative spaces throughout Europe

Welcome to Europe (DoP)
2015, 15 min., Documentary, Award: Willi-Münzenberg-Preis “global Rooms for radical Solidarity“, Maribor Festival for Documentary Film, Karlsruhe Filmfestival, Rojava Filmfestival

The Friend (DoP) by Dito Tsintsadze
2016, 90 min., fiction, East End Films GmbH, Festivals - Hofer Filmtage

Blaue Stunde Sehnsucht (DoP) by Sophia Bösch
2014, 19.15 min., fiction, Festivals: Filmuniversität Konrad Wolf, Fünf Seen Filmfestival, Warsaw International Film Festival, NYC Independent Film Festival

Hades Treptow, (DoP), by Nike Arnold, 10 Min., documentary., Universität der Künste Berlin (House of Cultures in Berlin for the exhibition: „architecture and ideology“)

SEVINAZ EVDIKE

Production Manager & Assistant

Sevinaz was born 1992 in Serekaniye/Rojava. She studied Elementary Pedagogy in Deir-A-Zor and Film Directing in Cigerxwin Academy in Diyarbakir/Turkey. She is Co-Director of Komina Film a Rojava. She gives lectures in filmmaking, scriptwriting and production and organizes film screenings all over Rojava. She co-founded the Rojava Film Festival. She served as production manager for "The Other Side of the River" by Antonia Kilian which premieres in CPH:DOX. She was production assistant for "The Return, Life after ISIS" by Alba Sotorra which premiered in March 2021 at SXSW. She gave a freedom lecture



(c) Antonia Kilian

at the Rotterdam Film Festival about Komina Film a Rojava. Her short fiction film "Mal" she directed in the city of Raqqa shortly after its liberation from ISIS. Currently, she is editing her debut feature fiction "Berbu, the Wedding Parade" which tells the story of the recent occupation of her home town Serekaniye by Turkish military from the perspective of three women.

ARASH ASADI

Co-Author and Editor

Arash Asadi was born in Iran in 1986. He is a writer, director and editor. In Iran he studied engineering and Sociology. He has directed several experimental films and film essays, mainly dealing with the themes of „memory and identity“. Arash has worked on the film „The Other Side of the River,“ as co-author and editor. His short film „A Letter from Raqqa“ about the memories of people in a war zone premiered at the Kassel Documentary Film Festival 2020 and was awarded the Willi Münzenberg Prize. Currently, he is studying Editing at the Konrad Wolf Film University in Potsdam Babelsberg.



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GUEVARA NAMER

Co-Author & Producer

Guevara Namer is a Syrian Kurdish photographer and documentary filmmaker based in Berlin. She is a graduate of the Damascus Applied Arts Institute as a certified photographer and did Drama Studies at the Higher Institute Dramatic Arts in Damascus. Her photography was exhibited in the exhibition entitled "Existing Elsewhere" in Berlin in October 2020. Guevara was selected for an artist's residency in Tapís De La Fundacio, Barcelona 2017 as part of the photographer, Susan Meiselas, exhibition "AKA Kurdistan". She was selected by the Magnum Foundation for a "Photography and Social Justice Fellowship" in 2018.



(c) Guevara Namer

Currently, she is working on her first photography book as a curator and editor entitled "Dialogue with Absence". Her film, "Morning Fears, Night Chants," co-directed with Diana El-Jeiroudi, premiered at IDFA 2012 and was broadcasted on Alarabiya and ARTE (2013). She has also served as line producer for several Syrian documentary films such as "Return to Homs" (2013) and "Silvered Water, Syria Self-Portrait" (2014). Recently she worked as assistant director with Gianfranco Rosi for his film NOTTURNO which premiered in the Venice Film Festival's main competition in 2020. She has also worked as a research assistant with Hogir Hirori on his upcoming film, SABAYA ALHOL. She is the co-author and producer of Antonia Kilian's debut documentary "The Other Side of the River" and is currently developing her second documentary as director.

