

A FILM BY **HERNÁN ZIN**

BORN IN SYRIA



A PRODUCTION OF LAPEZARUETA FILMS AND CONTRAMEDIA FILMS IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH FINAL CUT FOR REAL. EDITED BY JOSE M.G. MOVANO, FÁTIMA DE LOS SANTOS AND TRISTRÁN BARRERA. SOUND DESIGNER: JORGE MARTÍN. SCREENPLAY BY HERNÁN ZIN AND JOSÉ CORTIÑO. MUSIC BY CAROLINE VAREZ AND JEAN-PIERRE ENSSLE. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: OLMO FIGUEROA GONZÁLEZ-QUEVEDO, HERNÁN ZIN AND MÓNICA HELLSTRÖM. PRODUCED BY OLMO FIGUEROA GONZÁLEZ-QUEVEDO. DIRECTED AND FILMED BY HERNÁN ZIN.



BORN IN SYRIA

Time 84' / 55'

Genre Documentary

Languages Arabic, Kurdish, French, English, German and Spanish

Production year 2016

Director Hernán Zin

Producers Olmo Figueredo González-Quevedo

Executive Producers Olmo Figueredo, Hernán Zin & Monica Hellström

Scriptwriters Hernán Zin & José F. Ortuño

Music Gabriel Yared & Jean Pierre Ensuque

Editing José M.G. Moyano, Fátima de los Santos, Darío García

Produced by

La Claqueta PC (Spain)

Contramedia Films (Spain)

Final Cut For Real (Denmark)

Sales Agency

JAVA Films

Broadcasters

Canal Sur TV (Spain), UR (Sweden), TVN (Poland),
SIC (Portugal), AlJazeera (Middle East), DR (Denmark)

www.borninsyria.com



Over 3,500 people have died trying to reach Europe
since the beginning of the war in Syria.

Half of them were children.

Those who made it are now trying
to rebuild their lives, far from their native country.

This documentary is dedicated to them.



SYNOPSIS

Since the beginning of the **civil war in Syria**, around four million Syrians have had to abandon their country, fleeing violence. Over half of them are children. *Born in Syria* narrates the journey of these refugees **from the point of view of the children** who live this constant torment. They suffer the abuse of the mafias, the harshness of the sea, the uncertainty of the future with barely the shirt on their back, only to **arrive at their long awaited destination and start a new odyssey: an**

integration into a new land that, for many, is hostile. This is the greatest exodus of refugees since the Second World War, seen from a height of four and a half feet through **seven stories** of war, suffering, and desperation... But ultimately these stories are also tales of overcoming, innocence, bravery, and hope that help us understand **what it means to have been born in Syria.**



Director's notes

Twenty years ago, I decided to hone the focus of my work as a reporter and documentary filmmaker into regions of armed conflict. I felt it necessary to humanize the numbers we see every day in the news headlines. Give them names. Remove the tyranny of the here and now to delve into and give a voice to their stories and context. Since then, I have worked in over 50 countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Europe. My camera is always on my shoulder. From Afghanistan to Somalia, Uganda, Sudan, Lebanon, Gaza, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Syria.

If I have learned anything in this time, it is that the elderly and the children always suffer the most from war. They are the most defenseless victims. These children serve a double sentence as the physical and psychological traumas will follow them for the rest of their lives. The conflict in Syria, like all civil wars and like almost all armed confrontation of the twenty-first century, takes place in urban areas with a high impact on the civilian population. The sides are blurry. The armies, in large part, are soldiers by necessity. In this scenario, the impact on Syrian childhood is horrible. 40% of the victims of the conflict are under the age of 18.

The other harsh reality for Syrian children is the extended duration of the conflict. It has already been a five-year struggle for the most affected areas—five years without access to healthcare, education, and basic services like electricity and running water. Clearly, it is important to tell the story of the war in Syria from the perspective of childhood. Even more so when hundreds of thousands of children, in many cases alone, in some with their families, have embarked upon the most significant exodus to Europe since the Second World War.

Born in Syria rises from the call to give a voice to these children, from the moment they leave Syria, to their arrival to Europe, to their search to integrate themselves into the societies that take them in. It provides a way to talk about the conflict from the perspective of its most vulnerable victims, but also to discover the world's response to a conflict that is jeopardizing the future of one of the most sensitive and controversial regions on the planet.



Hernán Zin – Director of
Born in Syria



Giving a Voice to the Children

The narrative base of *Born in Syria* is found within the voices and gazes of the children in Syria and in their journey to the Promised Land: Europe. No voice will tell us the story better than the little Syrians.

