

A FILM BY DINA NASER



أرواح صغيرة TINY SOULS

DIRECTOR DINA NASER PRODUCER DINA NASER CO-PRODUCERS KHALED HADDAD, PALMYER BADINIER

CAMERA HASAN ABU HAMMAD, DINA NASER

SOUND ANTONIN DALMASSO EDITING NAJWA KHACHIMI, QUTAIBA BARHAMJI

MUSIC RONALD HEU COLORIST HAZEM BERRABAH



WIF



Logline

After escaping the Syrian war, a free-spirited 9-year old and her family must navigate confined life when stranded in Zaatari Refugee Camp, Jordan. Over four years, the director follows her characters' lives within barb-wired camp walls, capturing the resilient shift from childhood to adolescence, along with many states of adapting and survival in between, leading up to the eventual clash that threatens their fate.



Synopsis

Marwa, her mother and siblings are stranded in Zaatari Refugee Camp - Jordan, where they arrived in 2012 after escaping war in Syria. Marwa is nine, and like any child, her concerns revolve around school, and her interests around playtime. Throughout the film, her playful character comes to life with her mischievous younger brother Mahmoud and her sassy younger sister, Ayah, whose character also reveals the depth of the emotional impact war can have on a little girl. Four months into camp life, Marwa expects that they'd likely stay there for another week, maybe two. Over the ensuing four years, the director follows Marwa's day to day life in the camp, where she blossoms from a child to a young woman, where life perseveres time and again, despite its unusual shape. Amidst daily challenges, we witness humor, friction, and a range of survival sentiments, but above all, resilience is vivid. As a young, open spirit, Marwa envisions herself as a "free pigeon" in her own words, unrestricted by high walls and barbwires. As the years go by, Marwa gets attached to her camp life, friends, and make-shift home, until one day, her elder brother is called upon by authorities for interrogation about his association with militant extremists. Only then their "settled" life takes an immense turn, and questions the certainty of their narrative.-



Director Bio

A Jordanian director and producer of Palestinian roots, Dina first graduated with a BA in Art and Graphic Design in 2003. And in 2013, Dina was granted the Docnomads scholarship program for Master Degree Documentary Filmmaking in Lisbon, Budapest and Brussels. Post graduating, she followed her passion for filmmaking, and worked her way through diverse TV productions like Sesame Street, and film productions such as The Cut by Fatih Akin, and Inchallah by Anais Barbeau-Lavalere. She then transitioned behind the camera, and began to independently direct and produce. Dina's devotion for documenting is inspired by people who are seemingly ordinary, until you learn of their unsung circumstances, and by stories that spring from her homeland in Palestine. Her subjects are presented with poise and untainted perception, often touching on the veiled layers of certain communities and habitats.

Her short documentary film 'Shamieh' (2011) portrays an aging Palestinian woman living in Zizya Refugee Camp - Jordan. Thereafter, she began investigating the lives of Syrian refugee children, which organically paved the way for her 'Tiny Souls' documentary film; first realized in a nine-minute format (2012), then developed as her first feature documentary (2019). Over the course of four years, Dina filmed the lives of 'Tiny Souls' characters as they unfolded inside Zaatari Camp - Jordan. In its earlier 9-minute stages, 'Tiny Souls' participated in film festivals such as the Euromed Audiovisual's Made in MED Film Festival, where it won the Audience Choice award, and the Jordanian European Film Festival, where it won Jury Award for Best Documentary Short, among others. Tiny Souls –the feature length documentary– was supported by Doha Film Institute (DFI), IDFA, the Arab Fund for Art and Culture (AFAC), Bertha Foundation, and the Royal Film Commission (RFC); the film was selected to attend the IDFA Summer School 2017 Rough-Cut, as well as Malmo Post-Production Platform 2016, where it received a Music Production Award, and JCC Takmil 2016, where it was awarded for Color Grading



Her award winning film 'One Minute' (2015) depicts a woman living in Gaza while it was under attack in 2014; it received the PerSo-Perugia Social Film Festival (Audience Award) and won Best Short Film Award in Nazra Film Festival. It also participated in many international film festivals, such as the 14th Festival of Mediterranean Short Film Tangier 2016, the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) 2017, the Arab Film Festival Berlin, and the Cairo International Women's Film Festival 2017.

She also co-directed 'Sea Wash' (2016), a short experimental film, which pays tribute to refugees who lost their lives at sea, in search of a safer future. It was selected for the video art section in ZOOM-ZBLIŽENIA Film Festival in Poland, and it participated in "Europako Mugak/Fronteras de Europa", "Borders of Europe" in Spain/Bilbao (2017), and in Shnit Film Festival, Cairo (2017).

