

Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy: Activist, Journalist, Director, and Oscar Winner

ALI Thank you all for coming out tonight. My name is Ali Ruther, and I am the student entertainment board arts programmer.

ALLY And I'm Ally McGuire, the speakers' programmer.

MCGUIRE:

ALI This program is a collaboration of student entertainment boards arts, speakers, and the Common Reading Program. We are all very proud to introduce Pakistani's filmwriter, journalist, and Oscar winner, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy.

[APPLAUSE]

SHARMEENGood evening, everyone. I was born in Karachi, Pakistan in 1978. This is the year right around the time when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. And the country that I call home was changed forever.

OBAID-

CHINOY: We had millions of refugees that border-crossed the border from Afghanistan into Pakistan.

And the Pakistan that my parents described to me as I was growing up was very different from the one that I opened up my eyes to. My parents talked about a time when they had clubs and cabarets, where alcohol was flowing, where you had men and women who socially mingled together. And then in 1978 with the Afghanistan invasion, that began to change, rapidly at first because we had a military dictator by the name of General Zia that came into power.

And I remember my youth, growing up in the city of Karachi, and looking out and often seeing this city that had begun to be volatile. And my earliest memories are feeling some sort of anger was when I was about 10 years old. I remember I was being driven to school, and my car had stopped at a traffic light. And I looked out of the window, and I saw this young girl. She was almost the same age as me except I was wearing a school uniform and she was barefoot, and her hand was stretched out, and she was begging.

And for a 10-year-old to almost see a reflection of oneself on the other side of the car, I asked myself, why is it that I'm in the car, and she's outside? And I think that's when I really began to ask very difficult questions. I would pester my mother and I would ask the schoolteachers, and I would always be wanting to ask the questions that nobody ever wanted to give answers to.

And so at the age of 14, one day, my mother was completely fed up and said, you know what? You

need to start channeling all of these questions into a series of articles. So why don't you start writing for local newspapers? This is a time when there's no internet, no cell phones.

And I began writing for an English language newspaper in Pakistan called the *DAWN* Newspaper. And my editor, I don't even think he realized how old I was because by the time I was 17 years old, he was giving me investigative reports. My first investigative report, at the age of 17, was going undercover to write an article to expose bullies, high school bullies, that were children of wealthy land owners in the city that I lived in, and naming and shaming them, and talking about the fact that they would kidnap other young boys for hours, shave their head.

And when the article came out, I literally took the photographs of the people who were doing this. I wrote up about them. And the morning that the article got printed, it was a national holiday in the country. My father was going off to say his prayers, and he came running back.

And I always used to get into trouble because I was always writing about something or saying something that I wasn't meant to. And I could hear his voice kind of booming through the house. And he said, Sharmeen, what have you gone and done today? And I was racking my brains, thinking, what is it that I've done today that landed me into trouble?

And the young men that I had written about had spray painted my name and my family's name across my gate, my neighborhood, and within a five kilometer radius of where I lived. And they had done it to name and shame me and my family, and almost so that I would become silent, that I wouldn't write what I was writing. Because how dare I challenge the status quo and name and shame these kind of people?

For a 17-year-old young woman growing up in a fairly conservative household in Pakistan, I thought my father was going to tell me that my career was over. But he said something to me that day that has always stayed with me. If you speak the truth, I will stand with you, and so will the world. And that is something that I've held very dearly to my heart as I've carried on from Pakistan onwards to the rest of the world to pick up stories that people rarely talk about to challenge the status quo, to shed a light on minorities, to shed a light on war-torn countries, on women, on children, and to bring a different face to many of the conflicts that we see around the world today.

Very soon after that article was published, it was time for me to go off to university. And my father--you know, young women from Pakistan, in those days, very few of them made it out into the US or to the UK. And I really wanted to get to the US. I wanted to get an education here.

And so I secretly applied to college. I got into Smith. And then I broke the news to my father that I was going to go off to college. My father said, absolutely not. You're not going to college in America. You're going to stay in Pakistan. You're going to study here.