This is a narrative form that I previously used in works such as *The War Against Women*, a documentary about rape as a weapon of war. This was filmed over three years in ten countries and premiered in 2013 in Great Britain, with the help of actress Angelina Jolie. In the movie, over thirty women speak to the camera, recounting horrors they have suffered and how they fought to overcome them.

That same year, I also premiered a documentary that I produced and directed: *I want to be Messi*, coproduced by TVE and globally premiered by National Geographic. In this work, a dozen children denounce abuses endured at the hands of representatives and unscrupulous traders in the darkest corners of the soccer industry.

In 2014, I made the documentary *Born in Gaza* about the children living in the middle of the Palestine-Israel conflict. A decade earlier, I wrote a book called, "*Helado y patatas fritas*" and a series of reports for *el Mundo TV* about the sexual exploitation of children in Cambodia. As you can see, the most disadvantaged individuals, especially children, have always been the main subject of my work over the last 20 years as a documentary filmmaker.



Film Narration

In the wake of the documentary *Born in Gaza*, throughout a year of filming for *Born in Syria*, I have been looking to create my own audiovisual language that helps intimately center the viewer into the gaze of the characters, in spite of the surrounding chaos, uncertainty, and destruction.

We can stop time, feel and reflect, thanks to slow motion. We show aerial perspectives to understand the expanse of the exodus. These are two key points of view for *Born in Syria*.

It hasn't been easy **filming in 4K with heavy film lenses** or using drones in so many countries in such complicated circumstances: extreme cold and heat, tight crowds, saturated borders, and visas that are impossible to get. We have completed the entire refugee journey at least three times.

Nevertheless, the challenge was worth it. The protagonists' stories in *Born in Syria* are powerful and it says so much about the hardships of our time that it was such a challenge to portray them in a way that helps us arrive at the essence of the harsh fate they have to confront.

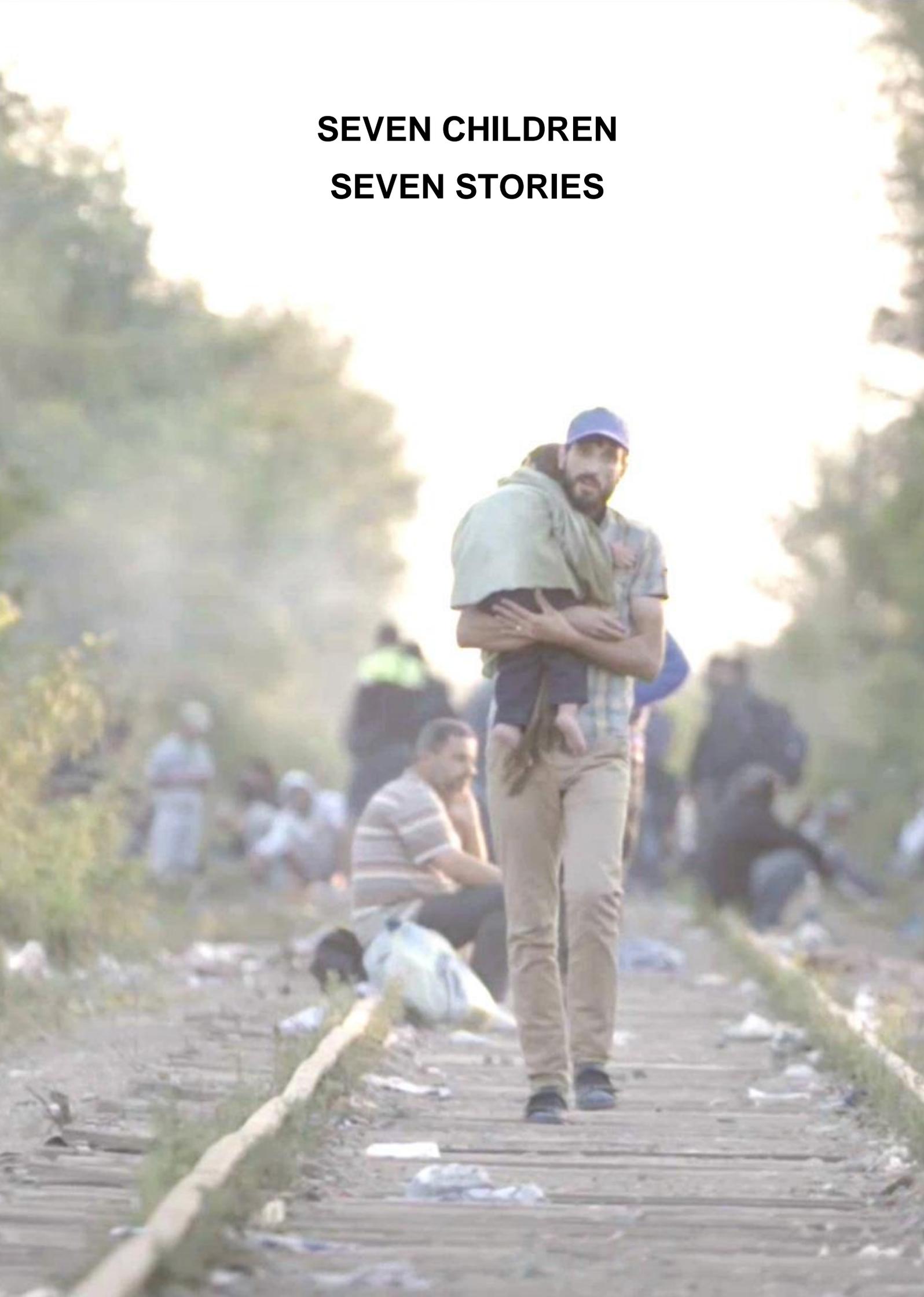
Without a doubt, the masterful music composed by **Gabriel Yared** helps us raise the narrative quality of *Born in Syria*. Not in vain, the Lebanese composer showed enthusiasm for the project from the very beginning and has three nominations for **Oscar awards** under his belt.

