

MEGHAN: Have you ever heard the saying if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything. I remember hearing it years ago and nodding along, thinking, mm hmm, that makes sense to me. Just stand for something. Stand for something good. But not everyone sees it that way. Especially when it comes to women. I started to notice this almost default eyeroll when someone would mention a woman fighting for a cause. An almost, "oh, here she goes again." Or maybe it was more of, "Stand for something? Why can't she just sit down and..." You know the rest. The unspoken annoyance that seemed to swirl around women in activism was astounding to me, and I couldn't quite wrap my head around it. I still can't. But then I realized, as with most things, while it may manifest itself differently, or in different shapes or forms or ways, it's not new. This has been going on for a long time. And I had read this New York Times piece maybe a year or so ago, and in it, journalist and author Elaine Weiss. She recounts the term suffragette. And she explains in the piece that in 1906, this term, this word suffragette — which is a fraught term — was created by a journalist for a well-known UK publication. Or shall I say, tabloid. And she says the name of this notorious publication, which still exists, but I'm not going to elevate them by mentioning it here. In this piece, she says that the journalist was, quote, making fun of the more militant suffragists in the U.K. And so he used the diminutive "-ette" to belittle them. Now, as we all know with the word suffragette, this became adopted the world over to refer to women in the suffrage movement. The suffix "-ette," by the way, is literally used to describe a smaller form of something. So for these women. It was used and adopted globally as a dig. For women who wanted the right to vote. When I read this, I found it so interesting and it made me wonder why is female activism so audacious to some? Why is it perceived as "How dare she?" And why do some feel the need to make a woman with big opinions? Feel small. It also made me wonder what are the ways in which women, the ways in which we serve up our activism to get around this — or not. For some, it's peaceful protest. For others, it's campaigning. Some take it to the streets. And others — others use comedy to make their point.

**Ilana:** That's the trouble I'm ever making, that's the kind of trouble that I'm drawn to, like shaking up the script because it was written by a select few. And that's what is like naughty to me, is to make the space for....new writing.

That's comedian, organizer, actor and activist Ilana Glazer. With her standup — and the hit series she co-created called "Broad City" — she is literally layering in activism at its finest.

### **Archival: Broad City**

*Ilana: Walk with me. So, She Work uses the urban landscape for a fast-paced workspace with no boundaries.*

*Abbi: So correct me if I'm wrong, people are paying you to use the free public charging stations?*

*Ilana: So what! All of the great male entrepreneurs do it, okay? They take something that already exists, claim it was their idea, throw in some fancy furniture, and charge double for it... [fade down]*

**Meghan:** Some of the ways that your work is described, it's this feminism that's sort of tucked under the layers. And there's something about that that's incredible. And at the same time, you know, like I say it and you'll start saying it too, as your little one gets older. But you could do it with politics: hide the vegetables. So you don't realize the nutritional value that's tucked in that meal; Hide the vegetables for your kids. Thankfully, my kids love vegetables, but it's the same idea like and at the flip side why would we have to have the feminism layered in?

**Ilana:** I was just thinking about this! I just bought these like puffs that have hidden vegetables and I don't like the idea of tricking our children. Everybody, you know, all these like parenting things of tricking our children. I remember one like lifestyle brand years ago, brownies with hidden spinach. But then you just said, thank God my kids love vegetables.

I'm just like, but they are good for you and they are delicious. And then once you finish them, you can have chocolate or whatever. But it's like actually, don't hide the vegetables!

**Meghan:** It's not a zero sum game! Why do you have to hide it!

**Ilana:** No, they're delicious!

MEGHAN: At this point in her career, Ilana, admittedly, *doesn't* hide the vegetables. Outside of her comedic work, Ilana helps run Generator Collective – which is a non-profit targeted toward Gen Z and Millennials, which seeks to humanize policy through personal storytelling, mostly on social media. This group was started in 2016. And through it, she helps galvanize her audience with calls to action, live shows, and resources...

For Ilana, it's *all* about civic engagement, getting people to *care* – because that's what *she* is passionate about. Down to her very core...

**Ilana:** I think I'm personally past the point of like messaging and making sure the message is right because I'm just like, I live it, you know what I mean? Like my politics, my body, my gender, my sexuality — I'm living it so I don't have to pointedly do it, you know, just being it is the message.

To live the message. I've never actually heard it put in those terms. But when Ilana said it, it clicked for me — that, to me, is audacious. Because in its truest definition, it's about being bold. And it's about being brave. Just like my next guests.

=====

**INTRO**

=====

<< INTRO THEME BEGINS >>

MEGHAN: I'm Meghan. And this is ARCHETYPES – my podcast about the labels and tropes that try to hold women back.

And for today's episode, I'm talking with two women who know first hand the change, power, and consequences that come with standing up and using your voice.

**Jameela:** The 12 year old me would have wanted the 30 year old me to do something for the next generation of 12 year olds. And so that's my motivation.

MEGHAN: Actor and activist, Jameela Jamil! And...

**Shohreh:** I was hoping that one day the people of Iran would be as free as the people in the U.K. or the U.S. But I never thought that it would start like this.

MEGHAN: Iranian-American actor and activist, Shohreh Aghdashloo, in a very timely conversation.

So much to learn here, and so much to feel. Stay with me.

=====

**ACT 1**

=====

**Jameela:** You all right, babe? Hello, how are you? Ello? \*laughter\*

**Meghan:** Hello, my friend. How are you doing?

**Jameela:** How's things? Good?

**Meghan:** Oh, my God.

**Jameela:** How have you been?

**Meghan:** Good, here...-I mean, I haven't seen you in a year. Maybe now. We've seen each other twice ever? Three times ever?

**Jameela:** Twice ever.

MEGHAN: That is the one and only Jameela Jamil – an actor, an activist... and a friend, who – as you can hear in her voice – is so refreshing and a very bright spot in this world.

She's starred in some very funny and popular TV series – recently playing supervillain — and businesswoman — Titania on the Marvel series *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law*.

