



A Destruction,

WORLD PREMIER AT MIDDLEBURY FILM FESTIVAL

A familiar stench diffuses through the town of Cashma Goth every morning. A remote and impoverished fishing community off the coast of Karachi, Pakistan, the locals have grown insensitve to the unique whiff of carbon fuel and rotting fish that has come to define the village. The swarms of flies that conjure as a result are what caused 11-year-old Humera to start sleeping with a cloth on her face. Fatherless, one of seven and the first in her family to study beyond the second grade, Humera often walks to school barefoot.

"I want to be a doctor to help the poor," she says.

But the odds are steeply stacked against her. With no male figure in the household, the burden of financially supporting the family will soon be on her shoulders. As she watches her 14-year-old sister marry a man over a decade older, she makes a determination about her own future.

"I'm never getting married!" she exclaims. "Marriage is utter destruction!"

But the pressure to uphold tradition looms in her conscience. When the only school system in the community comes under financial duress, Humera's mother insists that she, too, forego her education in favor of an arranged marriage.

A Destruction follows the trajectory of Humera's life as it reaches a critical point: When she must maintain the determination to stay in school or risk falling prey to the cycle of poverty.

Director/producer Urooj Yazdani holds an M.D. from the Chicago Medical School and an M.Ed. from the Johns Hopkins University. Her research focused on the socioeconomic circumstances that prevent women from attaining higher education in the developing world. Her exploration of the topic was so thorough that it led to the Johns Hopkins administrative staff encouraging her to turn it into a documentary film. She was awarded a grant to make it happen.

Cinematographer Omar Nabulsi grew up in Barrington and is an alumnus of Barrington High School. His childhood home was a few miles from the historic Catlow Theatre. He recalls many summers during which he and his family would go to the Catlow to check out the newest films. Engaging with local cinema inspired him to attend film school at Columbia College. Over the years, he has lensed a wide variety of projects, including narratives, documentaries, corporate, commercials, sports, and portraits.

Urooj and Omar met for the first time over coffee in downtown Barrington. She had already graduated from JHU and had just returned back home to Chicago so she could complete her MD at the Chicago Medical School. Omar was curious to learn about how, exactly, Urooj planned on navigating the intangibles of developing a film while completing her medical education. Omar was skeptical, to say the least.

Omar tells us: "I didn't want to discourage Urooj, but I knew how challenging it is to make a film. I scored the whole project as a noble but ultimately impractical idea. On the other hand, seeing just how deep her appetite for the project went, the other part of me wanted to create all the runway she needed to get the project off the ground if she was really that committed."

Urooj and Omar created a personal office space within the Barrington public library. Armed with their phones, laptops and an Excel spreadsheet, they drew upon her ties overseas to search for the ideal protagonist. The right fit ended up being a young girl who lived in a remote fishing community off the coast of Karachi, Pakistan. Her name was Humera. Wise beyond her years and barely even a teenager, Humera was trying to do everything she could to obtain an education so that one day, she could break out of the grip of poverty.

As the story fell together, Omar and Urooj both learned how to manage the monumental task of actually doing Humera's story justice.

Omar explains: "There are a lot of technical and stylistic considerations that Urooj seemed to learn quickly. The story was so personal to her, and at the end of the day, I think that is ultimately what makes any film captivating. When someone really pours their soul into a project, it will show, and the audience will feel it."

Omar described the intended style of storytelling. "The vast majority of documentaries don't prioritize cinematography. Traditionally, narrative films are made to capture the eye whereas documentaries are more about engaging the mind, with little attention to the visual aspect. My goal with this film was to marry captivating images with an even more captivating story."

With Urooj's investment in the story and Omar's background in photography and storytelling, both of them think they made a fantastic duo for the project. Being co-directors on a single project can be tough, especially when creative opinions do not match. Despite occasional disagreements, some worse than others, Omar and Urooj feel as though they have become experts at conflict resolution. "She's smarter than me," Omar says. "So as long as we go with what she wants, it usually ends up being best," he says with a smile.

The film recently its first test screening at the Catlow theater. Omar became nostalgic as he recalled his childhood experience of watching Hollywood films on what was now the same screen on which his feature documentary was being displayed. The film ultimately garnered a wide array of reactions.



Urooj states: "Some people observed Humera's struggle and came out of it feeling empowered, viewing her as a feminist who is determined to succeed in the worst of circumstances. Others felt anger and frustration at the way her environment is set up. Nobody, though, left the film feeling nothing at all, and I think that is the most important thing."

A Destruction will have its world premiere at the Middlebury Film Festival in Vermont at the end of August. It is subsequently planned to air on television stations around the globe, with the subsequent festival and educational exhibitions in the near future.

By Omar Nabulsi, Resident Contributor **resident profile**

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