For the script, I joined forces with **José Francisco Ortuño**, who has a long history in cinema.

In the editing room, the team is also of first-class artistic quality, which has helped increase the quality and esthetic novelty of *Born in Syria*. The head of the team is **José M.G. Moyano**, who, in addition to earning a **Goya award**, has been the film editor for movies such as *Marshland* and *The Man with Thousand Faces*. Darío García has also been nominated for a **Goya** for *Paco de Lucía: a Journey*.



**SEVEN CHILDREN
SEVEN STORIES**



It seemed like an eternity ago when Marwan still lived in Aleppo and, one day while he was running errands, saw two cars with decapitated men inside. He couldn't eat for three days after that. Even though it wasn't the first time this sweet and somewhat naïve boy saw such an atrocity, it was the straw that broke the camel's back. His family packed their bags and moved to Turkey, where the boy had to leave school to work and help his family get back on their feet. His uncle, a tailor by profession, showed him the ropes and Marwan became a great tailor, even though it was a difficult job with twelve-hour days and only one day off.

Luckily, they were able to pull together enough money to pay the mafias and begin their long journey to Europe. Marwan and his three sisters traveled with their parents in crammed cars and even more packed boats in a tough and seemingly unending pilgrimage. During the trip across the Aegean Sea, Marwan was terrified after hearing stories about those who had died at sea. But Marwan and his family arrived in Greece, safe and sound... Although it was just one step in the journey that awaited.

His grandparents had to remain in Syria and he worried about them, remembering the constant bombings and shootings. But his family could not afford the price of bringing them as well. Maybe they will hopefully be able to do it someday.

Time goes by and after no little hardship, we return to find Marwan and his family waiting to cross the border from Croatia to Serbia and finally to Belgium, where they now live. Marwan is trying his hardest to learn French in his new home. His father, on the other hand, hasn't learned the language, which still prevents him from finding work.

But when destiny closes a door, it opens a window. They have finally been granted refugee status and have even found a nice apartment to live in. His dream to bring his grandparents over and share a prosperous life together is closer every day.

"We thought we would die at any moment."



MARWAN, 13 years old



Hamude just arrived in Austria and he had already endured the worst trip. It took 16 days to get to Austria. That aside, he tells us he misses his parents.

At just nine years old, he had to leave Aleppo with his family because of the bombings. He saw people attacked and assassinated and he had to change schools to study in a mosque because his school was destroyed by a missile.

He has arrived with his little brother, Hamzeh, and his uncle, as they didn't have enough money to bring the rest of his family.

His dream is to reunite everyone in Germany, where he believes it will be less expensive and they can live happily.

What's more, the authorities have accused his uncle of hitting Hamzeh and they have taken away his custody, leaving Hamude separated from his little brother, whom he loves very much and misses.