### **Archival: She-Hulk**

**Jameela:** "First of all - sham? Why don't you try telling that to the thousands of testimonials from my fans who have had nothing but amazing results with my exclusive line of She-Hulk foot exfoliants. Which, I just so happen to have a little sample of and offer into evidence. Thank you!"

MEGHAN: And before that... you might remember Jameela from a little show called *The Good Place* – and by little I mean huge! The show was amazing. She played relentless name-dropper Tehani Al-Jamil...

### **Archival: The Good Place**

"You know I haven't been this upset since my good friend Taylor was rudely upstaged by my other friend Kanye who was defending my best friend Beyonce"

MEGHAN: But when it comes to Jameela's life off-screen, for some years now, *activism* has played a starring role. And she's been inspired to get active by her own life experiences – like her struggle with anorexia. In 2018, after gaining international fame on *The Good Place*, Jameela created "I Weigh."

### **Archival: I Weigh**

*Jameela: I wish that I hadn't told myself when I was younger that my entire worth as a human being depended on the number on a weighing scale...*

MEGHAN: At first, it was an Instagram account, focused around body positivity. But now, it's a huge multi-platform community and movement, which seeks to use storytelling to mobilize people to action across a variety of issues – from climate change to mental health to the representation of marginalized groups.

So I wanted to understand how Jameela gets inspired – how she stays inspired – and courageously uses her voice and platform, so we started with the inception of I Weigh...

**Jameela:** So I Weigh started as an accident because I joined Instagram in I think 2016 or something because I had to promote a new show I was on called *The Good Place*...

**Meghan:** Which was a huge success and really catapulted you in to stardom there. We binge watched it, we loved it.

**Jameela:** Yup and my... my character Tahani insists that she introduced you and Harry. Of course. Oh, my God. That's right. Yeah.

**Jameela:** So I was on Instagram, and I kept on seeing these posts that were just on the explore page, clearly directed at me because I'm a woman of a certain age and it was just female celebrities with numbers written across their body. And when I would click on their pictures, the number wasn't how many awards they'd won, or I don't know how much their net worth is, which is something that we see a lot with men. It was how much they weigh. And then once I clicked on one because of the algorithm, then I sort of being bombarded, oh, dozens of these pictures of famous, powerful women, women who'd broken records, women who started empires, you know, a group photograph of the Kardashians with just their weight written across their bodies. And I was like, When would you ever see a picture of any men? Never mind a group of businessmen, because they are business women, whatever anyone might think of them, they're an empire. They've - no one's ever done what they've done before. And so you'd never see a picture of a group of men and their weight written across their bodies, unless maybe they were, I don't know, bloody bodybuilders or UFC champions, but you would never see professionals in another arena having their weight written across their bodies.

And so I was like, I can't believe 20 years after I started having anorexia that this is still the literal message that people are being given. Have we not advanced at all in two decades? And so I just posted in a moment of premenstrual rage, well I weigh my orgasms and I weigh my relationship with my boyfriend, and I weigh, you know, my mistakes and my, you know, victories, I weigh the sum of all my parts. And it just must have struck a note with so many people because I was bombarded with thousands of posts in response with women mostly around the world, but people of all genders telling me what they weigh in the same format. And so I start an Instagram account. I thought it would be a very short lived phase and it kind of went viral and stayed fairly viral for about three years. So we had no choice but to take it and run with it and use it to change global policy on Instagram and Facebook around diet culture and Photoshop.

And, you know, we're we worked with them to stop selling diet products to kids under the age of 18. We worked with members of government about trying to find ways to legislate to protect children from diet culture and from diet products because they're incredibly dangerous and I mean, we have made such a huge noise about diet culture that at the beginning of 2018, it was very mainstream for celebrities to sell detox and diet products. And now you almost never see that happening because I think people are so afraid that I'm going to come after them. But we made it uncool. We made this thing that was being normalized, hugely stigmatized and hugely uncool. And so the movement has turned from being about eating disorders to not being about mental health as a whole. And we have a podcast and we have a documentary coming out on Snapchat about mental health, and we create content for mental health, about mental health, and also about advocacy.

**Meghan:** It's so incredible to just hear that story. And all of the things the organization and you have accomplished. And, if I think about where you come from, the experiences and the environment that you came up in — I know about that but let's set the table for those that don't. So you grew up in London, can you paint the picture for whoever isn't as familiar with your background? And obviously we've talked about some of that and where you got your start, but it is a very strong personality that you have, which isn't necessarily a given. Knowing the environment that you grew up in and how you got your start, can you sort of explain what your childhood was like and if this was always something, if it was always an undercurrent in your personality to be clear and strong willed or if not, where you found that voice.

**Jameela:** I had a tricky childhood surrounded by a lot of mental illness and a lot of sickness. And I, at a very, very, very young age, like single digit age, became a kind of carer figure for a lot of those adults who were struggling so much. And so I grew up very, very fast due to that reason, alongside other things I went through as a kid and I very much so intended to work in the kind of care industry being that as a doctor or a nurse or something like that,

And so I never planned on any of this. I never planned to be a face of anything or a leader of a movement. And it's not something I really wanted because as much as the glory might be yours, so is every single failure, every single hiccup, and so the idea that, like, this would be something that someone like me would choose is hilarious to me. But when the opportunity presented itself to me. To take the reins and use my platform to start speaking up about things that were tremendous injustices. I just. I went with it and I had no idea how it would go, but I just knew that I suffered so much as a child, you know, for so many reasons. But I was such a victim of misogyny. I was a victim of diet culture. I was hugely anorexic, very depressed, very anxious, very mentally ill. And the 12 year old me would have wanted the 30 year old me to do something for the next generation of 12 year olds. And so that's my motivation.

## MUSIC IN

MEGHAN: It is a bold move for someone like Jameela to step out on the public stage, to be so vulnerable -- and to use her platform for the benefit of others. And as you can imagine, this hasn't come without its detractors.

