

TAG FILM PRESENTS

Writing Hawa



A film by
Najiba NOORI & Rasul NOORI

produced by CHRISTIAN POPP, coproduced by HASSE VAN NUNEN, RENKO DOUZE, written by NAJIBA NOORI with AFSANEH SALARI
editing AFSANEH SALARI, cinematography NAJIBA NOORI, RASUL NOORI, music AFSHIN AZIZI, sound design and mix TIM VAN PEPPEN,
colour grading GREGOIRE AUSINA, A TAG Film Production in coproduction with Een van de jongens, in association with ARTE France
in coproduction with EDOCS, funded by CNC, Sundance Film Institute with the support from Open Society Foundations
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Dona Film Institute, with the support of the Women Make Movies Production Assistance Program, World Sales FIRST HAND FILM

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A film by
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84 minutes, 2024, DCP 2K, Stereo 5.1

WATCH THE TRAILER

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Logline

Forty years after her arranged marriage as a child, Hawa finally begins an independent life and to be literate. However, with the return of the Taliban to power, her dreams, along with those of her daughter and granddaughter, are shattered as they face new struggles.

Synopsis

Filmed over five years, "Writing Hawa" is the story of three generations of Hazara women from the same family in Afghanistan. With unique access and empathy, director Najiba Noori films her mother Hawa and her niece Zahra in their aspirations to emancipate themselves from patriarchal traditions.

Forced into marriage as a child, Hawa is 52 years old when she can truly start learning to read and write. With the support of her daughter, she opens a small textile business: she searches for traditional Hazara embroideries in the Bamiyan region and turns them into modern dresses to sell in Kabul.

Hawa eventually saves her granddaughter Zahra from her abusive father in a remote village and brings her to the capital. There, they study together and make plans for the future. However, the takeover by the Taliban in August 2021 turns the lives of the three women upside down: Zahra has to return to the village she escaped from, and Najiba is forced to flee the country, living as a refugee in France. From afar, she helps Hawa continue fighting for her dreams.



Director's notes

War, violence, lack of access to education, and forced marriages have plagued and victimised countless Afghan women for decades.

My mother's dreams were stolen, and she has spent years housekeeping and raising children, but she never lost her curiosity and motivation to learn and experience life. She has cried many times, longing for true, romantic love. However, Hawa is blessed with unconditional love for and from her children, gaining the genuine support of her sons to be educated, empowered, and free.

This film is the story of my mother and family in Afghanistan, where I have lived most of my life. It's the story of the struggle for independence and freedom for oppressed women and the Hazara community in my homeland. And the story of people who suffer from forced migration and separation from their home, country, culture, and family.

We see the turning point of Afghanistan's history from a family window. The fall of Kabul and the arrival of the Taliban make all dreams of three generations of this family collapsed: Zahra, Hawa and myself who are at a cross-roads and starting our lives over.

My film also offers a rare insight into the life of a Hazara family under the Taliban. Hawa is a strong woman the audience will connect and identify with, following her aspirations and struggles. Hope and sadness, major setbacks and little successes will create a truly emotional journey for the viewer.

This film shows Afghanistan before and after the arrival of the Taliban, when the country falls into the hands of a terrorist group who is erasing women from society and how the world turns a Blind Eye to the what is happening in Afghanistan.

With this film, I want to create awareness, impact and change.



An Interview with Director Najiba Noori

When did you decide to make a film about your mother and why?

When I grew older and listened to Hawa's story, I became deeply aware of the experiences of her life. She shared with me how her dreams and aspirations were sacrificed to oppressive traditions and patriarchy. She told me many times that if she had been able to go to school, she could have a career and become an independent woman like me. She always dreamed of being a teacher. Her passion for education was clear and powerful.

Listening to her story, I could see her determination and enthusiasm, and I decided to help her on this journey. She had done everything to ensure that I didn't grow up like her, and now it was my turn to stand by her side.

Her story is inspiring and it's the story of many women in Afghanistan. Deprived of education and forced into childhood marriages, having the pain of lost years and stolen dreams. Yet, they carry their aspirations in their hearts, eager to make their dreams become real - like Hawa, who believes it's never too late even at this age. That's why I decided to tell her story.

Did your relationship change because of the presence of the camera?