And so I did what any 18-year-old girl would do. I went on a hunger strike. And I said, I am not going to stop until you send me to college. Of course, secretly, I was kind of sneaking in the food, but you know, lots of tears and my father feeling really worried about my very serious hunger strike. And I ended up in college very soon. I went off to Smith.

That's really when my activism began. I was doing a lot of sit-ins at college. I was doing a lot of talking at that time, the sanctions in Iraq-- this is the late 1990s. The sanctions in Iraq were taking place. And there was a lot that I was politically involved in.

And when I was a senior at Smith College, I think my whole life changed in many ways. I was all set to go to the UN. I wanted to change the world. And then 9/11 happened. And I'll never forget that day because I was at Smith, and I was going up to meet the dean. And the television screens were on there. And I saw the tower come down, and as I went the other way, I wondered, what kind of a film is this early in the morning? And then I just kind of carried on.

And as I began to watch the news and began to see journalists being parachuted into the world that I had grown up in, I realized that actually, my calling was to bring stories from that part of the world into this part of the world. And having never ever watched a documentary film but having written a fair amount for local newspapers, I decided that I wanted to become a visual journalist.

And I didn't know what that meant. So I literally went online, and I typed in "visual journalism," and up popped in this word, "documentary." I said, right, I want to be a documentary filmmaker. And so I'm 21 with a bright green Pakistani passport, and I want to be a documentary filmmaker. So the best thing that I thought that I could do at that time was write up a proposal.

So I went back to Pakistan in December 2001. And the first thing that really hit me was the sheer number of Afghan refugee children that had been sent by their parents from Afghanistan into Pakistan because the war had begun in Afghanistan. And I thought about all that was being shown on television. And I said, well, no one is talking about the impact of war on children. And that's the proposal I wrote up.

And I had this very, very lengthy list of people that I sent this proposal to, about 80 organizations across the US. I'm talking about television stations, production houses, from MTV right down to CNN,

OK? Some people were polite. They wrote back saying, you have a degree in economics and political science. Never done visual journalism.

But I thought that, you know what? If a door hasn't opened for me, it's because I haven't kicked it hard enough. And so one morning, I found the email address of the president of *New York Times*, and I wrote to him. I just sent him my proposal.

I said, hi, I'm 20 years old. And I want to do this documentary film. And here is my proposal. And 15 minutes later, I got a response saying, let me read it. And another 15 minutes later, he said, do you want to come to New York?

And so I bought my first suit and I got onto this Amtrak train, and I went from Western Massachusetts to New York City. And I entered this room of very old very, very serious looking gray-suited people. And I began to give my presentation.

And I didn't know how things were going until the very end, and the kind of questions that were coming to me were very interesting. My favorite question was, how did I learn how to speak English so well? And so it was a very interesting exchange. But at the end of it, they decided that they would fund me, train me, and send me off to make my first film.

And that's when I realized, actually, you just have to kick open those doors for you, because those opportunities really do exist. So I went off to Pakistan, and I made my first film at the age of 21. It was called *Terror's Children*. It was about Afghan refugee children on the streets of Pakistan.

And after the first three weeks of filming when the tapes went back to New York, I got a very frantic call from my executive producer who said, it all looks great, but there's no sound. I had forgotten to put on the mics. So I thought my career was going to be over even before it started. But thankfully, I began to go back and recreate and retrace some of the steps that we had done.

And my first film was up for an Overseas Press Club award, which is a journalist award. And ironically, I beat a very seasoned *New York Times* print journalist for that award. And that was my very first kind of success in the world of film. I wanted, right from the start, to explore these kind of stories. And so from *Terror's Children* onwards to several films that I began to make around the world-- in Afghanistan, and Iraq, in East Timor, in Saudi Arabia-- and each one of the stories that I was looking at were stories that mainstream media wasn't talking about at that time.

In 2005, I went to Saudi Arabia to document the underground women's movement. Nobody had done a film at that time about the women's movement in Saudi Arabia, because actually, it was very

nascent and very, very underground. And I arrived there, purposely, three women-- a very tall, blond Dutch woman; myself; and an Asian-American. And the three of us were quite a sight in a country where women rarely ever go out.