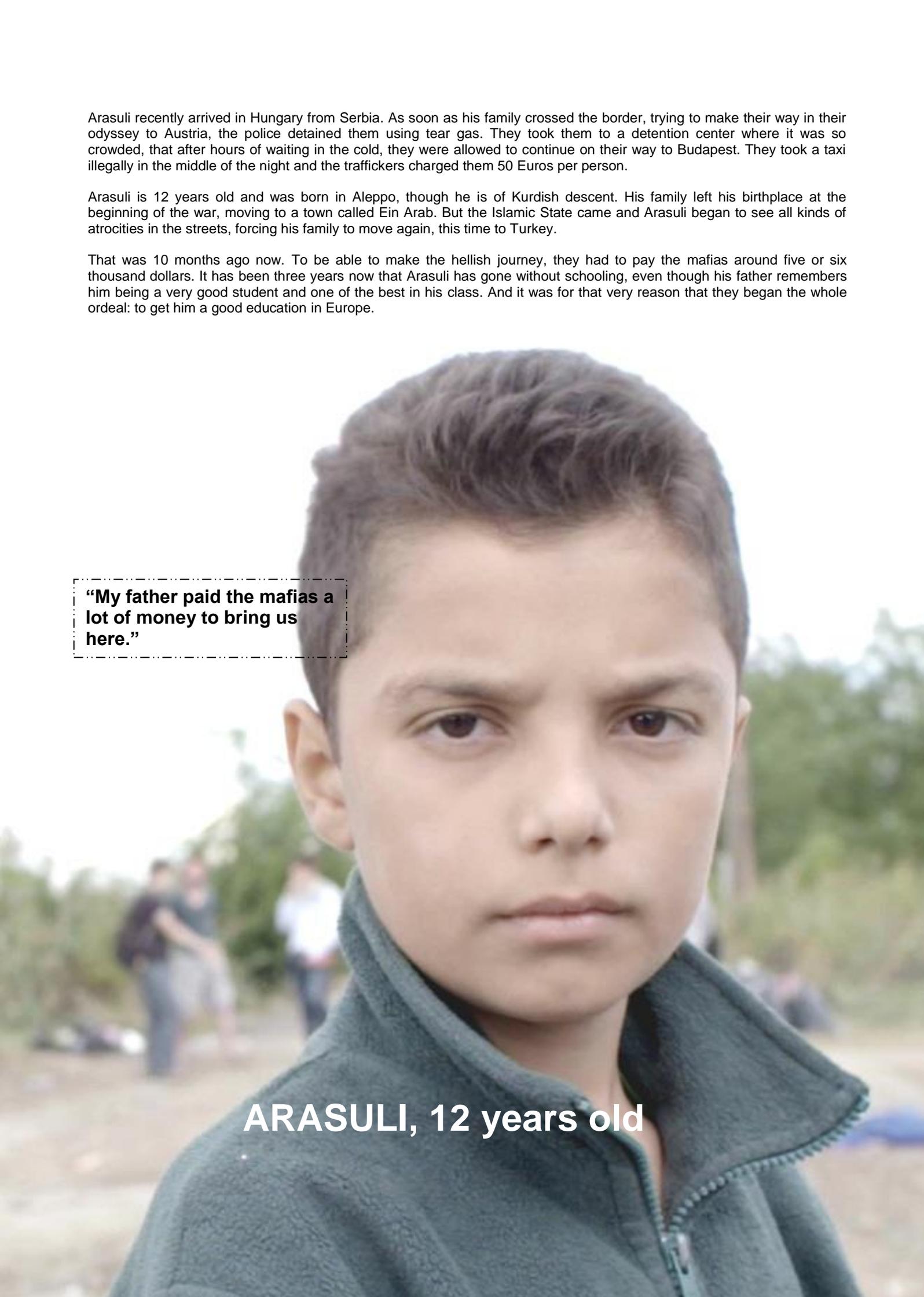
**“I really miss my
parents and my brothers
and sisters.”**

HAMUDE, 8 years old

Arasuli recently arrived in Hungary from Serbia. As soon as his family crossed the border, trying to make their way in their odyssey to Austria, the police detained them using tear gas. They took them to a detention center where it was so crowded, that after hours of waiting in the cold, they were allowed to continue on their way to Budapest. They took a taxi illegally in the middle of the night and the traffickers charged them 50 Euros per person.

