

UNTIL HE'S BACK



Directed & Produced by
Jacqueline Baylon

untilhesback.com

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SCRIPPS NEWS
LONGFORM



Logline

After learning that his son, Yahya, has died at sea trying to get to Spain, Ahmed Tchiche must find a way to get his son's remains back home to Morocco so he and his family can have a proper goodbye.

Synopsis

After learning that his son, Yahya, has died at sea trying to get to Spain, Ahmed Tchiche must find a way to bring his remains back home to Morocco so he and his family can have a proper goodbye.

A Spanish mortician, an NGO worker and an established Moroccan immigrant living in Spain all struggle to help Ahmed navigate the complicated process of repatriation.

Through interweaving threads, "Until He's Back" explores the dangerous journey — crossing the Gibraltar Strait from Africa to Spain — and the difficulty of returning the bodies of those who drown at sea.

In this story of grief and hope, a family and a community try to make sense of the tragedy that took Yahya away.

Director's Statement

When I was six years old, my mother paid a smuggler in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, to get us across the Rio Grande on an inflatable tube. My mom's decision changed my life forever. She knew that if we made it, we'd have a shot at the American dream. And we did.

I have been living between New York and Spain for the last three years. When I first arrived in Spain, the daily headlines about the drownings of migrants at sea caught my attention. The people dying were being smuggled from Morocco on inflatable dinghies not much bigger than canoes. Most of them were from North and West Africa. The temptation of a place like Spain was the same as the one the U.S. had for my mother — a job and a future. Standing in Morocco, you can literally see the lights in Europe each night across the Strait of Gibraltar.

As the boats sank and the tragedies piled up, I started to wonder: How does a family find closure after a shipwreck? The headlines never went beyond that day's news. The relatives of those who go missing are often left with unfinished text conversations and social-media posts from their loved ones. But to move on, one needs a body to bury. I wanted to know what takes place when a body washes ashore and to depict the process on film.

A topic like migration is very sensitive in Morocco because the king and his regime don't want to be scrutinized or held accountable for these tragic crossings. Prominent journalists are often jailed, and foreign reporters are routinely harassed and intimidated. To film this project, we entered the country without ever stating our real purpose for visiting. Given this level of risk, I was determined to get Ahmed Tchiche's story right.

Ahmed's son Yahya left Morocco without telling anyone. A few days after leaving his country, the body was found on a beach in Murcia, Spain. Ahmed now faced a nearly year-long process to get his son back home. A search like Ahmed's isn't easy to represent visually, and throughout filming we searched for means to represent it in an active way. A rescue mission of lost migrants at sea offered a visual representation of the circumstances that lead to such tragedies in the Mediterranean. Images of the open sea represent the unwieldy and uncertain search for some kind of closure.

The film's score serves another role, connecting the threads of the many characters, who along with Ahmed, are central to delivering his son's body home — a Spanish mortician, an NGO worker and an established Moroccan immigrant who dedicates his free time to helping families who have lost loved ones at sea. The emptiness and frustration can be seen on their faces but often goes unsaid. One can hear it in the score, however, which our composer wrote drawing from electronic and classical elements to convey their sense of yearning.

Never in history have so many people been displaced by political, economic or military conflicts at home. "Until He's Back" is a reminder that behind every person who perishes trying to emigrate, there are loved ones left behind. This film is about persistence and the power of closure.

Film Crew



Jacqueline Baylon

Director & Producer

Jacqueline is a Mexican filmmaker whose work focuses on civil rights injustices and immigration stories from different corners of the world. She has worked for news organizations across the U.S., including The New York Times. She produces and directs news documentaries for Scripps News Longform. Jacqueline was born in Chihuahua, Mexico, and was raised in El Paso, Texas.



Hailey Gavin

Editor & Story Producer

Hailey is an Emmy-nominated producer and editor who is passionate about subtle, character-driven storytelling. Her work often features interweaving narratives that influence and shape each other. Her pieces have appeared in TIME, Insider, The Orlando Sentinel and Slate Magazine and she's currently a staff editor and producer at Scripps News Longform based in Washington DC.