The presence of the camera brought Hawa and me closer to each other and made us connect more deeply. Through our conversation, I learned about her unfulfilled desires and the love she has always longed for. Even after all these years, she still cried for that love and the dreams she had lost.

Sometimes, I tried to put myself in her shoes and imagine having her life. But I could never have imagined what she went through. For me Hawa, like so many Afghan women, shows incredible strength and bravery.

What changed after you have been forced to leave Afghanistan and settle in France?

When the Taliban took over Afghanistan, it was a shocking moment in our lives. We could not have imagined that the world would hand the country over to a terrorist group. Hawa's story became bigger: the story of three generations of women in one family. Zahra, Hawa's granddaughter, escaped her abusive father to start a new life in Kabul with Hawa. Me and the women of my generation who worked hard to build a better life, we had to leave our homeland. Hawa, who was just beginning a new life, found herself confined once more.

After I had to leave the country, it was tough to keep working on this film. But along with Hawa and my brother who took the camera and filmed our mother, we also became stronger and more determined to document this important moment in our history, a story that will define the next generations.

What were the biggest challenges when editing the film?

Making this film, as my first feature and a personal story, going back through the footage of my years in my homeland and the way I left the country and also leaving loved ones behind was emotionally hard.

I was lucky to have a great editor like Afsaneh Salari by my side, a kind and beautiful soul who supported me through the process. She is Iranian. Speaking the same language and coming from the same region made those tough days more bearable.

Working on this film after being forced to leave my homeland became a form of therapy for me, helping me process my experiences and find healing.

**You and your family are from the Hazara community.
How important is this for you and your film?**

Many people around the world have only a few and clichéd images of Afghanistan, often don't know about the diverse cultures and ethnicities of the country, like the Hazara people.

This film also shows a Hazara family living in the west of Kabul, an area targeted by terrorist groups, especially in educational centres, because education was always the tool for Hazara people to survive and resist. Discrimination and persecution against the Hazara people has a long history and continues today.

As a Hazara woman from Afghanistan, it's important for me to talk about our identity, culture, struggles, and history. Fortunately my generation is becoming more educated and aware, using different platforms to raise our voices and advocate for change.

Your mother is a strong woman. Do you think her story can be inspiring for other women?

Hawa's story is truly inspiring. Her determination over the years to turn her dreams into reality shows the resilience of women in Afghanistan, who even today continue to fight against the Taliban, all alone with no support.



The Story Behind the Poster of "Writing Hawa"

Designer **Lola Duval** shares the backstory behind the artwork, including several collaborations:

In the poster for "Writing Hawa" I tried to combine several elements which are essential to the story of Hawa's journey to an independent life. She learns to read and to write. And she starts a small business, scouting and buying beautiful embroideries in the mountains of the Bamiyan region, turning them into dresses and selling them in Kabul.

I asked **Deyana Rafat**, a young Hazara woman who lives in exile in France and works with embroideries, to create one for us. This real embroidery has been scanned and is now framing the poster.

The key image I used is from one of the most striking scenes of the documentary, in which Hawa and her grand-daughter Zahra are learning to write together, two generations united in one image. In one scene of the film,

Hawa is reading out loud a poem from a book, and in another scene, the director is writing a letter to her. Those beautiful texts have been redesigned by Lebanese artist **Naji Elmir** and are now the patterns on Hawa's dress and that of her grand-daughter. The elegant Farsi letters are ornamental, but for those who can read the language, they develop a deeper meaning and subtle resonance with the story of the film."

Lola Duval also shares the translation of the poem on Zahra's dress on the artwork:

*Spring has come, flowers have bloomed,
Beautiful red flowers,
In the garden of our home,
Have opened their eyes,
And smiled with grace and pride.*

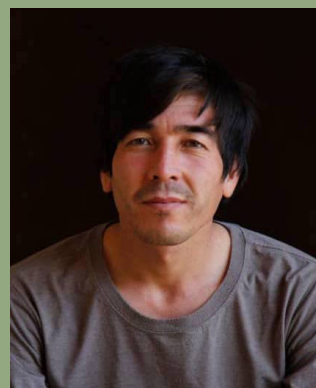
www.loladuval.com



NAJIBA NOORI (author, director) was born in 1995 in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. She began working for media organisations as a volunteer when she was just 15. She has participated in several workshops for photography and filmmaking in Kabul, Afghanistan. She has made reports and photo stories for various organisations and agencies, including the AFP, Huffington Post, MSF, FMIC, NRC and UN Women in Afghanistan. She participated at the Close-Up program 2020-2021 and at IDFA Academy 2022. She joined AFP as a video journalist in 2019. In 2021 she was obliged to leave her country when the Taliban took power in Afghanistan and lives in France. *WRITING HAWA* is her first documentary.