And we were filming on the streets, and we were arrested three times-- once for attracting too much attention because the cause was slowing down on the bridge where we were filming. But that story came out, and that story was one of the first stories where I realized that actually, film can become a tool. It's not just about informing the public, but it's also about how film can be used as a way to lobby governments, as a way to change policy, as a way for people to rally behind an issue.

When the film came out, the Saudi Arabia film, many female activists in Saudi Arabia watched that film, felt empowered by it and, shared it. It was very soon after that where a woman in Saudi Arabia-- where women started defying the law and started driving.

In 2007, I chose to move back to Pakistan after having lived in the US and after working for the *New York Times*. I chose to move back because I believe very strongly that people like myself have to go back and invest. And thus began my journey to create content, both within Pakistan but also to create content that showed a very different perspective of Pakistan to the world.

For many of you here, the Pakistan that you know is very different from the Pakistan that I know. And that's because the Pakistan you know is ripped from the headlines from the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* or the *Wall Street Journal*. And the Pakistan that I know is where I live and breathe, and where my children are growing up. And as with any country, there are good and there is bad. It's always helpful to talk about all of those heroes that are working on the ground to create change.

In 2012, a film I did called *Saving Face* won an Academy Award. I'm going to show you a clip from that film to start off.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

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[SPEAKING

URDU]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[END PLAYBACK]

SHARMEEN The issues that I pick up make people deeply uncomfortable. Acid violence is something that is prevalent in Pakistan, but nobody was talking about that issue. Nobody was talking about that issue
OBAID- because when you speak out about these kind of things, there is a backlash.

So there's very often that I wake up in the morning, and on social media, there are things about me that I didn't even know about my own self that seem to pop up all the time. And then there are threats, some that are more intense than others. Obviously, society finds it hard when you hold up a mirror to one's self.

But with *Saving Face*, I had my first real big win in Pakistan-- not just because the film won an Academy Award, the first in the country, but also because it moved the needle on acid violence. Zakia, the woman that you saw in the film, her husband was given a life sentence for pouring acid on her face. His was one of the first sentences ever handed out that was so intense, but also because we used the film to lobby the government.

And there is a huge backlog of cases when it comes to issues like this in the court system. And many women just get tired and don't want to go to court. And the men who do this walk scot-free.

And so we lobbied the government, and they took these cases and processed them through special courts so that where women would have to go to court for 15, 18, 22 months, now, they would get justice within six months. And this happened precisely because the film won an Academy Award. There was a global recognition of the film. And within Pakistan, people began acknowledging that this is a problem, and we need to do something to change it.

With the Academy Award, my voice was also amplified. It meant that many of the issues that I would then pick up subsequently, would mean that we could really try and affect some sort of a policy change, or we could try and affect some sort of a change in the way people thought of that issue, and thus began what I would call my second calling. For years, I was a thorn in the side of the government. I was doing things wherever I went, whether it was in East Timor, or whether I was in Saudi Arabia, or Iraq, or Syria, where I'd often arrive, and the work that I would do, governments

wouldn't want me to come back.

But in Pakistan, I thought because I lived and worked there that I not only wanted to pick up all of these issues, like acid violence, but I also wanted to talk about the people that was fighting those issues. Because in the 24-hour news cycle that we have, there is so much news that pulls us down. And we all know each one of us have problems. This country has its own host of issues. My country has its own host of issues. There is no country that doesn't.

But when we talk about these issues, it's important to also talk about those people who are fighting to change the ground realities. And so the next series of clips that I'm going to show you are going to be about the men and women that you'll never meet except through my films, but that will show you that they're literally risking their lives so that there are pockets of change across not only Pakistan but in many other parts of the world.

This next clip is of a woman called Syeda Fatima. Bonded labor is a very big problem in Pakistan when entire families work in brick kiln factories. And because they take money-- they borrow money for education, or to get their children married, or for health reasons-- that loan is amplified and gets carried down from generation to generation. So you have families that have been enslaved for generations.

And there is a young woman many years ago who started her fight against enslavement. When Humans of New York came to Pakistan, he also profiled her. But her work is incredible. Here in this clip, you see her standing up to a man who runs one of these brick kilns and stands up and asks him to free the family.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

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[SPEAKING

URDU]

[END PLAYBACK]

SHARMEENA a few years ago, Syeda Fatima and her brother we're going from brick kiln to brick kiln to educate the **OBAID-** workers about their rights, to tell them that enslavement is against the policies of the country. And two **CHINOY:** men came and shot them. Her brother was shot in the knee. He was thankfully not paralyzed.

And she was also shot. And the swelling of the brick kiln workers who came out, and took them to the hospital, and stayed with them until they rehabilitated-- and after a few months, both the brother and sister started going back to the brick kilns. Our calling, they tell me, is to free as many people as possible, because men and women are born free, and they should die free.

I'm going to take you next into a hospital, which is one of the largest hospitals in the city of Karachi. And its emergency ward is like no other, as you will see, because of the political violence that takes place. And it's run by this woman called Seemi Jamali, who is dynamic.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[SPEAKING

URDU]

This was a fight between two groups outside the hospital. And when they were brought into the casualty, one group came into the dressing room. They saw another man lying here on the stretcher. And once they saw him on the stretcher here, they fired him right from this door across [INAUDIBLE].

[SPEAKING URDU]

Blow the candles. You forgot to blow the candles.

[SPEAKING URDU]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[END PLAYBACK]

SHARMEEN Stories like Seemi Jamali are then taken to schools and colleges. And one of the things that I like to **OBAID-** do is encourage young people to walk in their footsteps. My country has very few heroes. And as a **CHINOY:** filmmaker, I like to elevate people to that level where they do become heroes, where people aspire to

be like them.

Polio is a disease that conflicts very few countries in the world. Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan are the three countries that are left in the world that have strains of polio now. And the polio workers on the streets of Pakistan have been targeted time and time again.

And the reason is because when Osama bin Laden was found and taken, the way they found him was through a DNA test that a doctor collected samples while administrating polio drops. And so there's a huge conspiracy theory in Pakistan-- and some, of course, buy into it-- saying that when the government is delivering polio drops, they're actually collecting DNA of people.

And so they see polio vaccine workers, women who go door to door to administer the polio drops, as some sort of agents. And so over the last four or five years, many women have been brutally gunned down because of that. These women make two, two and a half dollars a day. And they walk on foot through many dangerous areas to administer polio drops.

So I wanted to make a film about these women, why do they do this and what their job is like. Naseem Akhtar, a very bold woman who led a team of hundreds of young women through some of the most dangerous parts of Pakistan to administer polio drops, decided to share her story with us.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

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[SPEAKING

URDU]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[END PLAYBACK]

SHARMEEN So sometimes, it's not the danger that one envisions it to be. It's the danger that many women have
OBAID- right in their own homes.

CHINOY:

Naseem Akhtar's death really affected my team and I because we spent a lot of time with her. So sometimes when you elevate somebody to the status of a hero, you don't realize very soon

afterwards that they have so many evils lurking within their own home. Her husband is serving time currently. And her children-- there's an education fund that's been set up for her children to go to college and so that they can make a life for themselves.

Apart from finding the men and women that I've introduced you to today, we also look for stories that inspire people in a completely different way. This year, we spent time in a boxing club with young girls in a very volatile neighborhood in Karachi. Many of these girls have dreams to go to the Olympics. I'm going to introduce you to two of them today.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[SPEAKING
URDU]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[END PLAYBACK]

SHARMEENAnd my biggest victory to date as a filmmaker came just eight weeks ago. Earlier this year, in LA, a **OBAID-** film I did, *A Girl in the River*, won an Academy Award-- the second on my career, but one that has **CHINOY:** altered the face of Pakistan, the way people look at honor killings. I did a film about honor killings.

For those who are not familiar with the terminology, it's when men kill women and find an excuse, and they name it that they did it because their honor was somewhat affected. A woman asks for a divorce, a woman decides she wants to marry out of her freewill, a woman decides that she wants to work, and men decide, in her family, that she is bringing dishonor to them, and they kill her.