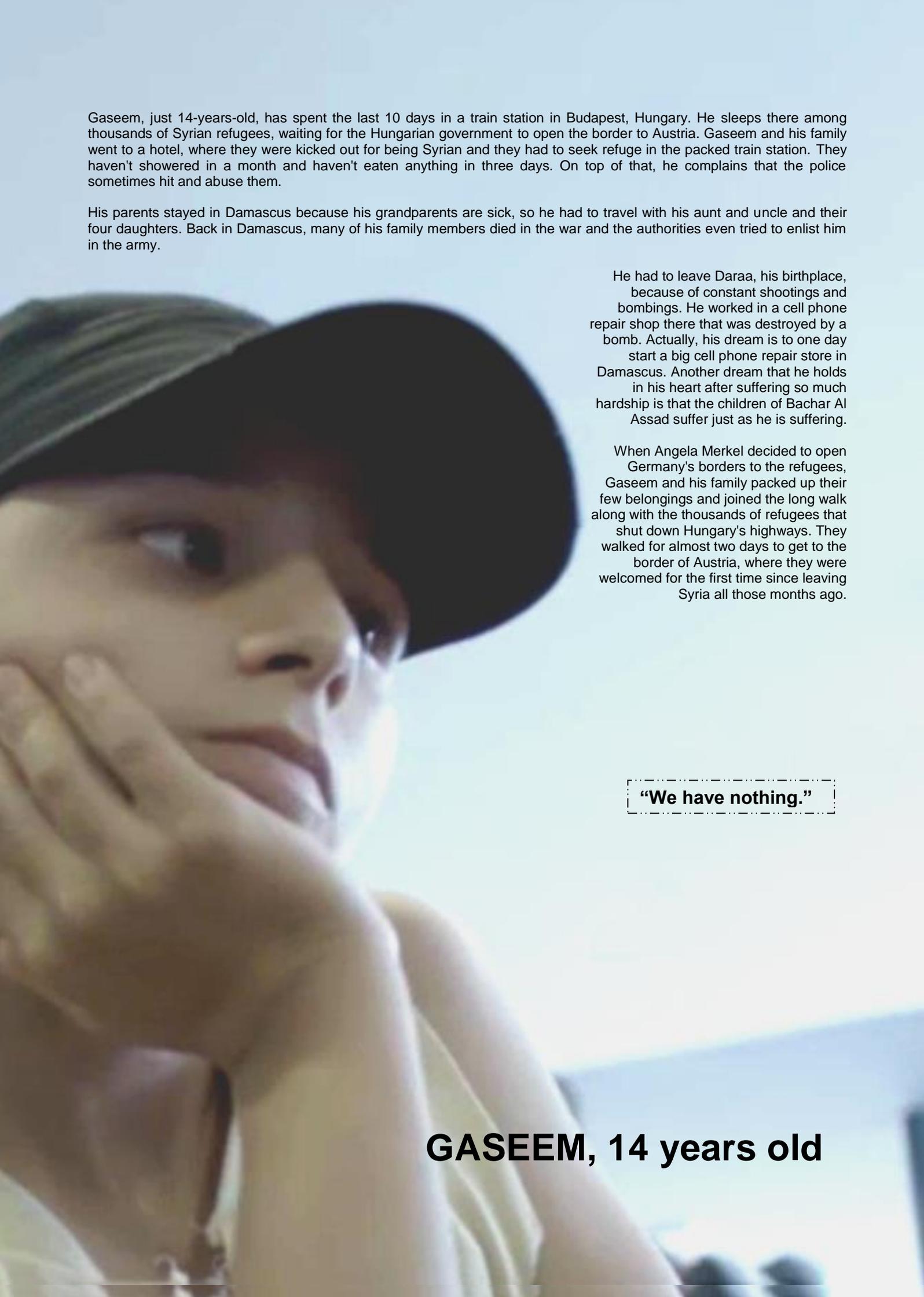
Arasuli is 12 years old and was born in Aleppo, though he is of Kurdish descent. His family left his birthplace at the beginning of the war, moving to a town called Ein Arab. But the Islamic State came and Arasuli began to see all kinds of atrocities in the streets, forcing his family to move again, this time to Turkey.

That was 10 months ago now. To be able to make the hellish journey, they had to pay the mafias around five or six thousand dollars. It has been three years now that Arasuli has gone without schooling, even though his father remembers him being a very good student and one of the best in his class. And it was for that very reason that they began the whole ordeal: to get him a good education in Europe.



“My father paid the mafias a lot of money to bring us here.”

ARASULI, 12 years old



Gaseem, just 14-years-old, has spent the last 10 days in a train station in Budapest, Hungary. He sleeps there among thousands of Syrian refugees, waiting for the Hungarian government to open the border to Austria. Gaseem and his family went to a hotel, where they were kicked out for being Syrian and they had to seek refuge in the packed train station. They haven't showered in a month and haven't eaten anything in three days. On top of that, he complains that the police sometimes hit and abuse them.

His parents stayed in Damascus because his grandparents are sick, so he had to travel with his aunt and uncle and their four daughters. Back in Damascus, many of his family members died in the war and the authorities even tried to enlist him in the army.

He had to leave Daraa, his birthplace, because of constant shootings and bombings. He worked in a cell phone repair shop there that was destroyed by a bomb. Actually, his dream is to one day start a big cell phone repair store in Damascus. Another dream that he holds in his heart after suffering so much hardship is that the children of Bachar Al Assad suffer just as he is suffering.

When Angela Merkel decided to open Germany's borders to the refugees, Gaseem and his family packed up their few belongings and joined the long walk along with the thousands of refugees that shut down Hungary's highways. They walked for almost two days to get to the border of Austria, where they were welcomed for the first time since leaving Syria all those months ago.

“We have nothing.”