People have picked apart her words, they've accused her of lying about all kinds of things, I mean even her own health history — and even if there's absolutely nothing behind it, claims like that can take on a life of their own on social media. She's no stranger to this. And she also acknowledges where she may have stepped in at the wrong moment. She's been attacked for speaking up on important issues when she wasn't deemed to be the right person to be speaking up.

Here's her thoughts on that.

## MUSIC OUT

**Jameela:** I think I've made some mistakes in the last few years where and I think this is a very classically, feminine stereotype. But, you know, when someone tells me I should help something or do something and, and help others, I naturally, of course, feel like I absolutely have to and I have an obligation. But when I started speaking out about diet culture and about mental health and about, you know, feminism and misogyny, suddenly people, you know, all over the Internet were like, why aren't you talking about this? This is happening in this country. This is happening over here. This is happening in this part of the law. And I wasn't experienced enough to talk on those subjects, but I felt this like feeling of like I have to help everyone. I have to just give out all my resources. It's fine to spread myself too thin. And I then would make mistakes, you know, that ended up causing more harm than good sometimes. And I ended up taking up space in inappropriate places. So I have learned to pull myself back in and just go, What do you actually know what you're talking about? Why don't we just start there? And I'm not saying anyone has to be perfect in their knowledge or understanding of something before they try and scrap in and fight. But if you're going to, if your voice is going to be elevated above others, people who are more experienced than you, then you better be ready.

**Meghan:** To do your homework. Done a little. Done your homework. Yes.

**Jameela:** Yeah. And unfortunately, when I speak, my voice can often be elevated above others in a way that I can't really control. So I have learned to be more careful in the areas in which I speak. There are still a lot of areas in which I care. You know, so much going on in the world. I think it's happening to Iran, it's happening to trans women. Everything is happening to reproductive rights. But there are certain areas where if I've experienced something personally and I have, I can back that up with those credentials. That's the place I'm going to fight the hardest because I know I can be the most effective. So places like reproductive rights, places like eating disorder culture, places like mental health, places like feminism. I can hold my own in those spaces and I defer — I'm very deferential now to other experts outside of my, you know, remit of understanding and experience.

**Meghan:** What does your partner think of all of this?

**Jameela:** I mean, he just likes that I am completely myself. And I think he really enjoys the fact that I'm not repressed in any way, you know, and therefore, I don't have anywhere that I need to kind of like let off that steam or hold in any toxicity. I get everything off my chest, to you know mixed results. He's incredibly supportive of me. And he he's been a big encourager of me to learn how to, you know, fight back and speak my mind and understand my worth. And he's just a great ally. He's a great, he's just a great source of strength and comfort and someone who can take my phone away cause he's six foot seven. I can't reach it when he's holding it up. You know, if I need my phone to be taken away, he's there to.... you know, he understands me, and he's just an incredible human, an incredible friend. And and I don't think I could have withstood all of this without him. And I know you have a very similar dynamic with Harry. And actually, when the four of us met that one time, yeah, it was a, it was a really sweet dynamic, with two very like sort of similar relationships. And it was very nice for me to see that you have that in your home. Yes. Because you need it. Because it's just it's an unfathomable

amount of s\*\*\* that you take Meghan. And I can't believe it. And I and I fought back on your behalf years before I'd ever met you, because I was so outraged by a so outraged with the twisting of this very normal, very kind, very civilized woman. That demonization just shows how afraid they are of you. And I'm sure maybe you can't keep this in or whatever, but. But the treatment of you and I'm so sorry you've had to withstand it. It has re highlighted for us the intense and unkindness and, and bigotry and misogyny of our media and I. And I, I think and I hope and I feel faith that the tides are changing because so many of us are fighting back.

**Meghan:** Well, thank you for fighting back. When all of that criticism can feel really attacking or really uncomfortable or scary, is there ever that moment where you go? No. I just can't put myself in this position anymore. It's not. It's not good for me, even if it's good for the greater good.

**Jameela:** Yeah. I think I've been through quite a lot of smear campaigns in the past and I when it got too much one time where it became like really gratuitous and I saw how much the public were enjoying joining in on it, I felt so exhausted and kind of like everything just felt very hopeless and pointless. And I saw such an ugly side of society that it made me kind of want to tap out. And so I felt very, very, very suicidal a few years ago because of it. Because a lot to take on, it's a lot of voices. And and I'm okay with being criticized for what I've done wrong, but I'm absolutely not okay with being lied about and having all of my words twisted, and doing interviews for publications and broadsheets and having those take my words completely out of context and sometimes reconstructs new sentences out of my full paragraphs.

And that just felt so. I just felt so. Oh, God. It just felt so unwinnable. It felt so unsurvivable at times. And. I kind of had this epiphany that I've spoken to you about before, which is that, oh, God, this is exactly what they want.

## **MUSIC IN**

The reason they go after powerful women who, you know, live very public lives is because they're trying to make an example out of us. Right. They're just using us to send out a flare and a warning to other women who might get the wrong idea that they, too, should use their voice and speak up and fight back and say no. They want to make an example out of us, because if they can destroy us or aid us in destroying ourselves, then they can successfully stop anyone else from getting too encouraged.

## **MUSIC FADE OUT BY HERE**

And so when that hit me and I realized how much they would win if I took my own life or if I backed down or if I backed off, that re- kind of created this surge of new energy. Or I was like, No, I literally now have to keep going. Now I have a duty to fight back and to expose this lineage of how we destroy powerful and opinionated women. And I made it my business because I feel like a lot of women cancel themselves. A lot of women retreat when they get piled on to. And that's completely fair and understandable. But they, they start to be like, oh, god, no one likes



me. I should be quiet. Oh, God, no one likes me. I should go away. You know, I won't take that job because I don't want to be too public facing that. I mean, people don't like me, I have to stay small. I have to go away because we're taught that the only thing important in our lives is that we all, we serve others and that we are liked and we are likable. And men just don't have to contend with this. Men are given space for redemption. I've said this before, but, you know, we can't give women the benefit of the doubt because we've spent it already on men.

