

A THOUSAND FIRES

written and directed by Saeed Taji Farouky
France/Switzerland/Netherlands/Palestine

2021

90'

Documentary

PRESS NOTES

LOCARNO FILM FESTIVAL 2021

SEMAINE DE LA CRITIQUE

OPENING FILM

WORLD PREMIERE

A THOUSAND FIRES

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
SAEED TAJI FAROUKY

Produced by ANNEK PRODUCTIONS - GABRIEL SEHNEMER - NIKON PELLERIN - ANNOCK BOURSCOFF
COPRODUCTIONS BY: WAHNEema CREAMY - JAMES BULLY - FATMA DEMI
COPRODUCTIONS BY: EIRIK SEIMERS
COPRODUCTIONS BY: TRAN WIN HAN - JOOHA WUN HUI
COPRODUCTIONS BY: ESTELLE BOISSY FOR THE PRODUCTION: PALAESTINE BALIBARI - SARAH MELBAUM
COPRODUCTIONS BY: SAEED TAJI FAROUKY
COPRODUCTIONS BY: RAGDUI HILF/USON SURSE - AL JAZEERA DOCUMENTARY - ANO HOVY
COPRODUCTIONS BY: EMBRE DE CHARENTAIS DU BORDS - CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINEMA ET DE L'ANIMATION ET DE L'ARTS AUDIOVISUELS - FRENCH OFFICE OF CREATIVE INDUSTRIES - NETHERLANDS FILM FUND
CREATIVE EUROPE - A PROGRAM OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, REGION PAYS DE LA LOIRE, POCOPED ANGOLE, REGION AUVERGNE RHONE ALPES - CINEPROM AND LITVIE PRODUCTION - VIDEO FORMATION - FIELD OF VISION - SAUDY ARABIA & MOHAMED MELBAUM PRODUCTIONS



