



RAWCAST: SEEING AND LISTENING TO WOMEN'S REALITIES IN IRAQ

Budoor al-Abid is an Iraqi independent filmmaker and producer. She used the Doria Feminist Fund grant to launch RAWCAST, a multimedia platform which depicts the realities of Iraqi women from different backgrounds and experiences. Her short film, "Suicide Letters", was screened at several festivals, including Lift-Off Filmmaker Sessions in the UK, and Women's International Film Festival Nigeria (WIFFEN).

Patricia Hill Collins, a leading Black feminist thinker, once said: "suppressing the knowledge produced by any oppressed group makes it easier for dominant groups to rule because the seeming absence of dissent suggests that subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization". Indeed. This is why knowledge production and storytelling has always occupied centre stage in feminist journeys towards change and justice.

In Iraq, there are plenty of stories to tell. A country so rich, diverse and complex, yet struggling with a plethora of political, economic, social and environmental crises. This, however, did not discourage Iraqi feminist filmmaker and activist, Budoor al-Abid, from launching a multimedia project showcasing stories and experiences of struggle and resilience, as told by Iraqi women.

In 2022, Budoor launched "RAWCAST", a digital platform that features podcast series, research articles, photo stories and a short film focused on women's rights and gender justice in Iraq. The themes vary from gender-based violence, to survival of sexual assault, women combating climate change in the Marshes, male favouritism and the lack of women leadership in the Iraqi market.

"Realizing that the Iraqi audience is quite big on podcast, we decided to produce a podcast series about women in cinema. We wanted to break the stereotypical idea that movies are made by men for men. Then we expanded into audio-visual production in order to reach out to bigger audiences and ensure a deeper impact", Budoor explains.



The short film, titled “Suicide Letters”, was screened at the First-Time Filmmaker Sessions by LiftOff Global Network in the United Kingdom - a worldwide platform that spans 13 countries. The film tells the story of a young woman who was raped by her own brother and cousin. To guard the brave young woman’s privacy and well-being, Budoor resorted to rewriting the events into film scenes and casting actors to play the roles.

When asked about the impact of the film, Budoor excitedly says, “the young woman herself, after watching the film and listening to her story, sensed how brave she was. She felt that she wasn’t alone anymore”. Budoor also points to the positive impact of people’s compassion in breaking the silence around issues like sexual violence. “Whenever we screen it in Iraq, women activists praise the film and encourage us to keep screening it. They see the urgency of shedding the light on this thorny issue”, Budoor explains.

For Budoor, the most important achievement was to bring solace and solidarity to women and girls who have been through similar experiences. “We wanted them to know that they were not alone... and that even if they have been through something similar, they can get through it and recover”, she says.

“I will stay strong, I have no other choice but to stay strong and live”, Budoor’s film protagonist resiliently states in the concluding scene.