**Meghan:** Mm. Interesting.

**Jameela:** Everything is women's responsibility. Everything is women's fault. I mean, for f\*\*\*k's sake, there are so many—

**Meghan:** No credit and all the blame.

**Jameela:** Yeah, no credit. All the blame, you know, and and there's a theory that the reason that we treat the earth like such s\*\*\* is because we consider it Mother Earth. Mother Nature. Like, if we considered it the authoritative patriarch figure, would we be drilling it? But it's, it's something so poetic about the way that we just drill into the earth. We take our resources. We take our resources. And we expect her to never fight back and—

**Meghan:** To keep giving.

**Jameela:** And to give and give and give and take tolerate endless abuse and endless withdrawals, withdrawals, withdrawals with not enough deposits, exactly how we treat women. That's something so—

**Meghan:** OK and it really — it connects back to the heart of this, really the whole series — all the archetypes, all the stereotypes we're examining. The way women are typecast. And I'm wondering, just hearing you talk about all of this, the culture of being an activist at the moment, a celebrity who raises your voice, and how crucial social media is to that effort in today's day and age — and if, for example, I mean you tell me, if you'd been doing this kind of activism in the 70s or in the 80s, in the pre-social media era... do you think, in some ways, it would have been easier than it is now? Or would the pros and cons have been different given the landscape? What do you think it is?

**Jameela:** No. I mean, as extraordinary as the movement and progress was back then, and however toxic social media is now, we would never have seen the speed of the changes that we have seen in so many movements without it because of its connectivity and and the speed with which we can mobilize and organize. It also means that our opposition can mobilize and organize against us. But I think most fundamentally, I'm extremely grateful to have taken this challenge on in a time where we have so much connectivity and, you know, seeing how much happened with Black Lives Matter throughout the pandemic, I think is a sign of how extraordinary social media is. So, yes, and no. But ultimately, I think I would still rather have done it now.

**Meghan:** You feel the good outweighs the bad.

**Jameela:** Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And also, you know, as much as you can feel the vitriol, you also get to feel so much support. I get so much more love than I get hate online. Yeah. And as so, I'm very grateful for the online community that I have.

## MUSIC IN

A lot of these things, you know, you were talking about these stereotypes, these tools of shame.

There are so many different ways in which shame, like body shame, shame about your age a completely natural thing that happens to everyone. Shame about the way that you speak or the way that you, you know, move or the way that you work. All these things are to silence us, right? To exhaust us. We're given all this extra homework of all these levels of perfection to meet before we can be accepted. All of it is built specifically and like, it's kind of it's expertly planned to make us too fatigued to fight back for our rights, it's hard to fight for equality when you're f\*\*\*ing starving, isn't it? It's hard to fight for equality when you're on a weight loss drug that's destroying your internal organs. It's hard to fight for equality when you're being forced to give birth to a baby that you didn't want and aren't ready for. You know, it's it's hard to fight for equality when you are shaming yourself.

## MUSIC FADE OUT BY HERE

They teach us the words of shame, and then we use those words on ourselves. They've taught us how to abuse ourselves with their rhetoric. It's extraordinary. I mean, it's a masterpiece of control. And the reason it's important to point this out is because when I see diet culture, when I see triggering media about something to do with misogyny or patriarchy or, you know, bigotry, like I realize how perfectly designed it is to subdue me. And then that ignites my rage and, and fuels my energy more. So as long as you think about the fact that this isn't a coincidence, this isn't an accident,

**Meghan:** It's by design.

**Jameela:** Yeah, this is by design. It is a very well-oiled machine. Then it inspires you to fight back and it kind of like demystifies it. You know, it's it's hard to feel like you can really see misogyny. It's just sort of in the air. It's like a vapor. But I think when you can actually start to, like, recognize the patterns, it suddenly becomes less of a boogeyman and it becomes something that you can actually tangibly see and therefore organize with each other to deconstruct. And that's what I'm trying to do and build.

**Meghan:** Well and you've achieved so much of that. And I wonder if when you look back and even as you were listing the things and changes and advancements you were able to do in

social media platforms and with policy. What was it like when you really started to see these changes happening?

**Jameela:** It's very meaningful for me when I see changes happening. You know, I approach a lot of my advocacy as a kind of puzzle that I want to fix. You know, injustice makes me feel physically sick because it doesn't make sense. It's not fair. And and so when I see things start to change and shift, and when I read letters from from children or mothers or scared dads, you know, about how the work of I Weigh, you know, my company or my work or my words have affirmed them or helped them or taught them how to believe in themselves again or help them start eating again after years of starving themselves. It's incredibly encouraging. And it's it's the only thing that keeps me going, you know, because this is this is difficult work and it's it's draining work and when you have this many people trying to discredit you all the time. But I can see that it's working and I can see that we're helping people. And that's really my only drive, like when it comes to like the accolades or the list for I'm on top of this, that and the other awards. It doesn't really mean anything to me because it's, I think it's Georgia O'Keeffe, right? And the insults go down the same drain.

**Meghan:** You're exactly right, its Georgia O'Keefe, she said I've already settled it for myself. So flattery and criticism go down the same drain and I'm quite free.

**Jameela:** Yeah, that's it. That's. That's exactly it. And so I, I think that I, that I resonate a lot with that because it's important to not have the praise mean anything to you otherwise then the insults mean something to you. You know, I have to live by my own standard of constantly challenging myself to be better every day than I was yesterday. But I'm not here to live up to anyone's standards. I'm not here to be believed. I'm not here to be understood, and I'm not here to be liked. And that is vital in my rebellion.

**Meghan:** What are you here to be?

**Jameela:** I'm here to be me! I'm here to be me. That is my right. I am not here to fit in with a uniform design of what women are supposed to be like. Even the fact that we're given trends for our bodies, not even just the way that we dress or we're supposed to wear our hair, but our body shape is considered a f\*\*\*ing trend. Like, this is ridiculous. I am not a trend. I am a human being. And so I am here to be me, unapologetically, warts and all. And if you don't like it, you can just f\*\*\* off. It's okay. I don't have to fit into your uniform of what it is that you have decided a woman is supposed to be. We are individuals with individual experiences, individual trauma, individual ideas and dreams. And that's what makes us so special and so f\*\*\*ing powerful. And that's why so many people want to destroy us.

**Jameela:** I also just want to thank you in a way that, you know, I probably didn't get to at the time. But during some of my hardest moments where I'm being the most maligned and harmed by the media and sometimes also by the public. You have been such a sobering voice of unwavering support to me. And people don't know that you frequently reach out to women who are having a very, very hard time privately. You reach out to us.

You don't do it publicly. You don't come to get any glory. But you privately reach out to us in our most lonely and desperate moments. And we need more of that in the world. And so I just I appreciate you and thank you for that, because those are some hairy moments and I needed that guidance. So, thanks. Thanks mate.

**Meghan:** Yes, absolutely.

## MUSIC IN

MEGHAN: Coming up, we've got a conversation with the Iranian-American actor and activist, Shohreh Aghdashloo.... Who brings us inside the world of the protests happening now in Iran...

**Shohreh:** If my generation, had the world's support, lovingly looking at what is going on in Iran and trying to help out as much as possible, I would have not left Baharestan Square. I would have had some take some painkillers and would go back to the square and—

**Meghan:** Wow.

**Shohreh:** Until... We would be able to bring back democracy to Iran.

MEGHAN: This conversation — it was really special. I don't want you to miss it. More after the break.

=====

## ACT 2

=====

MEGHAN: Welcome back.

Before we get into my conversation with Shohreh, I first wanted to take a detour back into history. Because women pushing against the powers that try to hold them back this isn't new, in fact women have been the force behind revolutions and changes for generations.

So we called up Lisa Tetrault, an associate professor of history who specializes in gender, race and American democracy at Carnegie Mellon University. We thought she might be able to help bring us all up to speed.

**Tetrault:** With the process of democratization that was kicked off by the French Revolution and the American Revolution, with that has come a broader global movement for democracy and for rights within democracies, for overthrowing dictatorial powers. And that kind of rights movement has always simultaneously come with women arguing that we, too, should be part of this rights revolution.

But at the same time that there was a voting rights movement, there were also movements by working class women for occupational safety, for equal wages, for

protections. There were also lots of movements for bodily autonomy in the middle 19th century as when birth control and abortion both get criminalized. And there are lots of people who argue that bodily autonomy is far more important than voting. So the feminist movement is so many things.

And then if you look inside other rights movements, you also see feminist activism. So inside the black church, there are lots of people who are arguing for women's rights to be preachers, inside civil rights movements, and inside indigenous movements and inside Chicano movements.

MEGHAN: Women and their activism have been critical to so many social movements throughout the decades. And we've been lucky to have brilliant leaders lighting up the path... like Angela Davis during the Black Power movement of the 60's...

#### **Archival: Angela Davis**

*Angela Davis: Education should not mold the mind according to a prefabricated architectural plan, it should rather liberate the mind. It should liberate the mind from established definitions and plans.*

MEGHAN: Or my friend and mentor, the ever-inspiring Gloria Steinem during the Women's Liberation movement of the late 60s and 70s...

#### **Archival: Gloria Steinem**

*Gloria Steinem: Now, thanks to the spirit of equality in the air, and the work of my more farsighted sisters I no longer accept society's judgment that my group is second class...*

MEGHAN: I think, too, of women like Tarana Burke, who pioneered the #MeToo movement... and Tamika Mallory, who helped to organize the 2017 Women's March...

#### **Archival: Tamika Mallory at Women's March**

*We have a chance, brothers and sisters, to get this thing right. We can do it if women rise up and take this nation back!*

MEGHAN: Now despite *all* the effort it takes to change culture and societal norms – and even when it feels like “success” is a Herculean task, a very, very long game – women keep coming back, to stand up for what they believe in. And in many ways as we picked apart with Lisa Tetrault, *maybe* this is kinda baked in to who women are...

**Tetrault:** I think too, maybe part of the reason that, women generally have been the ones who've supported social movements is that the more you deviate from the mythical norm that Audre Lorde outlines, you know, that kind of white male, able bodied, straight, middle class fit. The more you deviate from that, the more you're going to hurt. And so, as you deviate with sexuality or as you deviate with race or as you deviate gender, women in some ways have always had another degree of deviation from the men around them. And so in some ways have carried the burden because they know an extra layer of oppression than maybe the man that they're fighting alongside.

MEGHAN: And does this ever ring true for my next guest.

**Shohreh:** Hello, hello, hello!

**Meghan:** Hello, Hello! I am so genuinely so grateful that you're joining me on this. I'm a huge fan of your work, obviously on screen, but also off screen and your activism.

**Shohreh:** Thank you so much, and ever since I've gotten to know you I've always admired you for your courage, your love for humanity.

**Meghan:** Thank you!

MEGHAN: Shohreh Aghdashloo is one fierce woman – an actor and activist, who burns with so much passion, so much depth. And I just have to say what so many have already said before me, on top of all that, she does just have the most soothing voice. I can't get enough of it.

And you may recognize that voice from movies and TV shows – like *24* – where she played Dina Araz:

#### **Archival: 24**

*Jack: Do you recognize this man?*

*Dina: No.*

*Jack: He's connected to Marwan.*

*Dina: I don't know him. I already told the other agent. Marwan doesn't permit communication between cells.*

MEGHAN: Or maybe you heard her voicing Sheriff Grayson on animated steampunk drama *Arcane*.

#### **Archival: Arcane**

*Grayson: You don't seem to grasp how serious this is, if I don't put someone behind bars tonight we both know how that will go...*

MEGHAN: But before these roles put her on the world stage, Shohreh was a leading lady in her home country of Iran. She made her big screen debut in 1976, in the Iranian film *Chess of the Wind*, where she played a soft spoken handmaiden.

