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CHIME THROUGH THE YEARS

“BAHRAIN: THE FORBIDDEN LAND OF THE ARAB SPRING” BY STÉPHANIE LAMORRÉ

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.



Film Produced by Luc Hermann and Paul Moreira

It is virtually impossible for journalists to enter Bahrain, they can't sneak in illegally, like some do in Syria, because Bahrain is an island, one located between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

In Bahrain, attacks from the government happen every day, and every week there are more casualties

Journalists, photographers, activists and citizens calling for democracy are among the targets, public hospitals are controlled by the army, the secret police are everywhere and misinformation pervades society. NGO's have an equally difficult time being allowed in. And according to Human Rights Watch, Bahrain's political climate has worsened in recent years as the country's courts convict and imprison peaceful dissenters, as well as tighten its grip on women by restricting their rights to attend the Muslim holy pilgrimage on their own if they are under 45 years-old.

The monarchy ruthlessly manages its public image and likes to see itself as a modern state, one with a developed and expanding economy relying on oil and good relationships with the West (there are up to 400 foreign banks and financial institutions in the country).

Since there are close to no eye-witnesses on the ground, the only way to see what is happening are video clips posted on YouTube by amateurs or tweets sent by activists. If the government happens to grant visas to a television station, the journalists will be followed and controlled by a “communications team”— so-called “guides” whose mission it is to prevent direct contacts with the local population. Because of this lack of visibility, the rest of the world behaves as if nothing ever happens in Bahrain.

But for an entire month, my team and I were able to share the struggle of the Bahraini people even though international media from outlets like the BBC or the New York Times were banned from entering the country.

And I witnessed how Bahrain's insurgents have fallen on the wrong side of history.

I filmed mostly women, but it wasn't much of a deliberate choice. As a foreign female journalist, I couldn't stay at a man's place, though Bahrain isn't like Saudi Arabia, as women there tend to be educated and independent.



On a rooftop, a young woman shelters herself from police offensive.



Bahraini police raiding a Shiite neighborhood looking for militants.



A young woman comforts a friend who was just beaten by the police.



Police use extremely toxic gas to discourage demonstrations. It triggers serious asphyxia and has killed many people.



Young women pray at the funeral of a young boy killed by the police.



Funeral of a young militant.

Watch the full documentary in French: