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# Homeward

a film by  
Nariman Aliev



Akhtem Seitablaev    Remzi Bilyalov

LIMELITE PRESENTS "HOMEWARD" BY NARIMAN ALIEV AND MARIYSA NIKITIUK

CASTING BY ANTON FURSA    PRODUCTION DESIGNER VLAD ODUDENKO    EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS OLEKSANDR CHORNY AND ASYA SUTIYAGINA    EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS SERHIY STEPANSKY AND VLADIMIR YATSEVKO    PRODUCED BY ANASTASIIA IVASHCHUK    DIRECTED BY MICHEL MERKT    COSTUME DESIGNER OLEKSANDRA KOSTINA    EDITOR NARIMAN ALIEV

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## SYNOPSIS

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Having lost his oldest son in the war between Russia and Ukraine, Mustafa resolves to take the boy's body to his native land: Crimea. Together, he and his younger son set out on a journey that will profoundly mark their relationship.

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

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I am a Crimean Tatar (Qırımli). All of my previous short films talk about my people. Family and native land are always at the center of these stories. These two values have been inculcated in me since birth – there is nothing closer than my family, and nothing more precious than the Homeland. I was lucky enough to have been born in Crimea, Ukraine.

The subjugation of the Crimean Tatar population on the peninsula began with the first Crimean annexation by Catherine II and ended with total deportation in 1944. While Crimean Tatar men fought against the Nazis in the Soviet army, Stalin's personal order accused them of collaborating with Hitler. At first light on May 18, Crimean Tatars were given 15 minutes to pack and then deported in cattle wagons to Central Asia and Siberia. Over 40% of the deportees died on the road and during the first years of exile, from starvation and disease.

My parents were born as deportees in Uzbekistan. For more than half their lives they lived in a foreign country with the idea that their home was in Crimea. When they got an opportunity to return to Crimea, they did it. They left their work, house and friends, and started everything again, from scratch.

But at the end of February 2014, Russian troops occupied Crimea. Again, it became the center of confrontation, and Crimean Tatars were the hostages.

For now, our primary task is to preserve our culture, traditions and language. In the 21st century, instead of the mass destruction of nations, new hybrid methods of war are used, destroying the individuality of nations and depriving them of integrity. Over the last five years, the occupiers have conducted numerous surgical strikes in order to intimidate Crimean Tatars. Murders, kidnappings, searches and arrests of Crimean Tatars living in Crimea occur on a regular basis. Under the pretense of the “war on terror”, the occupying authorities are doing everything possible to force people to leave their Homeland. Lawlessness, the absence of justice and the failure to comply with international human rights make Crimea a place of “silent terror”, where no one can feel safe.

It is important for me to show the real Crimean Tatars, with all the advantages and disadvantages, as the perception of them remains very generalized and stereotyped, even in Ukraine. Quite often, people abroad don't realize such a nation even exists.

The relationship between father and son lies at the heart of the film. Two generations meet. The generation of the father, who lived as a deportee as a child, and who had to sacrifice so much to return to his homeland and begin his journey anew. And the generation of the son, who was born in Crimea and does not know what the Soviet Union is. On the way back home, they try to find a common language in order not to give up on each other and to continue their journey.

This is my feature debut as well as my reflection upon what is happening with my family and me at this difficult time for my country – Ukraine – and my people. I live and work in Kyiv; my parents live in Crimea. I cannot go back there because I cannot make peace with the occupation of the peninsula, and my parents do not want to move, as they are not ready to leave the Homeland they have only recently regained.

For me, this movie is about strength of the spirit, love, and hope. I have tried to be honest and sincere. My intention was not to manipulate or beg for sympathy. I just wanted to share what hurt me and thus was important for me.

I want to dedicate this work to my loving parents and my deceased brother, Erfan, whom I will definitely meet in the next life.

– Nariman Aliev, 2019



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## NARIMAN ALIEV

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Nariman Aliev was born December 15, 1992, in Crimea, Ukraine.