### **Archival: Chess of the Wind**

*Lady's Maid: Miss, if I may say, you shouldn't believe everything he says.  
Shaban said that we should watch that Ramazan.*

MEGHAN: Now this role, it *should* have – or I guess we could say *could* have – been her big break... but the film – with its strong female leads, and depictions of homosexuality – was, really controversial at this time in Iran. It only screened *two times* there... and eventually, was banned.

Now that's because – this was all happening in the late 70s, in the lead-up to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which was a massive shift in the politics and makeup of the country. In January of 1979, after years of struggles, the country's Western-backed government, it was overthrown, and it was soon replaced by an Islamic Republic under the rule of Ayatollah Khomeini.

### **News Archival**

*The end of Iran's monarchy came early today when Khomeini's followers took control of the palace of the Shah.*

MEGHAN: So in a matter of a few years, Iran changed so dramatically – from a relatively free society into one governed by religious extremism.

And at this time, Shohreh — she was in her late 20s — she could hardly believe what was happening. Especially all the new restrictions being placed on women's freedom. Like the requirement to wear a *hijab*, or head covering in public. And the fact that, in large part, women lost the right to file for divorce; lost custody rights to their children. This was all so new, and so overwhelming. And girls as young as *nine years old* were suddenly eligible for marriage.

*Now this was not* the Iran that Shohreh grew up in...

**Shohreh:** I was born into a very young family. My mother was 20. My father was 22 years old. So you can imagine the amount of love I was receiving from both of them. They told me that they used to put me in the middle of them on the bed and kept kissing me.

**Meghan:** Oh!

**Shohreh:** So I was born into a loving family and a loving country. Iran was under huge progress under the Shah's reign. We had a great healthy relationship with our neighboring countries, European countries, the United States, to the point that we called Tehran the Paris in the Middle East.

**Shohreh:** The life was magical. And I had little idea of what activism meant in general. And all of a sudden the whole world was toppled on their head. Overnight, a regime came to turn the clock back for almost a thousand years, if not more. And the only way I can describe it for the Western listeners, those who are not familiar with what happened, what took place in Iran, is to compare it with one of my favorite TV series of all time, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

### **Archival: The Handmaid's Tale**

*I had another name, but it's forbidden now. So many things are forbidden now.*

**Shohreh:** And I'm dying to ask Miss Margaret Atwood, the writer, if she was tipped by anyone from Iran. She started writing this book around 1979, which is the same year a couple of months later after the revolution of Iran.

MEGHAN: Now we can help with that a little – because in interviews, Margaret Atwood – who wrote the novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and was a producer on the TV adaptation, she has cited the Islamic Revolution in Iran as one of the sources of inspiration for the book... in addition to the rise of the Religious Right in the US, the Salem Witch Trials, and more. Her novel was originally published in 1985... and for those who aren't as familiar, it's set in a future where a totalitarian theocracy overthrows the U.S. government, leaving women without rights or autonomy and seen as property of the state.

So, for Shohreh – this moment in 1979 during the revolution this felt like her new reality being formed. And this in many ways is where the fighting spirit in her began to take hold...

**Meghan:** How old were you when all of that was happening?

**Shohreh:** 26.

**Meghan:** So you're in your mid-twenties. This all starts to happen. Do you remember the first day that you felt something inside of you at that age? You said, I have to push back against this?

**Shohreh:** It all started with the very first and the last pro democracy demonstration in Iran. Thousands of Iranians, thousands of them went to this demonstration.

### **News Archival** (*Crowd chanting*)

*Announcer: Yesterday's demonstration was the nearest thing to an anti-Khomeini rally yet.*

(*Crowd chanting*)



**Shohreh:** I did, too, with a dear friend of mine, a childhood friend. His name was Mahdi. And as soon as we joined the demonstrators, we noticed that there were religious fundamentalists on the pavements. We were in the middle of the street walking, but they were also with us on the pavements and shouting, and cursing us for joining this demonstration.

**Archival: Protests**  
(*Crowd chanting*)

*Crowd: Allahu Akbar! Bye, bye Shah! Bye, bye Shah!*

**Shohreh:** And soon as we got to the square, people were so close to each other, we were just like sardines, you know? And the fanatics were still cursing and cussing us. They were moving with us on the pavements. Now we are in the square. And the Prime Minister started his speech with a poem by Hafiz, world renowned poet Hafiz. They didn't let him finish. Somebody shouted, "He means Shah, the rotten Shah!" And then all of a sudden I looked at the sky and the sky was filled with stones, parts of bricks, broken bricks.

**Meghan:** Oh my goodness!

**Shohreh:** They were stoning us. Literally stoning us.

I turned around and a brick hit my forehead. My friend Mahdi took me to the nearest ambulance. He took me to one and I received 11 stitches. I was numb. I didn't feel anything. And that the nurse who was doing the stitches for me, her eyes were filled with tears. And all she said was, *I can't believe this. I cannot believe this. It could have killed you if it had hit the right place.*

**MUSIC IN**

**Shohreh:** And she gave me a couple of painkillers, and I left, went home, straight home, and hugged my beloved dog Pasha, and I started crying and talking to Pasha and telling him 'Pasha, I need to leave. Whatever is happening to us seems far bigger, larger than my strength or my stamina, and there's nothing we can do. Therefore, I need to leave.'

**Shohreh:** I was newly married, just a couple of years, my first husband. And one day he came in and he saw me sitting in the dark crying and he said, "I don't want to see you this way. I'm an intellectual, I'm not going to keep you here by force. If you feel like leaving, by all means. I will help you to get out." And God bless him. Because if he had not done so, I would have never been able to achieve what I have achieved for the last 43 years.

**MUSIC OUT**

MEGHAN: That's one of the reasons she's now able to speak up and speak out about what's *still* happening in Iran – and the more recent, massive women-led protests there.

