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CHIME THROUGH THE YEARS

## **“WELCOME TO SISTER-HOOD” BY DEEYAH KHAN**

*CHIME FOR CHANGE Through the Years: The Female Fabric is a series curated by CHIME Managing Editor Mariane Pearl featuring stories from the CHIME journalism platform archives by women around the world.*



If the mainstream media has shaped your representation of women of Muslim heritage, you may imagine our lives as a grim bucket list from hell: honor killings, acid attacks, suicide bombings, forced marriages, FGM, hijabs... and the ever-growing risk of radicalization. Indeed and sadly, those issues are real and need to be discussed without fear.

But conservative men claiming to speak on our behalf, or bigots eager to use our hardships to further their own divisive agenda, often are the one entitled to discuss these issues.

In doing so, they specifically discard anyone else’s input, let alone that of young women (who also happen to be the primary targets).

There is a propensity to consider either victimized or devout individuals to be the authentic voices of all women of Muslim heritage- victims of oppression and violence or potential jihadi brides.- These sensationalist and dehumanizing accounts lose touch with reality, and specifically that of the women at the heart of these tragedies. We are failing to provide a multidimensional portrayal of women who are already dealing with conflicted identities, intergenerational clashes and the corrosive atmosphere of prejudice against Muslims. This sense of frustration led me to create the digital magazine sister-hood to challenge stereotypes, and reflect the diversity of our voices and the wider experiences of women of Muslim heritage today. I wanted to create a platform that confronts the reality of misogyny and violence but which also celebrates the spirit of resistance, creativity and courage amongst women of Muslim heritage.

Although my films and activism often uncover violence, oppression and the darker side of our experiences, I have always been inspired by women’s efforts to bring change from within. We need to hear what they have to say. If we only focus on oppression, then we are telling an incomplete and desperate story when, even in the darkest tragedies, there are women standing up to challenge injustice, providing hope for a better future. These women’s contributions are mostly ignored and have been forever and across cultures. In fact, they may very well know how to address some of the greatest issues of our age.

So far, the mainstream media has had little time for the women who have been on the frontlines of progressive change for decades. These women are trouble-makers and peace-makers, activists and artists, rebels and revolutionaries, who have been defending peace, justice, freedom of expression, gender equality and human rights.

Often we hear about them once they become victims – imprisoned by repressive states or assassinated by religious zealots. We need to include them and acknowledge their contributions while we can.

And my heroes are not just these loud and fearless activists who operate at the political level, but also those unnoticed young women who resist oppression and discrimination in their personal lives, every day, within their own homes, families and communities. These are all women who, in their own ways, whether publicly or privately, are refusing to be defined by anyone else. In Sister-Hood, I am inviting all women and girls of Muslim heritage, regardless of age, ethnicity or sexuality.

Devout Muslims, cultural Muslims, former Muslims and agnostics are all welcome to contribute, all sects and denominations are welcome. Whatever their differences, they can speak to their common experiences of growing up in Muslim families and communities, and the experiences of what it is to be considered Muslim in the world today. And let the loud noises that have covered our voices forever recede so we can impulse a new peaceful direction for our world.

We are endlessly spoken for, and spoken about. It's time we speak for ourselves.

*sister-hood* is an award-winning digital magazine spotlighting the diverse voices of women of Muslim heritage.