Director's Statement

FILM INSPIRATION

When I first visited Zaatari Refugee Camp in 2012 with my camera, I didn't have a film in mind. I wanted to gain a better understanding of the situation in Syria and the refugees' condition, thinking I would do so by talking to adults. Instead, I was drawn to the children's spontaneous, unscripted tales of war, then particularly to 9 year-old Marwa, who effortlessly grabbed my attention with her witty talk, innocent smile, and most importantly, her willing openness. In those moments I realized where to direct my camera and why. As I got to know her, I understood her sharp, positive, and responsible character, which stretched way beyond her age. The harsh conditions never suppressed Marwa's willpower. This vibrant child was determined to build her own path, dictated by her own resolution, not by war and nor by exterior circumstance. Her strength and charm were bursting with lessons, and I saw then an inspiring message of resilience, survival, and hope, calling to be carried across the camera, and so 'Tiny Souls' was born



PERSONAL CONNECTION

My own sentiments towards children of war and diaspora stem from my personal memories, post Kuwait war in 1990, as well as my father's recollections as a Palestinian child refugee in 1948. I feel that we can all identify with immigrant emotions of misplacement, despite our varying contexts and geographies; the feeling of belonging elsewhere is a universal sensitivity which we can all relate to.

ON HANDING CAMERA TO THE CHILDREN

The characters of the film evolve in the context of the Syrian crisis. Over the past seven years, the war in Syria has affected millions of lives. *Tiny Souls* turns focus on the children among them, portraying strands of physical and psychological repercussions, after witnessing the violence, destruction and dehumanization of war. In a conflict dominated by adult decisions, these children have been left out of the conversation – but they have a great deal to say.

The main character, Marwa, comes from a big family with 9 siblings. They lived in Deraa -Syria before the conflict, and then fled to Zaatari, where they were stranded with almost 80,000 people. In order to address the children's survival themes, the film gets up close and personal with Marwa, along with three of her recurrent siblings on site; her younger feisty sister, Ayah, her younger playful brother, Mahmoud, and her elder responsible brother, Mohammad. By choosing to make a character-driven film, and handing my camera over to them for long intervals, I hoped to give them a means for voicing their own thoughts, struggles, and dreams. I aimed to open a window into the make-shift homes and daily lives of refugee camps, where people are usually cited as statistics under the homogenizing "refugee" label, depriving them of individual qualities.

FROM SHORT TO FEATURE FILM

Tiny Souls was first released in a 9-minute format in 2013; my friend released it online without my knowledge, and before I had time to react to this surprise, I was fast flooded by people reaching out to me from all over the world, asking important questions with genuine interest about the state of refugees on film. In parallel with this public interest, my bond with Marwa kept growing, who still had much she needed to express; while I felt there was more to be told. That's how I went back to Zaatari and ended up filming '*Tiny Souls*' for four years, ultimately producing the current feature length documentary.

BEYOND CAMP WALLS

I hope it portrays the children's inspirational coming-of-age story, where they transitioned on camera, from childhood to adolescence, despite it all happening in a giant walled playground. As a child, Marwa's fenced life never stopped her dreams. However, as she grew into adolescence, her outlooks got more and more restrained, due to physical wall confinement, as well as cultural constraints, which become hyper-sensitive in severe controlled environments, such as refugee camps. This rather "monitored" shift into becoming a young woman is something that I, along with the majority of Arab women, do identify with.

CONCLUSIVE THOUGHTS

"What is their narrative of the situation" is the question I've asked myself. It is a film about being in their shoes, being in my shoes. Making this documentary has shown me the measure of how much we have to learn from their survival, and their ability to rebuild life from ground zero. More than anything, I hope this film can encourage us all to reflect on the world we live in today, and on the future of these "*Tiny Souls*," because in parallel circumstances, this could be me or you, displaced away from home.

Review

REVIEWS

'Tiny Souls': CPH:DOX Review

BY ALLAN HUNTER | 28 MARCH 2019



Dina Naser documents four years in the life of a trio of young Syrian refugees in Jordan



SOURCE: CPH:DOX
'TINY SOULS'

Dir/Scr Dina Naser, Jordan-Qatar-France, 2019, 86mins

The life of a young Syrian refugee is marked by privations and uncertainty but tempered by an abiding sense of hope in the future. Dina Naser's closely observed documentary *Tiny Souls* doesn't shy away from harsh reality, but is distinguished by the way it draws out the signs of optimism and normality that endure against all the odds. It should readily secure further festival exposure following its world premiere at CPH: Dox, and find a welcome in cable and satellite channels.

Four years of filming creates a potent sense of lives changing and the resilience required to keep cheerful and carry on

Jordanian based filmmaker Naser began capturing the story of nine-year-old Marwa and her family in 2012, and her feature-length debut grew out of an initial nine-minute short. When she met the family, they had fled Syria and found shelter at the Zaatari refugee camp in northern Jordan. They assumed their time there would be measured in weeks or perhaps months, never realising that it might stretch to years.

Naser keeps the focus very much on Marwa, her younger sister Ayah and their little brother Mahmoud. Close-ups capture the expressive faces of children filled with unguarded curiosity and excitement as they share their stories. They casually talk of having experienced "unimaginable horrors", the deaths they have witnessed and the moment their house in Syria was burnt to the ground. They describe the refugee camp as "paradise". What we see is a large family squeezed into a cramped tent that leaks when there is rain. Shelter is modest, water has to be collected and carried across muddy terrain from a central source, Mahmoud washes in a tin tub.