### News Archival

Amini's death after being taken into the custody of morality police last week has sparked unprecedented protests. Calls for accountability for her death have turned into cries for freedoms, this generation of Iranians has never known...

MEGHAN: On September 13th of this year, 22-year-old Mahsa Amini was detained by the Guidance Patrol, also known as the "morality police" in Tehran. She was held for, supposedly, violating Iran's hijab laws. And a few days later, on September 16, while still in custody, she died. Iranian security officials say she died of a heart attack. But eyewitnesses claim that after being detained, she was beaten by the police.

*(Crowd chanting Mahsa Amini)*

MEGHAN: Her death has sparked a wave of protests that have continued across Iran and around the world....

*Protestor: I'm cutting my hair because many of my sister in Iran they're going to die. Maybe tomorrow because of hijab and I don't want it and I hate it and I don't want to follow this terrorist and dictator regime.*

MEGHAN: And these protests are fueled, in large part, by on-the-ground activists – who are capturing their efforts on social media, drawing the world's attention into their corner of the globe. And most of these activists — they're women.

*Protestor: Many people are getting killed in the middle of the streets in Iran. And there is no support; they are defenseless they are voiceless.*

MEGHAN: And all of this momentum has some people – including Shohreh – hoping that maybe, just maybe, this is a tipping point for Iran and for women.

**Meghan:** I guess September 16th really is when everything changed. And I think in some ways it's become emblematic to see women taking the hijab off, using it almost as a flag of sorts. But I don't know if people fully grasp what this is emblematic of in its totality, and you might be able to speak to that in a way for people to understand that it's not just a strong image and visual, but it is representative of something so much bigger. Did you ever think that you would see women standing in the middle of the town square, removing a veil and waving it?

**Shohreh:** No, honestly, not, it is beyond my belief. I was hoping that one day the people of Iran would be as free as the people in the U.K. or the U.S. But I never thought that it would start like this. And you're right, both the light at the end of the tunnel and that this is it. This is the last chance that I get to do this. That gives them the courage, the stamina, the perseverance, not to leave the battlefield.

**MUSIC IN**

When a woman put her scarf in bonfire in a religious society. The message is bold, loud and clear. Either leave me alone or kill me. When a 14 year old barehanded, not armed, stand in front of the whole army and just keeps looking into their eyes. It's her eyes talking saying that. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Killing me for asking for my basic rights? That tells me that this movement is going to grow. This movement is not gonna go into vain. This movement started ignited spontaneously, but now is coming together, bringing more and more people who agree with this movement, who believe in this movement.

**Meghan:** So the more that we keep the focal point on what is actually happening there, then people, they understand this is real and the consequences and the stakes are so incredibly high. You know, and so whatever we can do to keep a spotlight on what is happening so that all this sacrifice and all this courage isn't in vain, that this activism is applauded as opposed to seen as an act of like, oh, gosh, what are these women doing now? No, what these women are doing now is what needs to be done.

## MUSIC OUT

**Shohreh:** It has to win. Let's put it this way. It has to win. With millions of Iranians rising against tyranny. It has to win.

### Clip of Current Protest Chants

*Protestors: Our disgrace is our incompetent leader!*

**Shohreh:** The truth of the matter is that it wasn't just the death of a 22 year old Mahsa Amini, in the hands of the morality police. But it's 43 years of dictatorship, religious tyranny, misogyny, child abuse, embezzlement from the Iranian people's wealth.

**Meghan:** I'm really struck by the similarities in these stories – because of how old *you* were when you protested in '79, and how old these women are who are protesting today. Because when you look back at the median age or look at it now, the median age of some of these protestors in Iran, to my understanding, it's 15 years old...

**Shohreh:** Teeangers.

**Meghan:** Some of these girls are so young and yet so fearless, so brave and so clear on what they want to speak up about. What does that bring up for you and what would you say you feel and what you're witnessing now versus what you experienced then? How do you think they're different and how do you think they feel the same?

**Shohreh:** I would say the only difference is the fact that this generation is the Internet generation. This generation is not only very well educated they speak quite good English they learned it through the internet. This generation has witnessed everything that my generation had

never witnessed before. My generation was politically naive. We had no ideas of political prisoners, torture chambers. But this generation have seen it all. Either on the Internet or television or on the streets of Iran... Not only that, but also they know that the whole world is watching. My generation had no idea of how the world is going to react to what we were trying to do for Iran to bring a democracy to Iran. Therefore, we felt alone. We felt hopeless. If my generation, had the world support and lovingly looking at what is going on in Iran and trying to help out as much as possible, I would have not left Baharestan Square. I would have had some take some painkillers and would go back to the square and—

**Meghan:** Wow.

**Shohreh:** Until... We would be able to bring back democracy to Iran.

## MUSIC IN

MEGHAN: Before we go, I wanted to ask my guests three words, as you've heard throughout the series, the three words they would use to describe themselves as a young girl. We'll start with Jameela....

**Jameela:** As a young girl. Three words I would describe myself as. Caring. Mm. Lonely. And. Insecure.

**Meghan:** And the three words you would use to describe yourself as the woman that you are today?

**Jameela:** Can I just choose a loose cannon?

**Meghan:** Yes, you may.

**Jameela:** I would say. Defiant, clumsy and authentic.

**Meghan:** Hmm. Those are *great*. Jameela, thank you for being here.

MEGHAN: And I would be remiss if I didn't ask the same of Shohreh... three words that you would use to describe the young woman that you were growing up in Iran?

**Shohreh:** I would definitely say serious. I was too serious. At the age of 12 my parents had to take me to a psychologist to find out as to why I was so serious. Just to find out that nothing is wrong with being serious. This one is serious.

**Shohreh:** So I would say curious — serious, curious, and an adventurer.

**Meghan:** And today?

**Shohreh:** Definitely fun. I'm fun now, I smile a lot and I laugh a lot. Fun, understanding, and mature. I can finally call myself mature at the age of 70.