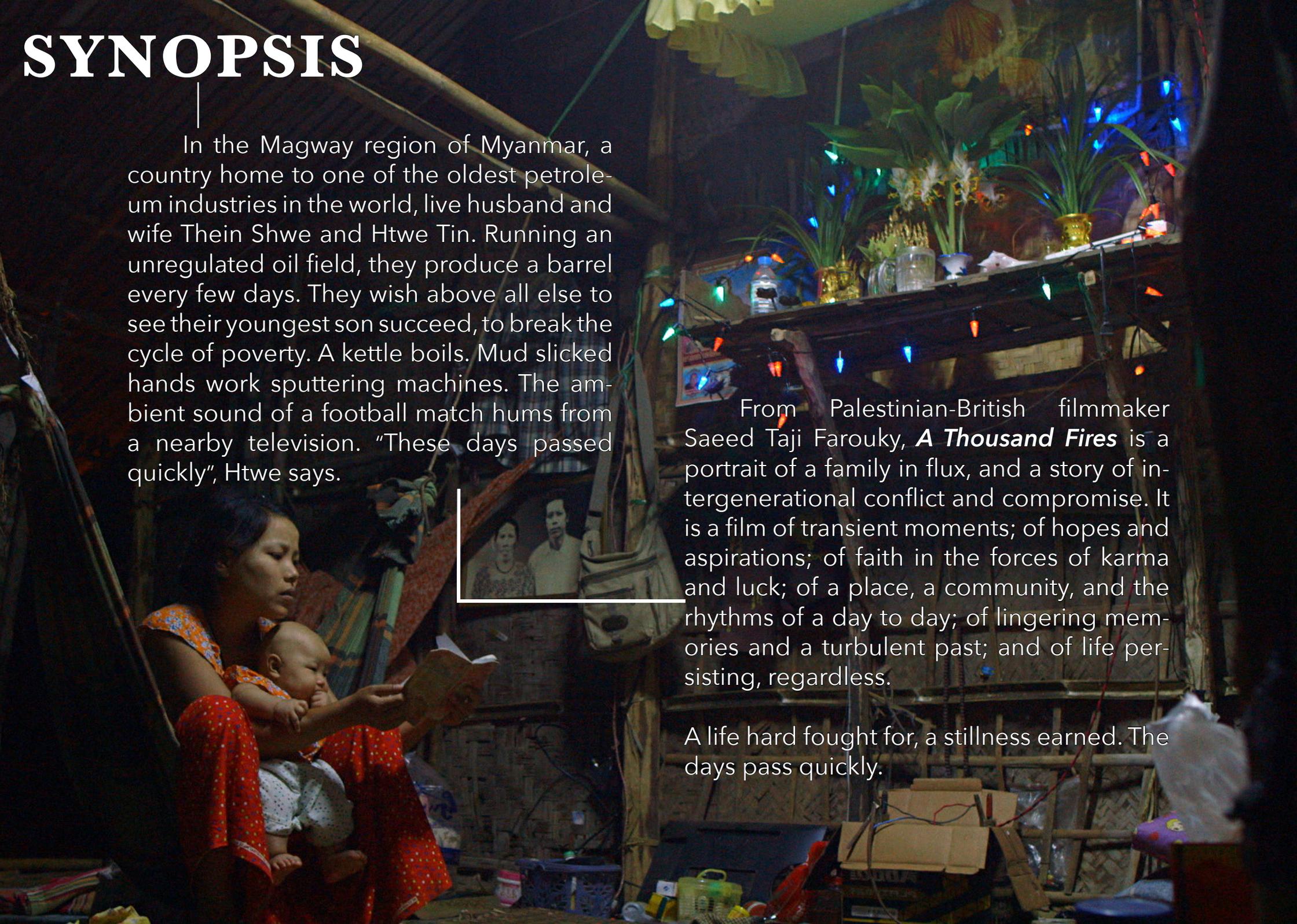
SYNOPSIS

In the Magway region of Myanmar, a country home to one of the oldest petroleum industries in the world, live husband and wife Thein Shwe and Htwe Tin. Running an unregulated oil field, they produce a barrel every few days. They wish above all else to see their youngest son succeed, to break the cycle of poverty. A kettle boils. Mud slicked hands work sputtering machines. The ambient sound of a football match hums from a nearby television. "These days passed quickly", Htwe says.



From Palestinian-British filmmaker Saeed Taji Farouky, *A Thousand Fires* is a portrait of a family in flux, and a story of intergenerational conflict and compromise. It is a film of transient moments; of hopes and aspirations; of faith in the forces of karma and luck; of a place, a community, and the rhythms of a day to day; of lingering memories and a turbulent past; and of life persisting, regardless.

A life hard fought for, a stillness earned. The days pass quickly.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

At its heart, this is a film about a couple working hard to give their children a better life. Thein Shwe reminds me of my own father, the tough, quiet man who occasionally breaks into a smile and shows his affectionate side. My father also worked hard, and was often absent, in order to give his family everything he - a Palestinian refugee - never had: stability, certainty, safety. This is what drew me to Thein Shwe. I felt an instinctive connection the instant we met. He soon asked me, "What brought you halfway across the world to find me here? Maybe we were related in a previous life."

This reflects my approach to filmmaking: working very closely with the people I film, emphasising mutual respect, mutual benefit, and learning from them. In this, I am eternally indebted to the two Burmese assistant directors: Joshua Min Htut (the subject of the Oscar-nominated *Burma VJ*) and Than Win Han, who were there filming for over 4 years, crafting the story with me.

With this film, I want to explore the human aspects of the oil industry. As a child growing up in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, global oil trade was at the centre of my world. I was surrounded by the money and mythology of oil; a creature with tentacles reaching across the globe. This is the oil industry that most people are familiar with, and it dominates

every aspect of our lives. It creates and destroys. It brings countries unimaginable wealth, and decimates them. I wanted to get beyond the abstraction of "the industry" and examine the point where oil is intimately connected with the human body; where one person reaches into the ground and touches, with their bare hands, the remnants of tens of millions of years of organic decomposition.