GASEEM, 14 years old



Jihan has spent a lot of time at the border between Austria and Slovenia. This thirteen-year-old girl travels with her father, having had to leave her siblings and her mother in Lebanon, where they fled to from Syria, because they couldn't pay to bring them all. Jihan remembers that as she was leaving, her mother couldn't stop crying and even begged her father not to take her, which made the rest of the trip an even sadder experience for her.

Her father is a shoemaker and her mother a waitress. She's able to stay in contact with her mother through brief phone calls in which she tries to cheer her up.

When they got to Lebanon, Jihan started going to a school where they treated her very badly because of where she was from, until she was eventually expelled.

Now she is in Berlin, Germany, where she practices kickboxing and hopes her dream of seeing her mother again comes true.

**“I dream of the day
when I will be able to
see my mother again.”**

JIHAN, 13 years old

Kais is a happy and extroverted boy who is always laughing. One day, in his birth city of Aleppo in Syria, he went shopping with his family and a plane bombed the area, causing him serious injury and burns. He lost an eye, although he hopes to recover it with surgery in Turkey, where he went to get attention for his injuries.

His parents had to stay in Syria and they now live with his uncle and aunt... or at least that is what he believes as no one has been brave enough to tell him a terrible secret: his parents died in the explosion.

Kais was very close with them, especially his father, and right now he has to be strong in order to recover and be able to live as normal a life as possible for a 10-year-old child. The wounds of the body are one thing, and those of the soul are another.

Kais wakes up in the middle of the night with horrible nightmares and is paralyzed by terrible fear every time he hears a plane fly over.



"After the explosion, I don't remember anything."

KAIS, 10 years old

Mohammed is a very alert and intelligent boy who loves poetry and drawing, even though lately he only draws the things he saw in his birthplace, Syria, before he had to abandon it in search of a better life: bombs, destruction, blood, amputated bodies...

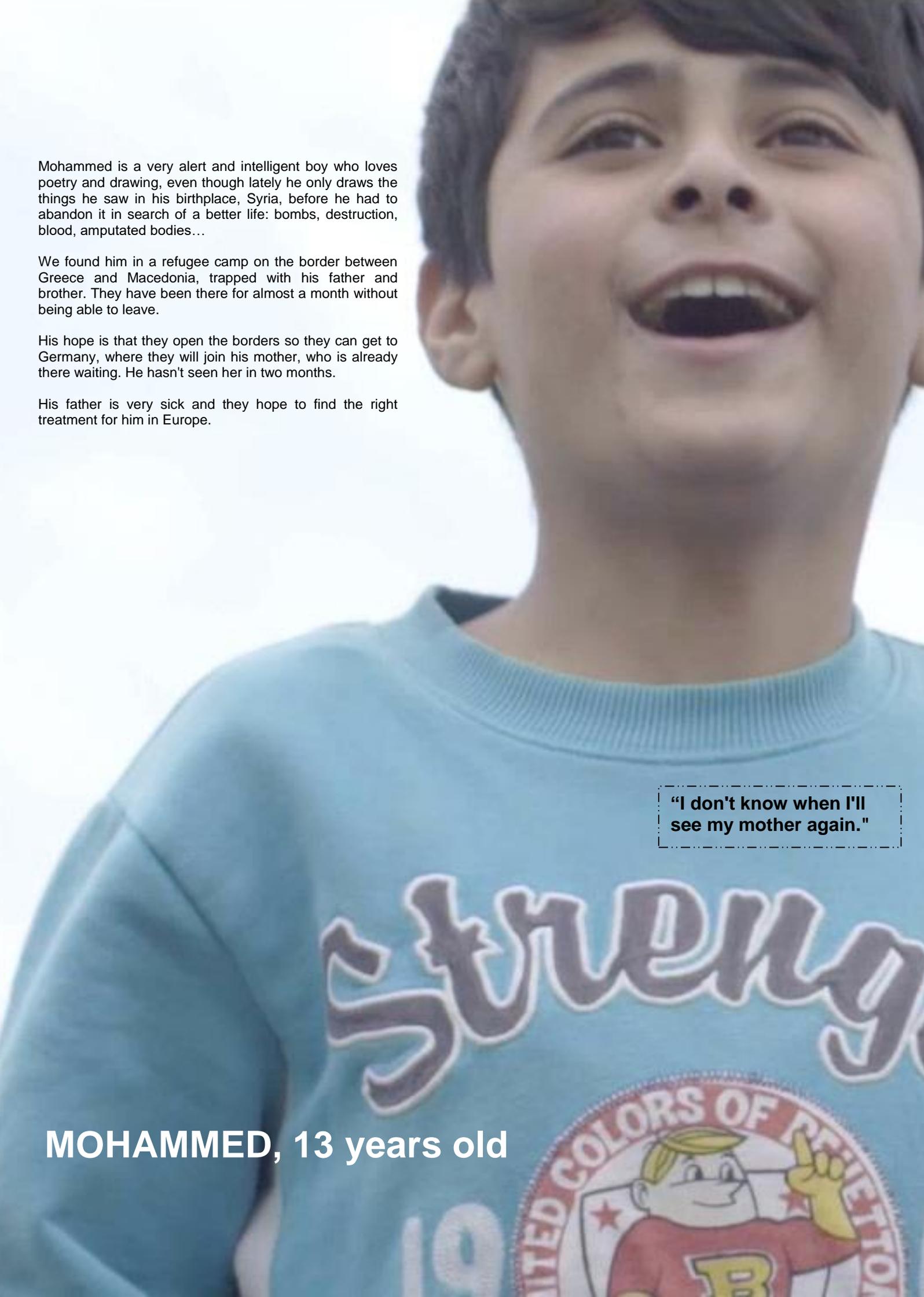
We found him in a refugee camp on the border between Greece and Macedonia, trapped with his father and brother. They have been there for almost a month without being able to leave.