SHKOON – ORIGINAL MUSIC

Based in Hamburg, the Syrian-German duo live-act Shkoon have been a major force in the electronic music scene since 2016. The musical duo is comprised of the Syrian Ameen Khayer on vocals and percussion along with producer, Thorben Diekmann, on synth and electronics. Musically, Shkoon's boundary-blurring sound pairs traditional musical Arabic folklore and oriental melodies with Western electronic hiphop beats. All original music for THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER was composed and produced by Shkoon, who intend to release an original track from the film in the very near future. Stay tuned!



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PRODUCTION COMPANIES



(c) Antonia Kilian

DOPPELPLUSULTRA FILMPRODUKTION

Founded in 2000, Doppelplusultra Filmproduktion is a Hamburg-based production company, focusing on creative documentaries, commissioned TV reportages, music videos and image films. With a love for storytelling and a passion for discovering new talents, our distinctive creative handwriting is prominent in all the works we produce.

The films DPU produced have received numerous awards and were screened at some of the most important festivals. They have been supported by major broadcasters (Arte, NDR, RBB, WDR, YLE, Swiss TV, Al Jazeera, Current TV among others) and funds such as CE Media Program and TFI Tribeca Documentary Fund, BKM and Hamburger Filmförderung.

DPU has a strong foothold in the international market and participates frequently at documentary events and training workshops (IDFA, Eurodoc, Ex Oriente, Baltic Sea Forum), continuously expanding our network and always looking for new ways to bring great stories to life.



(c) Antonia Kilian

PINK SHADOW FILMS

Pink Shadow Films is an independent production company based in Kassel and managed by Antonia Kilian. Pink Shadow Films produces creative documentaries and feature films with strong authoring voices that translate social and political events into the language of cinema. Stories which address issues around emancipation and diversity are of particular importance to us.

GREENLIT PRODUCTIONS OY

Producer Essi Haukkamaa founded Greenlit Productions in 2011 and Merja Ritola joined the company as Managing Director and Producer in 2017. Directors Inderjit Kaur Khalsa and Leena Kilpeläinen also joined as minority shareholders alongside with translator Mikko Lyytikäinen in 2017. All of them have worked with Ritola and Haukkamaa in several projects prior.

Besides Helsinki, the company has an office in Sydney, Australia, with the aim of an increasingly international approach to productions. Greenlit Productions has currently several feature films and feature-length documentaries in different stages of production, topics ranging from drama to comedy and international politics.

The aim of Greenlit Productions is to discover talented, creative and original filmmakers and let them be heard. We want to produce high-quality, attention-grabbing content for both Finnish and the international audiences. We are an innovative and uncompromising company that wants to do its part in regenerating cinema.



(c) Antonia Kilian

CREDITS

Director: Antonia Kilian

DoP: Antonia Kilian

Script: Antonia Kilian, Guevara Namer, Arash Asadi

Editor: Arash Asadi

Original Music: Shkoon

Sound Design and Re-Recording:
Stephan Konken

Colourist: Sally Shamas

Graphic Designer: Naji El Mir

Producers: Frank Müller, Antonia Kilian, Guevara Namer, Merja Ritola

Production Manager: Sevina Evdike (Komina Film a Rojava)

Commissioning Editor: Erkko Lyytinen

Produced by Doppelplusultra Filmproduktion
and Pink Shadow Films



PINK SHADOW FILMS

in Co-Production with Greenlit Productions Oy

GREENLIT ✨ PRODUCTIONS

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(c) Antonia Kilian

This film was developed within the framework of
EURODOC 2017

Ex Oriente Film workshop organized by the Institute of Documentary Film Czech Republic
IDFA Summer School 2018 and IDFA Project Space 2020
Baltic Sea Forum for Documentaries 2018

This project was completed with the support of
Women Make Movies, Production Assistance Program

Pitched at
Diyarbakir Film Festival
Lau Haizatera
Fipadoc
Dok.Fest München
Speed Meet Market Barcelona