In 2013, he received a bachelor's degree from the Institute of Screen Arts, having majored in film and television directing. In 2014, he received a master's degree from Kyiv National Theater, Film and Television University in television directing. He has been a member of the Ukrainian Film Academy since 2017.

As a director, he made three short films united in the trilogy *Crimean Stories*: "Return with Sunrise" (2013), "Love You" (2014), and "Without You" (2016).

Each of the works screened in leading national and international film festivals, including Berlin International Film Festival, Palm Springs ShortFest, Vancouver Film Festival, and others.

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# INTERVIEW WITH NARIMAN ALIEV

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***What inspired you to begin work on this film?***

Five years ago, when Crimea was annexed, a lot of people heard of my nation – Crimean Tatars – for the first time. In those difficult times, we supported the sovereignty of Ukraine, despite Russian military intervention. Since then, most activists have had to leave Crimea, and those who stayed have been persecuted for their political and religious beliefs. There are a lot of stereotypes about Crimean Tatars, both in Ukraine and in the rest of the world. It's impossible to show the full picture in one film or in one interview. However, I would like to start by showing the importance of family values and love for the Homeland. This is what I was taught in my childhood and this is what I will believe in until I die.

***Please describe your working method and the atmosphere on set.***

I stand for punctuality and speed. I don't like to waste time. Although the film is emotional, the shooting was smooth. It was fast-paced, as we had a limited number of shooting days. But I derived pleasure from working with professionals. On the first day on set, when I gave a speech in front of the whole team, my main point was: "I really want that in the end no one is embarrassed with having worked on this project." Now I would really like to thank everyone who has contributed to the creation of our film.

***Please share a few words about your actors.***

The main parts are played by Crimean Tatars, as it was crucial for me to preserve authenticity. And it is especially heartwarming that 50% of the film is in the Crimean Tatar language. The father is played by Akhtem Seitablayev. He is a well-known actor and director in Ukraine. I am grateful to him: with all his experience in the film industry he fully trusted me and took the part very seriously. Remzi Bilyalov plays the younger son. He's my cousin; he isn't a professional actor. I have worked with him before – he acted in my short film "Sensiz" ("Without You"), along with his elder brother Fevzi. He did me a big favor, he is not into filmmaking at all, but for my sake he agreed to take part. It was hard for Remzi, but he went through the whole process with great dignity.



***What inspired you to become a filmmaker? What were the sources of your inspiration?***

I entered film school when I was 16. I was young, naïve, and knew absolutely nothing about filmmaking. When I edited my first short film as a school project, I cried because it was terrible. For me, filmmaking has little to do with inspiration: this is teamwork, where the director sets the direction based on his cinematographic preferences. Support from my family and the faith of the whole crew in our project are the things I value the most. This is what gives me strength to move forward.

***If you could meet a favorite filmmaker, who would it be and what would be your first question?***

If Jean-Luc Godard was passing me by in the street, my reaction would be something like: "Oh my God, this is him. Oh, my God!" But I wouldn't dare approach him, I'd be too afraid of looking like a fool...

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# LANGUAGES OF CRIMEA

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If it is not unusual to see films spoken in more than one language, *Homeward* is quite unique in that we hear four different languages intertwined in the dialogue, creating a linguistic kaleidoscope that subtitles clearly can't quite transcribe. Indeed, the film is spoken 45% in Crimean Tatar, 40% in Ukrainian and 15% Russian.

The father, Mustafa, a Crimean Tatar, was born and grew up in deportation, most likely in Uzbekistan, where the Crimean Tatar population – some 400,000 people, 90% of whom were women and children – accused by Stalin of having collaborated with the Nazis, was deported over the course of two days in May 1944. Brought up on “foreign soil”, he learned only Crimean Tatar, the family language, and Russian, taught at school. The connection between Russian and Ukrainian helped him understand the latter, of which he doesn't speak a single word in the film. He speaks Russian with everyone he meets but uses his native tongue, Crimean Tatar, with his son, and also at times with his brother.