Despite any hardships, the children cannot help being children. The camp is almost a playground to them, full of possibilities and mysteries. They are cheerful and uncomplaining, with Mahmoud turning into a bit of a performer over the course of the film. He develops a fondness for wearing hats. "They look good on you," says Naser. "I know," he replies.

Naser's need to renew her official permission to visit the camp creates some breaks in filming, and she provides the three siblings with their own camera to document their daily existence. Over the months, it is the simple joys that matter, from a Skype call with older brother Suleiman and a first glimpse of his son to the bold family decision to try and find a life outside of the camp.

In an echo of Richard Linklater's *Boyhood*, the four years of filming creates a potent sense of lives changing and the resilience required to keep cheerful and carry on. Marwa grows into a young woman before our eyes. She starts to notice boys and is no longer allowed to be out alone in the camp. Ayah seems to become more belligerent as the years pass, while Mahmoud is eternally mischievous and set on adventure.

Immersing herself in the lives of Marwa and her family creates a personal connection for Naser that the viewer comes to share. She is able to carefully construct a film and a narrative that shows the human face of the refugee experience. Their setbacks, small triumphs and lack of basic amenities that many western viewers take for granted (running

CPH:DOX 2019 Review: *Tiny Souls*

by KOLEEN APRIS

© 29/03/2019 - Dina Naser's film looks at life in a refugee camp in Jordan through the eyes of children



In contention for the DOX Award at CPH:DOX (20-31 March), *Tiny Souls* takes a look at the refugee crisis through the eyes of children. Jordanian director with Palestinian roots **Dina Naser's** first feature is a co-production between France, Jordan and Qatar. The film follows the themes of displacement, refugees and family dynamics that she also explored in her short film *Shamleh* (2011), *One Minute* (2015) and *Sea Wesh* (2016). *Tiny Souls* is an extension of her nine-minute documentary project looking at life in the Al Zaatari refugee camp from a kid's perspective.

There is an element of Richard Linklater's *Boyhood* in the way that we see young girl Marwa develop from a petite nine-year-old into a dynamic teenager over the course of four years, starting in 2012. The standout feature of *Tiny Souls* is the authenticity and frankness in the assessments that Marwa and her siblings make of their own lives, comments made without any political motivation that have a matter-of-fact quality that is often impossible for adults to relay, especially given the charged and frustrating political nature of refugee camps.

These children are endearing witnesses, albeit with a limited and protected view of what is happening around them. They initially see the camp as a safe haven, a "paradise", of sorts, after the horrors seen in Syria. The drawback of a child's perspective is that the almost banal can seem to take on a huge gravitas to a youngster. The kids adapt quickly to life in UN tents, even romanticising it, such as when they describe their authoritarian neighbour as the president. They have a life filled with roleplaying and secrets. As Marwa enters her teenage years, her interest in boys heightens, and there is an interesting gender division. Her brothers don't go to school and soon find themselves in trouble. But from a quasi-idyllic and feelings of hope, the days turn into weeks, then months and years, and their frustrations grow, as does their yearning for their former life in Syria.

While Naser is careful not to include any visuals of adults in the film, she does incorporate herself through narration and by directing questions at the young protagonists. These elements are slightly misjudged. Does the audience need to understand the context better than the children do themselves? Some of the camera work is also a little haphazard, as the director chose to let the children film themselves in the weeks that she had no permission to enter the camp. But the aesthetic is a worthy sacrifice in the attempts to elicit a genuine emotional response from these tiny souls.

The jumps in time have a powerful effect, as we see the children develop and age in front of our eyes almost as if by magic, and yet, despite their physical changes, their situation often seems very much the same, or worse – all the more so when they move outside the camp. There is a sense that their life will be a constant open prison, which makes some of their decision-making more understandable, even when it feels like their actions could amount to self-sabotage.

Tiny Souls was produced by Mada Moshawash, Jordan Pioneers and Urban Factory. Its international sales are handled by Canada's Syndicado.

Links :

https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/tiny-souls-cphdox-review/5137796.article?fbclid=IwAR39XoZZWLZoRBmp-te1yo_HPvwAO7084YleM6lAlBFVC7qdrnT-FWtGi8

<https://cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/370290>

CREDITS:

DIRECTOR: DINA NASER

PRODUCER: DINA NASER

CO-PRODUCERS: KHALED HADDAD, PALMYER BADINIER

CAMERA: HASAN ABU HAMMAD, DINA NASER

SOUND: ANTONIN DALMASSO

EDITING: NAJWA KHACHIMI , QUTIBA BARHAMJE

MUSIC: RONALD HEU

COLORIST: HAZEM BERRABAH

TECHNICAL CREDITS:

GENRE: DOCUMENTARY

RUNNING TIME: 85MIN

LANGUAGE: ARABIC

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: JORDAN

CENTURY OF PRODUCTION: JORDAN, LEBANON, QATAR, FRANCE

YEAR: 2019

FORMAT: HD

SCREENING FORMAT: DCP

FESTIVALS:



FOLLOW US ON : [f](#) [@Tinysoulsfilm](#)