**Meghan:** At what age do you think you would have started to be able to describe yourself as mature?

**Shohreh:** Um, I would say. Past 60.

**Meghan:** Wow.

**Shohreh:** You still need time to fully grasp the meanings of everything that has surrounded you.

**Meghan:** Oh my goodness, OK so I've got another two decades to get to maturity.

**Shohreh:** Oh, my God. Don't even go there. You're too young to talk about that. So don't. Don't hurry. You'll get there.

**Meghan:** Thank you. I hope I get to meet you in person one day.

**Shohreh:** Me too. And I would love to make ghormeh sabzi for you because...

**Meghan:** Oh I love ghormeh sabzi yes please! It's one of my favorites [laughs]

**Shohreh:** Yes I heard in one of your interviews where you were referring to ghormeh sabzi.

**Meghan:** Yes! And tahdig - I love that too

**Shohreh:** I do a good job. I can't tell that I'm REALLY good at it, but I make good ghormeh sabzi.

**Meghan:** That would be such a treat. Thank you. Thank you so much for your generosity of time and your kindness.

**Shohreh:** Merci, merci.

BEAT

MEGHAN: And one final moment I wanted to share with you, before we close out this episode. She has a message – in Farsi – for the women and youth of Iran today.

**Shohreh:** (speaks in Farsi)

**Meghan:** So for those who don't speak Farsi, can you please summarize what that message was that was important for you to communicate?

**Shohreh:** What I said was, my dear friends, people of Iran, the world has heard your voice and they are supporting you lovingly and they are willing to echo your voice to the whole world. I am talking to miss beautiful Meghan Markle, and I'm so thrilled that I know that with her this talk will go all around the globe. Millions and millions of people would hear us and would know what you're doing in Iran and would support you even more.

**Meghan:** From your lips to God's ears, I hope that truly this ends up being able to resonate in a bigger way. I know one of the slogans that I keep seeing is woman, life, freedom. And I think that just really those three words, they're so powerful, especially when together woman, life, freedom.

**Shohreh:** Zen zindagi Azadi. Woman, life, freedom. The three things that Iranians have been deprived of for the last 43 years and their shouting it from the top of their lungs. Zen. Zindagi. Azadi.

### Clip of Students Chanting

*Students: Zen! Zindagi! Azadi!*

=====

### CLOSING THOUGHTS

=====

MEGHAN: To be able to have conversations like these. Felt really affirming. Empowering even. Because it reminded me that as women. We aren't alone. Even when we have the audacity to stand for something. We stand together. And I thought a lot about words that became unnecessarily charged as it pertains to women. Like feminism, for example, often treated as taboo as the F-word or the word woke? I know.... I'm saying woke. I fully realized that I am spoon feeding the clickbait. But here is why, because woke by definition means, alert to injustice in society, especially racism. Now what's loaded or wrong with that? And when you layer a woman into that seemingly anodyne definition, it becomes for many, almost disgusting. Outrageous they would say. But why? What is so scary about a woman having an opinion as strongly as a man does? And why do we sometimes cower to that? Turtle, as I often say. Go back into the safety of our own shell. As Shohreh shared her closing thoughts in Farsi, it reminded me of a message that was shared with me just a few days before my wedding by a very influential and inspiring woman. Who for her own privacy I won't share who it was with you but she said to me, *I know that your life is changing, but please don't give up your activism. Don't give up, because it means so much to women and girls.*

And I kept doing the work for women and girls because it matters. Yes. But also because she encouraged me to do so. And the collective voice of all of us telling each other that matters is perhaps the point. There's safety in numbers. But there's also strength in numbers. In the weeks since we've been putting this episode together, a lot has changed. Women's rights here in the U.S. still remain in limbo. And in just the last week in Iran, their parliament voted to impose the death penalty on all protesters in custody as a, quote, hard lesson for the rebels.

That's with nearly 15,000 people having been arrested thus far for protesting. How many of those being young girls or young women? We don't know. But their message was clear. For standing their ground. They should no longer be allowed to stand at all. Or to live. Our collective voice is our lifeline. Women who are scared into silence remain... silent. But if they know they aren't alone, if they know we're echoing their voice for the side of right. Then it's no longer noise. Then what we're making together is music.

As ever. I'm Meghan. Thanks for joining me today. Until next week.

=====

**CREDITS**

=====

Archetypes is a Spotify Original

The podcast is a co-production between Archewell Audio, Gimlet and Spotify

Meghan, The Duchess of Sussex is our Executive Producer – alongside Executive Producers Terry Wood and Catherine Cyr [SEER]

Archewell Audio's Executive Producers are Rebecca Sananès [sah-nah-NESS] and Ben Browning

Gimlet's Executive Producer is Matt Shilts. Executive Editor is Andrea B. Scott.

The show's producers are: Itxy Quintanilla (IT-see | keen-ta-NEE-ya), Kayla Lattimore (Kay-Lah | Lat tah More) and Farrah Safari with help from Noor Gill (Nur (like Lure) | Gill) and Lesley Gwam (Less-Lee | Gwa-mm, like the country)

Senior Producer is Cristina Toshiko Quinn (Cris-tee-na | Toe-shee-koe | Quinn)

Senior engineers are Haley Shaw and Catherine Anderson with help from Jack Mason and Raymond Rodriguez. Mix by Naji Ali (nah-ZHEE ah-LEE)

Music supervisor is Liz Fulton

Technical director is Zac Schmidt with help from Seth Richardson and Mark Yoshizumi (YO-shee-ZOO-mee)

Fact-checking by Naomi Barr

Booking by Rima Morris and Whitney-Gayle Benta

Spotify Studio's Executive Producers are Dawn Ostroff, Julie McNamara and Courtney Reimer (Rye-mer)

Special thanks to the entire team who helped to make this happen, including the team at Archewell, Kevin Manley, Paige Hymson, Jeff Paugh, and Katelyn Bogucki.

For more information on how you can get involved, visit [archewell.com/archetypes](https://archewell.com/archetypes).