Thus Alim speaks Crimean Tatar with his father – the only person with whom he speaks this language. Born in Ukrainian territory when his parents were authorized to return to Crimea – Crimea was Ukrainian from the time Nikita Khrushchev “gifted” it to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic in 1954, until its re-annexation by Vladimir Putin in 2014 – Alim is fully bilingual. It is in Ukrainian that he speaks with “the rest of the world”: his dead brother's fiancée, the police, the young woman he meets when they have their car fixed, his aunt, and even his uncle, his father's brother who, it appears, feels more at ease as a Ukrainian than as a Crimean Tatar.

All the other characters only speak Ukrainian: the morgue employees, Nazim's fiancée, the garage owner and his granddaughter, the police, the border patrol, Mustafa's sister-in-law...

Lastly, the Surahs of the Quran are recited in Arabic, a language spoken by none of the characters – hence the question Alim asks his father about the meaning of the prayer that he wants him to repeat.

The originality of the linguistic intermingling of the dialogues comes from the fact that they are often spoken in two different languages: Mustafa speaks Russian with everyone (except his son) and everyone replies in Ukrainian, a language he understands and to which he replies in Russian.

Ukrainian and Russian are closely related: both belong to the Indo-European family of languages (as do French and English), to the Slavic languages group and the East Slavic languages sub-group (unlike Czech, Polish or Bulgarian). Even though the phonetics, syntax, declensions and some of the vocabulary vary noticeably, the proximity of Ukrainian and Russian allows speakers of these two languages to understand each other when it comes to simple conversations. Moreover Russian, having become the *lingua franca* since being uniformly imposed on all the republics and minorities that comprised the Soviet Union, is today still understood by nearly all the inhabitants of this multilingual territory.

Crimean Tatar is altogether different from these two languages: it belongs to the Altaic family of languages (thus non Indo-European), the most familiar of which is Turkish, to which it is related. Neither the syntax, nor the phonetics, nor the vocabulary is close to Slavic or Latin languages. Crimean Tatar was first written in Arabic characters, then from 1929 in Latin characters and nine years later in the Cyrillic characters imposed by Soviet rule in the interests of Cyrillization. Today both alphabets are used. Furthermore, Crimean Tatar must not be confused with Tatar as it spoken in Tatarstan: not only are the phonetics different but the vocabulary abounds with words borrowed from Arabic, Farsi and Russian, whereas Crimean Tatar borrows most liberally from Greek and Italian.

Only 100,000 Crimean Tatar speakers remain today, and UNESCO has officially declared the language “at risk of extinction”.

– JOËL CHAPRON  
*Author of HOMEWARD subtitles*

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# CREDITS

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## CAST

Akhtem Seitablayev MUSTAFA  
Remzi Bilyalov ALIM  
Dariya Barihashvili OLESYA  
Anatoliy Marempolskiy NAZIM  
Viktor Zhdanov UNCLE VASYA  
Veronika Lukianenko MASHA  
Akmal Gurezov REFAT  
Larysa Yatzenko GALINA

## CREW

DIRECTED BY Nariman Aliev  
SCREENPLAY Nariman Aliev & Marysia Nikitiuk  
FROM AN IDEA BY Novruz Hikmet  
PRODUCER Vladimir Yatsenko  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS Anastasiia Ivashchuk  
Michel Merkt  
Oleksandra Kostina  
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER Anna Sobolevska  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Anton Fursa  
EDITOR Oleksandr Chorny  
PRODUCTION DESIGNER Vlad Odudenko  
COSTUME DESIGNER Asya Sutyagina  
& MAKE-UP ARTIST  
SOUND Serhiy Stepanskiy  
CASTING DIRECTOR Pavlo Makarchenko  
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