His hope is that they open the borders so they can get to Germany, where they will join his mother, who is already there waiting. He hasn't seen her in two months.

His father is very sick and they hope to find the right treatment for him in Europe.

"I don't know when I'll see my mother again."

MOHAMMED, 13 years old



Composer – Gabriel Yared

Oscar winner, Gabriel Yared, is a Lebanese immigrant who went to France in search of a better life. Given his past, he feels strongly about the current refugee situation and forms part of our project as the principal composer and one of our movie's most important ambassadors.

He was born in 1949 and lived in Lebanon until he was 18-years-old. He went to a Jesuit primary school in Beirut, which he attended from the age of 4 to 14. In addition to his studies, he learned about music on his own, practicing with the school's organ and reading repertoires thanks to the Jesuit's music library. He was the first in his class and was most fascinated with what he heard and he soon decided to study music composition techniques.

Known especially for his extraordinary soundtracks for Anthony Minghella's movies, his first collaboration with the director was for the movie *The English Patient*, for which he won an Oscar for best original soundtrack. He went on to compose all the scores for Minghella's movies, including the series *The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*. His work in film, however, has not been limited to Minghella, having also worked for Brad Silberling, Angelina Jolie, and Mira Nair, among many others.

In 2006, the documentary, *Music by Gabriel Yared* premiered, centering on the titular composer.

Among his soundtracks, some highlights are:

- * *The Promise* (2016)
- * *The Prophet* (2014)
- * *Amelia* (2009)
- * *The Lives of Others* (2006)
- * *Troy* (2004)
- * *Cold Mountain* (2003)
- * *Autumn in New York* (2000)
- * *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999)
- * *City of Angels* (1998)
- * *The English Patient* (1996)



Director – Hernán Zin

Hernán Zin (Buenos Aires, 1971) has a degree in International Relations and has spent the last 20 years travelling the world creating documentaries and writing articles and books.

He has directed many documentaries, some highlights being:

* **Villas Miseria** (2009). Directed, filmed, and written by Zin, Villas Miseria shows life in the slums of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Filmed over three years, five of the protagonists that Zin returned to visit died, due to poverty and violence. The voiceover was done by actor José Coronado. It premiered on Canal Odisea.

* **I Want to be Messi** (2013). This documentary film was written, directed, and produced by Zin to show the darkest corners of the successful reserve of players in Argentinean soccer: the abuse the children suffer at the hands of scrupulous agents and their very own parents. It was premiered in Spain by Televisión Española and in America by National Geographic.

* **The War Against Women** (2013). This documentary film was written, produced, and directed by Zin to tackle the topic of rape as a weapon of war. It was filmed over three years in Sudan, the Congo, Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kenya, and Uganda. The main theme song, "Caesar must die," was composed by the singer Bebe and Zin, and produced by Carlos Jean.

* **Born in Gaza** (2014). Documentary directed, filmed, and written by Zin. Produced by Zin, Bebe, Olmo Figueredo, and Jon Sistiaga. Nominated for Best Documentary at the Goya Awards and the Platino Awards. Forqué Award for best documentary. Jury Prize at the Al Jazeera Festival. Nominated for Best Documentary by the Cinema Writers Circle.

* **Matadoras** (2015). Documentary directed and produced by Zin about women in bullfighting, specifically about the life of Ángela Hernández, the woman who faced Franco in order for women to be able to bullfight. In coproduction with Televisión Española.

* **10 años con Bebe** (2016). Documentary film that premiered at the Malaga Film Festival on the life of the singer, Bebe. Written, produced, and directed by Zin in coproduction with Movistar Plus and Canal Extremadura. Nominated for Best Documentary at the Latin Grammys.