RASUL NOORI (co-director) was born in 1994 in Bamiyan, Afghanistan and graduated in journalism in Kabul. He has made several short videos for NRC, GIZ, and FMIC in Afghanistan. He was one of the cinematographers of the short film "Hoof" with the American Company Hungry Man in Bamiyan.



AFSANEH SALARI (co-author and film editor) is an Iranian director, editor and producer based in Paris. She's the co-founder of Docmaniacs Collective in Tehran and founder of Docmaniacs Production in Paris. "Hawa" is her fourth feature length as an editor.

Her other works include "The Silhouettes" - 2020 as a director that won Special Mention at Visions du Réel and was funded by Sundance Institute, and "The Forbidden Strings" - 2019 as a producer that was funded by and premiered at IDFA.

Her last film "Great Are The Eyes of a Great Father" was in collaboration with Wim Wenders and premiered at CPH Dox 2023. Afsaneh works as an editing coach with Ateliers Varan in Paris.



Credits

With Hawa Noori, Zahra Haidari, Fatima Noori, Musa Noori Rasul Noori, Mahdi Noori, Zaher Noori,
Mohammad Ali Khalighi, Mehran Khalighi, Kian Khalighi

Directed by Najiba Noori, Co-directed by Rasul Noori, Written by Najiba Noori, Afsaneh Salari

Produced by Christian Popp, Coproduced by Hasse van Nunen, Renko Douze

Cinematography Najiba Noori, Rasul Noori, Editing Afsaneh Salari, Narration Najiba Noori

Original Music Afshin Azizi, Assistant Arash Azizi, Performed by Milad Alemi - Violin, Mehrdad Alemi - Cel-
lo, Arash Azizi - Setar, Mehrzad Hoveyda - Percussion, Afshin Azizi - Rubab, Recorded at, Aafraa Studio
(Spain), Dumble Studio (Netherlands, Iran), Mixed and Mastered by, Afra Azari

Sound Recording Najiba Noori, Rasul Noori, Additional Cinematographers Asghar Noormohammadi,
Ishaq Ali Anis, Ilyes Bentizi, Reza Esmailzada, Hussain Ali Haidary

Sound Designer & Re-recording Mixer Tim van Peppen, Foley Recordist Valentina Pasetti, Foley Artist
Sebastian Sonzogno, Foley Studio Supervisor Rafael Millán, Additional Music Editing Marc Lizier

Colorist Grégoire Ausina, Editing Consultancy Audrey Maurion, Production Managers Christian Popp,
Noa Defesche, Postproduction Coordinator Katya Panova, Production Administration Stéphanie Rob-
ert, Translations Asad Kosha, Mohammad Mahdi Yaqubi English Subtitles Adaptation Danny Wool, Film
Archives Najiba Noori

Additional Music Mina, by Shabana Mehryar, Hazaragi, by Sadiga Madadgar, Trailer David Fernandes,
Impact Producer Hasse van Nunen, Impact Production Manager NL Deniece Hilberink

Titles and Poster Design Lola Duval, Calligraphy Naji Elmir, Poster Embroideries Deyana Rafat

Technical Equipment Najiba Noori, Loca-Images, Docmaniacs, Gisèle Productions, Avidia

Produced by TAG FILM, Delegate Producer Christian Popp
in Association with ARTE France, Society and Culture Department, Fabrice Puchault, Commissioning
Editor Rasha Salti, Head of Business Affairs Marie-Lise Lafon, Production Coordinator Quentin François,
Administration Manager Linda Rekouane, Postproduction Manager David Duchemin
In Coproduction with Een van de jongens, EDocs, Commissioning Editor Margit Balogh

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