This is a vertical film, like the construction of the oil wells, digging deeper rather than zooming out, emphasising miniscule detail over epic narrative. It's a tale, inspired by the folklore and mythology of Burma: a family going about their daily lives in a slow-moving world of luck, fate,





karma, astrology, and dragons, where everything influences everything else and is influenced by millennia of past lives. Above all, the film is about cycles, constantly ending and beginning again. A well is born, bled dry and abandoned, and a new one is dug. Oil is collected, poured into an engine, and the drilling continues. A father worries about his son, then the son grows up and worries about his ageing father. Life, death, and rebirth.

It was during the making of this film that I finally understood that, for the most part, even though my parents made mistakes, they acted with the best intentions. Thus the film is dedicated to them. As the film was nearing completion, the Burmese military staged a violent coup and began a new campaign of repression and killing. At the same time, the Palestinian people faced yet another onslaught with increasingly violent attempts to dispossess them and kill their spirit. This film is for the brave people of Burma and Palestine fighting for their liberation and dignity.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

SAEED TAJI FAROUKY

is a Palestinian-British filmmaker who has been producing work around themes of conflict, human rights and colonialism since 2004.

His previous documentary, ***Tell Spring Not to Come This Year***, premiered at the Berlinale 2015 where it won the Panorama Audience Award and the Amnesty Human Rights Award.

His films focus on exile and the lingering trauma of conflict. He tells intimate, personal stories with an emphasis on humanism, and its mirror image: surrealism. Saeed participated in the Edinburgh International Film Festival talent lab and the Torino Script Lab with his first fiction feature project.



FILMOGRAPHY

2021 A THOUSAND FIRES, Documentary

2019 STRANGE CITIES ARE FAMILIAR, Short

2016 THEY LIVE IN FORESTS, THEY ARE EXTREMELY SHY,
Short

2015 TELL SPRING NOT TO COME THIS YEAR, Document-
tary, co-director

2013 THE RUNNER, Documentary

2013 THERE WILL BE SOME WHO WILL NOT FEAR EVEN
THAT VOID, Documentary

2009 THE PATH OF MOST RESISTANCE, Documentary
short

2007 TUNNEL TRADE, Documentary short

2005 I SEE THE STARS AT NOON, Documentary

PRODUCERS

ESTELLE ROBIN YOU

Point du Jour - Les films du balibari, France

Estelle has produced documentaries that have travelled and gained acclaim in festivals and on TV stations around the world, with broadcasters such as ARTE, ZDF, France Télévisions, YLE, SVT. *VILLAGE WITHOUT WOMEN* by Srdjan Sarenac (ZDF), *SEA IS MY COUNTRY* by Marc Picavez (ARTE France), *SISTERHOOD* by Maxime Faure (France 2), *ZINDER* by Aïcha Macky and *CPH:DOX 2021* winner *THE LAST SHELTER* by Ousmane Samassékou are amongst the films she and her partner Clara Vuillermoz produced with international careers, selected in festivals such as IDFA, *Visions du Réel*, *Hot Docs* and *Göteborg IFF*.

Estelle has successfully moved the company into theatrical film production in 2016, releasing films in French cinemas such as *COMME DES LIONS* by Françoise DAVISSE, *OUAGA GIRLS* by Theresa Traore Dahlberg (co-produced with Momento Film in Sweden), and the Greek-French-Canadian *DOLPHIN MAN* by Lefteris Charitos (co-producers Anemon Productions GR, Storyline Entertainment CAN) for ARTE Documania. Estelle is a EAVE producers workshop and Ex Orienté Alumni. She is co-President of the Plateforme, the audiovisual and cinema professional organisation in her region, and has been a member of committees such as CNC, regional funds, Procirep. She was nominated for the French Documentary Producer Award in 2010, 2017 and 2018, and won the award in 2019.

PALMYRE BADINIER

AKKA Films, Switzerland

Palmyre studied Arabic Literature and International Relations at Sorbonne University and has worked in the fields of journalism, diplomacy and international artistic exchanges. In 2008, Palmyre graduated with a Masters in Law and Management for the Audiovisual Industry. The same year, she co-founded LES FILMS DE ZAYNA, a Paris-based production company dedicated to Arab cinema. The first title, *Fix ME* (2009) premiered at Sundance and Cannes (ACID). The following years, through European and international coproductions, Palmyre produced creative documentaries and short films by Sameh Zoabi, Nassim Amaouche, Rana Kazkaz & Anas Khalaf, Erige Sehiri among others. In 2017, she won Berlinale Best documentary award with *GHOST HUNTING* (2017) by Raed Andoni.