Guillem Trius

Director of Photography

Guillem is a Spain-based journalist by training and has a Masters in Documentary from the London College of Communication. He has worked in countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda, Syria, Niger or Angola, devoting himself to the creation of long-term multimedia documentary projects, and publishing in international media such as National Geographic, 5W Magazine, Al Jazeera or The Guardian.



Carmen Molina

Cinematographer

Carmen is a documentary filmmaker and director of photography in Spain. She graduated with the Master's degree of Creative Documentary at UPF Barcelona. Her projects have been selected in laboratories such as SSIFF, Zinebi or Acció Viver and festivals such as Directed by Women or FICAH México, among many others. In 2022 she co-directed her first short film selected at the VOC awards for best short films in Catalan.



Pedro Ballesteros

Cinematographer

Pedro began his career as a video artist, being awarded at festivals such as the Locarno Video Festival, Brooklyn Council for the Arts, Liège Vidéo Festival, Brno Cinema Festival or Tokyo Video Festival. He has worked as a director, cinematographer and editor of TV documentaries for more than 30 years. His latest work is the feature documentary Can you hear me? (Puedes oírme?), which won the Audience Award at DocsBarcelona and Best movie, Best Director and Best Cinematography at Arte Non Stop Film Festival.

Mandy Hoffman

Composer

Guided by her passion of storytelling and visual art, Mandy found her musical niche in composing to picture. Her work on films, series, documentaries, commercials, and art installations have appeared in theaters, networks, top film festivals, and art galleries all over the world. Her scores for *The Lovers* (A24) and *Hala* (Overbrook/Apple TV+) received ample praise from top film critics. Her music appears on countless TV shows, including underscoring Joey Soloway's *I Love Dick* (Amazon), *Doll & Em* (HBO), and the Anna Kendrick-led *Dummy* (Roku).



Zach Toombs

Executive Producer

Zach leads a team of producers, DPs, editors, and animators to create documentary projects for Scripps News and their distribution partners as the director of the Longform unit. The projects include the Emmy-winning *In Real Life* series, the gaming series *Next Level*, and the visual investigations series in partnership with Bellingcat. The team's projects have gained industry recognition from the News & Documentary Emmys, the Edward R. Murrow Awards, ONA, SEJ, and SPJ.



**Sound Design and Mix**

José Bautista | Kanseisounds

Color Grading

Joan Roig | CROMAGNON TV

Credits

Jennifer Smart

Subtitles Copy Editor

Sharon O'Neal

Poster Artist

Grier Dill

Additional Sound

Olmo Sebastián

Impact Producer

Marga Varea | Twin Seas Media

Translators

Iklil Bouhmouch

Mehdi Kouchih

Lalo Remes

Jacqueline Baylon

Jennifer O'Mahony

Thais Terrien

Roser Toll

Cyrena Lee

Etenesh Abera

Featuring

(In order of appearance)

Ahmed Tchiche

María Ángeles Colsa Herrera

Faisal Bouhafs

Martín Zamora

El Gourari Mbarka

Boras Mohamed

Bougrara Nouradin

Majid Ouchan

Ouchan Mohamed

Maysa Medmad

Special Thanks

Centro Internacional para la Identificación de
Migrantes Desaparecidos (CIPIMD)

María Ángeles Colsa Herrera

Leslye Davis

Nicholas Casey

Chris Anderson

Bill Pack

Alejandra Hering

Technical Information

Documentary short

Running Time: 39:41 minutes

Country of Origin: United States

Country of Production: Spain & Morocco

Format: Digital 16:9

Language: French, Spanish, Darija, English subtitles

Exhibition Formats: .MP4, Quick Time Pro Res 422, DCP SHR 4K, 2.0 Stereo Mix





Press

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Promotional Assets

Trailer

Website