

BULLFROG FILMS PRESENTS . . .



A Film by ALEXANDRA SHIVA

# THIS IS HOME

*a refugee story*

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

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# Synopsis

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Only twenty-one thousand Syrian refugees out of five million have been accepted into the United States since 2011. *This Is Home* follows four families sent to resettle in Baltimore in 2016. They have just eight months to find jobs, learn English, and become self-sufficient. The clock starts right when they land. For Syrians like Khaldoun, who was tortured and left physically disabled, and children like Mohammad, who suffers from PTSD, their needs are vast and complicated. Halfway through the process, President Trump issues a travel ban on all refugees from Muslim-majority countries, and suddenly their lives, and the safety of loved ones still trapped in Syria, become all the more perilous. With much-needed empathy, the film reveals the inherent decency of a displaced community desperate for help within a country increasingly hostile to principles of inclusion and opportunity. *This Is Home* is the winner of the 2018 Sundance Audience Award: World Cinema Documentary.

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# Director's Statement

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*This Is Home* began when someone involved in refugee resettlement asked me to make a film about refugees in a similar style and tone as my previous film, *How To Dance In Ohio*. I understood immediately why my style of filmmaking would be effective for this subject matter. The approach I took with my previous documentary was to foster connections between film and audience by creating an opportunity for the viewer to be with the subjects, to walk alongside them, rather than looking at them from a distance. Part of the strategy was to stay personal and away from the political.

My approach with *This Is Home* is similar. No expert talking heads or political advocates explaining why you should care or believe one thing or another, but rather direct human connection through vérité and interviews with our subjects. What does it feel like to be uprooted from everything they know and start over, after intense trauma? How does it feel to come from a rich culture and adult life and in some ways, feel like a powerless child, having to learn the details of basic living all over again? What is it like to be a child, trying to develop a sense of rootedness and sense of self, while watching your parents – your role models – struggle with their own sense of identity and belonging?

By bypassing the highly charged political aspects of this enormous crisis (while still allowing for the context) and landing the viewer in the intimate worlds and the drama of everyday life, struggles and triumphs, I hope to pierce the veil of indifference. To find a way in, so that we see all our common humanity and similarities instead of an intense focus on difference.

I believe that people want to connect and care about the current refugee crisis, but that fear, indifference and alienation, borne out of a complete lack of exposure or understanding, stands in the way. Refugees have been reduced to statistics or nameless faceless millions. I think that by focusing in on a few individuals and making the story as personal as possible we can create a bridge to the universal and shed light on a larger issue.

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As the daughter of an Israeli immigrant father, I have a very up close and personal interest and understanding of issues around displacement, alienation, identity and belonging – all the more reason why I wanted to tell this story.

- Alexandra Shiva, Director/Producer

# Discussion Questions

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Below are questions to help begin a discussion following the film. We encourage you to add or amend.

1. How do you feel after watching the film? What are you thinking about? What scenes are most memorable for you? What was most surprising?
2. Did you know about the resettlement process here in the US? How did this film change your perception of what it is like to resettle here?
3. When did your family immigrate to the United States? Can you share a bit about your family's history?
4. When you moved to a new neighborhood or town, what was most helpful to you in settling into that new place?
5. In the film, the Employment teacher says she has to destroy many of the preconceived ideas of the US that refugees come to this country with. What do you think those ideas are? And why?
6. What are some traditional recipes that your family like to cook?
7. In the film, every member of the family played a role in helping adjust to new life in the United States. What various roles do members in your family play in your everyday?
8. What do you think is the hardest part of this transition to a new country? What would be your one piece of advice/encouragement with these families?