Producer – Olmo Figueredo González-Quevedo

Selected as “New Producer to Watch” at the MIPTV in Cannes 2012, Olmo Figueredo has several nominations for the Goya Awards for Best Documentary. He began his audiovisual career when he founded La Claqueta fourteen years ago.

During his time in the production industry, he has mainly produced feature documentary films (*Born in Gaza*, 2014), short documentary films (*El hombre que estuvo allí*, 2013) and documentary series (*Life in Flames*, 2015).

After graduating with a degree in Audiovisual Communication from the University of Seville, he now specialises in the management of audiovisual companies and has also completed various Masters programmes (Media Business School, 2004; EAVE, 2016). He has also taken part in numerous european cinematographic workshops; such as European Films Crossing Borders, L'Atelier du Cannes, Cartoon Forum, The Pixel Lab and Insight-Out.

He is also a member of the European Film Academy in Spain and is on the Board of Direction for the Association of Andalusian Producers AEPAA – APRIA. In 2002 he founded the production company La Claqueta along with Manuel H. Martín, where he has developed numerous projects as a producer for channels such as History Channel, Discovery, RMC Découverte, RTL, Euronews and Canal +.

He has produced:

- * **Born in Syria** (Hernán Zin, 2016). Official Competition Section, Festival de Cine Europeo de Sevilla 2016.
- * **The Resurrection Club** (Álvaro Corcuera y Guillermo Abril, 2016). Official Competition Section, Heartland Film Festival 2016
- * **10 años con Bebe** (Hernán Zin, 2015). 80' Nominated for Best Documentary. The Latino Grammys 2016.
- * **Amazonas Clandestino** (David Beriain, 2015). Nominated for Best Factual Series. Real Screen Awards 2016
- * **Born in Gaza** (Hernán Zin, 2014). Nominated for Best Documentary at the 2015 Goya Awards. Nominated for Best Documentary at the Platino Awards 2015. Best Documentary at the Forqué Awards 2015.
- * **El hombre que estaba allí** (Daniel Suberviola y Luis Felipe Torrente, 2013). Nominated for Best Documentary at the 2014 Goya Awards.
- * **30 Years of Darkness** (Manuel H. Martín, 2011)' Nominated for Best Documentary at the 2013 Goya Awards.



The companies



LA CLAQUETA

Founded in 2002, LA CLAQUETA is a Film & TV production company based in Seville, Andalusia. Nominated four times by the Spanish Academy Awards, the company was recognized as one of the four upcoming young international production companies at MIPTV 2012.

The company is specialized in documentaries and factual entertainment. It has worked together with international broadcasters such as Discovery Channel, RMC, History Channel or Canal +.

In 2012, La Claqueta created a new label called TC-Movies in order to produce and develop fiction feature films for cinema and TV.

FINAL CUT FOR REAL

FINAL CUT FOR REAL is a two-time Oscar®-Nominated production company based in Denmark dedicated to producing high-end, creative documentaries for the international market.

Founded in 2009 by producers Signe Byrge Sørensen and Anne Köhncke, the company today consists of two additional producers, Monica Hellström and Heidi Elise Christensen, and post producer Maria Kristensen. Korthe Barfod is our financial controller, and Walteri Vanhanen is our in-house editing assistant. The company also brings in two invaluable interns every semester.

CONTRAMEDIA FILMS

CONTRAMEDIA is an audiovisual producer founded by Hernán Zin in October 2008. We have grown quickly and sustainably ever since.

After finishing 'Slum World', we started our most ambitious project in 2009, 'War Against Women', together with the American producer Island Bound, shot in over 10 countries along 3 years, as well as the series 'Women That Change The World'.

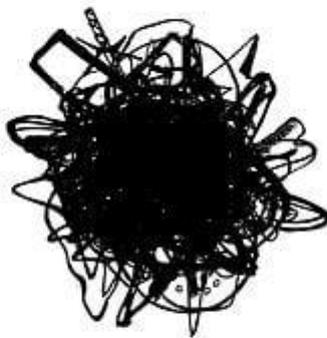
In 2011, we started producing reports and documentaries for TVE and Canal Plus, while we developed our own formats like '13 Stories' and 'Highway to Jail'.

DISTRIBUTION COMPANY - JAVA FILMS

Founded in 2005, Java Films rapidly established itself as one of Europe's leading independent documentary distributors, providing production support and distribution to both finished films and projects in development.

Our films include international Emmy winners and have been nominated for prestigious prizes like the Goyas or premiered at important festivals like Sundance, Tribeca or HotDocs.

FINAL CUT
for real



CONTRAMEDIA

JAVA FILMS

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