Up until now, the laws that dealt with honor killings were very weak in Pakistan where you could

forgive the perpetrator. So if a father killed his daughter, his wife could forgive him. If a brother killed the sister, the parents could forgive.

And so the lacuna in the law was exploited, where you had up to 1,000 women being killed in the name of honor. The film I did, *A Girl in the River-- the Price of Forgiveness*, I'm going to show you a trailer from that.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[END PLAYBACK]

SHARMEENI found Saba. She had been shot by her father and her uncle, put in a gunny bag, and thrown in the river. She miraculously survived. And when I found her, it was about two or three days after this had happened, in a local hospital.

And immediately, I was struck by how this young woman who was not educated was willing to risk her life to tell her story so that what happened to her would not happen to any other woman. And I don't know whether I directed her in this film or whether she directed us, but it was her bravery in telling her story that inspired a country to change the law.

When this film was nominated for an Academy Award earlier this year, the prime minister of the country invited me to come and screen the film for the cabinet. And then he made a pledge that there was no honor in honor killing, and that his government would work in closing the loophole in the law. Saba's voice, even though she was not educated, had moved a prime minister.

Her bravery had inspired a country. Every single newspaper, television channel, began talking about honor killings. And just 8 weeks ago, the parliament in Pakistan passed a law that now makes it impossible for forgiveness to take place and hands down life imprisonment sentences to anyone that kills in the name of honor.

And it happened because the film galvanized the country to think about honor killings, and it inspired people to take that first step. It's not always easy to tell the truth. It's not always easy to take up these issues. But if we don't, then we are all complicit in the status quo. We're all complicit in making the status quo the norm. And that is something that we should never allow ourselves to do.

So sometimes, I turn on the television and someone is calling me a prostitute, telling me that I pander to the West, or that I take on issues that we shouldn't be talking about. But when laws like this are passed, when people like Saba are empowered to tell their stories, I know, as a filmmaker, I have done my job. Thank you so much.

[APPLAUSE]

So I'm happy to take on any questions that any of you might have. I'm blinded by all these lights, but-- OK, for those who want to know, there are some microphones in the audience that you can walk up to. Hey, come on. Two-time Oscar winner, you have no questions to ask her? Jesus, how many two-time Oscar winners come up here. Sure.

AUDIENCE: Hi. First off, I just wanted to thank you for coming out. This was awesome.

But I wanted to ask, when you were getting started, what was one of the first things you learned? You told the story about forgetting that mic was off or something. What was one of the first, most important things you learned getting started and actually developing the actual films to create a good product that could get out and send your message effectively?

SHARMEENI mean, one of the first things I learned as a filmmaker was that you should always look for stories that **OBAID-** other people are not looking at, and find the people who best exemplify the stories. So for example, if **CHINOY:** I wanted to talk about an issue, sometimes, somebody who's had something remarkable happen to them cannot articulate that. And for film, even if your story is weak but you're a very good storyteller on screen, then you can reach out and touch an audience.

The thing about me was that I was bringing stories from far-flung countries to screens in the US. And I needed people to empathize with the people they were looking at, to walk in their shoes, to say, you know what? This is not those people-- and this happens to those people in that part of the world, but more like, oh my god, this could happen to anyone. And that's why I was looking for people who would best exemplify that.

AUDIENCE: Awesome. Thank you so much.

SHARMEENThank you.

OBAID-

CHINOY:

AUDIENCE: Oh, this is really loud. Thank you so much. That was really inspiring. My question is, how do you think you've grown as a filmmaker from making *Terror's Children* to *Saving Face* to this most recent Oscar-- just the progression of yourself as a filmmaker.

SHARMEEN So in my first like 10 or 12 films, I was in the film. So all my films were about my journey into places,

OBAID- speaking to people. And so the audience was introduced to the subject through me-- very vain, I

CHINOY: might add.

So I quickly began to change that way of telling stories, because it was effective initially because again, as I was talking about all of these countries that were far-flung and far away, they needed to connect with somebody. It was easier to get films commissioned in which I was the storyteller. And in 2012, when I did *Saving Face*, that was my first film literally being just behind the camera and not being in the film.