In 2017, Palmyre joined Philippe Coeytaux and Nicolas Wadimoff in the Geneva based company AKKA FILMS (Switzerland). In parallel, Palmyre provides mentorship and consultancies for documentary production. She is a member of the European network EAVE.

JORAM WILLINK

BIND , The Netherlands

BIND was founded in 2007 by producers Joram Willink and Piet-Harm Sterk. As a creative producer, Joram Willink is initiating and closely working with writers/directors to create stories that inspire social change. Their productions were awarded the International Emmy Award, Berlinale Special Mention, Berlinale Silver Bear, two TIFF Kids awards, Prix Jeunesse and honorable selections like SXSW and IFFR.

BIND produced the author debut of Remy van Heugten Gluckauf which world premiered at the 2015 IFFR in Tiger Competition and won 4 Golden Calves at the 2015 Netherlands Film Festival, for Best Script, Director, Camera and Best Film. Gluckauf was also selected for many film festivals and won the Best Screenplay Award at the 2015 Brussels International Film Festival, the Grand Award at the 2015 World Premieres Film Festival Philippines and an Honorable Mention at the 2015 Galway Film Festival Ireland.

The family feature film *My Extraordinary Summer with Tess*, directed by Steven Wouterlood was awarded the Special Mention at 2019 Berlinale and was theatrically released in 12 countries. The film had an extensive festival tour and won over 23 international awards.

In 2021 BIND will release the journalistic investigation thriller *The Judgement* by Sander Burger (6 major awards Seattle FF) and is in postproduction with *Mascot*, the new film by Remy van Heugten as well as the debut film of Shariff Nasr, *El houb*.

CREDITS

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DIRECTED BY SAEED TAJI FAROUKY

ASSISTANT

DIRECTORS THAN WIN HAN, JOSHUA MIN HTUT

EDITOR CATHERINE RASCON

COLOR GRADING ERIK DEMERIS

MUSIC FATIMA DUNN

SOUND

DESIGN AND MIX MAXENCE CIEKAWY, JAMES BULLEY

PRODUCED BY POINT DU JOUR - LES FILMS DU BALIBARI

(FRANCE)

ESTELLE ROBIN YOU

AKKA FILMS (SWITZERLAND)

PALMYRE BADINIER

BIND (THE NETHERLANDS)

JORAM WILLINK

ASSOCIATE

PRODUCER MAY ODEH (PALESTINE)

**WITH THE
SUPPORT OF**

**DEVELOPED AND
PITCHED AT**

AIDE AUX CINÉMAS DU MONDE,
CNC-INSTITUT FRANÇAIS / RÉ-
GION PAYS DE LA LOIRE / RÉGION
AUVERGNE RHÔNE ALPES / ME-
DIA CREATIVE EUROPE / PRO-
CIREP-ANGOA / FIELD OF VISION
/ BARRY AMIEL & NORMAN MEL-
BURN TRUST / OFFICE FÉDÉRAL
DE LA CULTURE / CINÉFORUM ET
LOTÉRIE ROMANDE / SUISA FOUN-
DATION / NETHERLANDS FILM
FUND / AL JAZEERA DOCUMEN-
TARY / RADIO TÉLÉVISION SUISSE
/ KRO NCRV

EAVE PRODUCERS WORKSHOP,
PITCHING DU RÉEL - NYON,
CANNES DOCS,
EDINBURGH PITCHING FORUM



CONTACTS

A man in a patterned shirt is shown in profile, working with a wooden loom. He is holding a long wooden stick and appears to be weaving or spinning. The background shows a traditional wooden structure with a thatched roof, suggesting a rural or traditional setting. The lighting is warm, possibly from the sun.

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

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