I think over the years, my voice as an activist has grown much bigger. I know many filmmakers say, oh, we're not activists. But every filmmaker, virtually by the fact that they choose a subject, is an activist because they're choosing that subject because that subject moves them in some way, motivates them to do something. So I'm an activist filmmaker, and I think that that realization has come more and more with my work and seeing how my work has affected policy change.

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

SHARMEEN Thank you.

OBAID-

CHINOY:

AUDIENCE: First of all, I thank you for being here being so inspiring to us. And second, so what do you think of women's rights right now in the US, and especially after the results of the recent election?

SHARMEEN Whew. You know, I'm speaking at many college campuses, and I get asked this every time this week.

OBAID- So look, there's one thing that unites women around the world, and it doesn't matter whether you're in

CHINOY: the US or whether you're in far-flung countries somewhere in Africa. It's that violence against women is very real.

It doesn't matter the color of your skin. It exists in society, and so does the glass ceiling. I hate to break it to everybody. It exists. You can be anywhere in the world. That glass ceiling still exists. So we, as women, have a long way to go.

I mean, look. The way I look at things is that many things seem to be covered up. It seems all OK when you look at it. It's all packaged neatly. You start uncovering the layers, and you begin to realize that actually, there is a lot that's going on under the surface.

I mean, the fact that in this country-- I've lived here for more than a decade when I was in college and working here. There are many parts of the country where women has no control over her own body, where governments decide what and how her body is regulated. It's 2016. The United States might hear domestic violence against women by partners is rising dramatically.

There are many, many issues that I hear. And I think that one thing that we women around the world need to realize is that women's rights around the world are facing a sort of a regression, to say. I mean, there are many countries-- yes, you see them moving one step up because metrically, on a board, in a Fortune 500 company, you might find women. And you might say, oh, that's progress there. But then when you look at other statistics, you'll find that there is less progress that is being made.

And with the elections, I would just say that, as I've said about my work is, don't be complicit. Speak up. Speak out. If you see something wrong, say something about it.

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

AUDIENCE: Hi. I'm passing on questions from the Global Campus students. And one of the first ones was one for [INAUDIBLE]. And she was wondering if you've ever been scared living in Pakistan.

SHARMEEN: If I've ever?

OBAID-

CHINOY:

AUDIENCE: Ever been scared living in Pakistan.

SHARMEEN: Scared-- well, anybody that pushes the envelope anywhere in the world finds that there are people

OBAID- who-- there is always a blowback. Of course, there are people who want to silence me and the kind of

CHINOY: work that I do. But then I have a lot of supporters as well.

And I think that early on, when I would look at lots of stuff about me on social media or I would look at stuff about me, it would upset me. But then I realized that I must really be pissing off a lot of people for them to wake up in the morning and find stuff, make up about me, and post it on there. So really, you only piss people off when you're actually affecting change.

So I take that now as an advantage. And the more I find people against me, the more empowered I feel to continue down my path.

[APPLAUSE]

AUDIENCE: Hi, I had two questions. My first question was that if you had to choose one of your works, which one impacted you the most? And my second one is, do you have any future plans for documentaries?

SHARMEEN So the film that really impacted me most was a film I did in Iraq in 2008 about children that had been

OBAID- maimed by bombs. And I was living and working with the children and seeing 8, 9, 10-year-olds going

CHINOY: through surgery after surgery after surgery. It began to dawn to me that even though I'd been in many, many conflict zones before that, I'd never been with children in those conflict zones.

And there was one particular moment that I think I'll never forget is a young girl in a rehabilitation center. There was a wall of drawings on it. She had just gone through her surgery, and she was showing me these paintings.

And I said, which one is yours? And that was a house on it. And I said, is that your house? And she broke down, crying. And I didn't know what I had said.

And she explained to me that there was no one left in that house because 16 members of her family had been blown up, and she was the only remaining survivor. That's when I really realized that war is not what you see on nightly news. It is somebody's reality that literally changes people's lives.

I am currently working on a film about collegiate sports in the United States. And it's very apt that I am here in this space. And it's about how sports transformed the lives of young individuals that come through college.

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

AUDIENCE: Hi. My question is-- oh, sorry. Give me a second. I can just stand up. It's OK. My question is what your creative process is, and where your ideas come from, and how do you know what makes a good documentary.

SHARMEEN So I have a barometer of anger. And depending on how angry I feel about an issue, that's what I

OBAID- choose to do. So many of the issues that I've been looking at for the last couple of years are issues

CHINOY: that deeply moved me and make me angry, and I want others to become angry about them. So

depending on the barometer of anger, that's how I choose the subject.

AUDIENCE: Hi. I was just wondering, are there any other documentary filmmakers that you watch and they inspire you to pursue more projects?

SHARMEEN Yeah. There are a couple of documentary filmmakers that really inspire me. Joshua Oppenheimer, he does-- also, James Langley. And so I always look at filmmakers that create film in a very different way.

For example, I encourage all of you, if you haven't seen this film called *Iraq in Fragments*, you should watch it. It's a beautiful documentary film. One wouldn't even think that it's a documentary film to one who is watching it. So those are the filmmakers that inspire me.

AUDIENCE: Thank you very much.

SHARMEEN Thanks.

OBAID-

CHINOY:

AUDIENCE: Hi. I have two more questions from the Global Campus. The first one is Damien, and he is asking, have you ever questioned putting something on film, fearing that it would endanger the subject? And then the second one is from Lynn. And she was curious about the prime minister when he discussed honor killings, and if that has gone into effect, what he has proclaimed.

SHARMEEN Yeah, so the first one is when we do films where people risk their lives to tell their stories, it's very hard sometimes to gauge what the reaction will be when the film comes out. We've tried our best to protect all of the people who've spoken out in our films. Sometimes we hold back screenings within the country to make sure that the environment is OK. But as filmmakers, we can only do so much. And so far, we've been able to protect everyone that we've made films about.

And the second answer is that the prime minister has obviously lived up to his promise because the law has passed in Pakistan. I will take two more questions.

AUDIENCE: Hi. Thank you for being here and your inspiring stories. My question is, was there any particular situation where you felt like you wanted to quit or you thought the field was not right for you? If there was, how did you get back up?

SHARMEEN Once I began making documentary films, I knew that that was my calling. But there have been a few

OBAID- moments where I really questioned whether I wanted to be in these far-flung places, not knowing

CHINOY: whether I'm going to live or die through that process.

In 2007, I was in East Timor working on a film about gang violence, and I found myself in the middle of two gangs that were attacking each other. And thankfully, the gangs in East Timor do not attack each other with guns. They attack each other with rocks and machetes. So at least there weren't any bullets flying around.

But at one point, I was looking at the camera. And somebody picked me up from off the ground and literally threw me to the other side. And as I fell, so did a massive boulder fall where I had been. And you know, you begin to realize that life and death, it can come and go very quickly.

And it's at moments like this you question the work that you do and the impact it would have on my family. But I think that the fact that somebody, even in that violence and in that chaos, managed to rescue me shows the power and ability of humanity in general.

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

SHARMEEN Thank you. OK, last question.

OBAID-

CHINOY:

AUDIENCE: On behalf of WSU, thank you very much for coming. It's an honor to have you here.

SHARMEEN Thank you.

OBAID-

CHINOY:

AUDIENCE: Our Common Reading book this year is *I Am Malala*. I'm wondering if you're familiar with her work.

And if so, can you draw any parallels or connections between your work and hers?

SHARMEEN Oh, yeah. I know Malala. And in fact, we were at a conference together less than four weeks ago.

OBAID- She's a remarkable young woman.

CHINOY:

What happened to Malala is very tragic because unfortunately, she had to leave the country. And what she stands for now and what she is trying to achieve is remarkable. And education for young girls is something that should be not be lobbied. And I hope one day, she can come back to Pakistan.

Like Malala, there are many young women in Pakistan who are fighting for education. I love that book because it really shows you the voice of a young woman and how she's trying to affect change. I think that her book has inspired many people in her home country to walk in her footsteps. Thank you so much.

[APPLAUSE]