

Bisexual and Muslim?

As the first same-sex couples get married in the UK, [Laura Hughes](#) talks to a Saudi student on what it is like to be a bisexual Muslim

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Photo credit: lewishamdreamer

Leila was 13 when she entered into a relationship with her first girlfriend. “It started when I was seven,” she tells me, “I was at a party at my Nanna’s house and there was this Syrian girl who was eleven at the time, she took me into the bathroom and started kissing me. It was the first sexual experience of my life and I remember that I liked it.”

In Saudi Arabia, homosexuality is a crime and punishable by death. For Leila, a bisexual Saudi student currently studying in the UK, it’s also an exhilarating act of defiance against the Saudi state. Women in Saudi Arabia are required to have a male guardian, and need permission to get married or divorced, travel, get a job or open a bank account. Public spaces are segregated and women aren’t even allowed to drive. But Leila tells me that behind the veil, women are increasingly taking agency over their own bodies.

Leila was 11 was when she seriously considered her sexuality, realising she liked guys, but also liked girls. “I freaked out and I told my father, he said it was normal but that I would probably change my mind. It’s something I can tell people here, but back home, you have to be careful about who you pick to tell.” When a friend of Leila’s parents caught onto their daughter’s sexuality, they threatened to take her to the police. That friend packed her bags and fled to New York, where [he/she] is forced to live in exile today.

The punishment for homosexuality varies, Leila tells me. While some might take advantage of the situation and demand sexual favours or money from you, there are those who will go straight to the police. “The police will handle it differently. One might say you need to go to therapy and another might just tell you its shameful, but they can go as far as removing you from the country and killing you. It also

depends on what you were caught doing.”



Photo credit: lewishamdreamer

Despite the driving ban in Saudi Arabia, Leila surprised her male contemporaries when she disguised her identity and, donning her brother’s helmet, won an illegal car race in the desert outside the capital. The Saudi Cleric, Sheikh Lohaidan, recently commented: “If a woman drives a car, that could have negative physiological impacts as functional and physiological medical studies show that it automatically affects the ovaries and pushes the pelvis upwards.” Leila tells me she’s been in love with cars since she was a young child, since her father taught her how to fix engines. “It was the same with my uncle’s motorbikes. I would drive it after midnight with the helmet pulled over my face, so no one could tell I was a woman. There are other women who do this.”

In 1990, 47 female intellectuals spearheaded the first concerted action against the ban and were subsequently dismissed from their profession. Since October last year, more than 100 women have gotten behind the wheel in protest and uploaded videos of themselves onto YouTube. On one occasion, Leila tells me of how she herself was arrested, “I went to jail, I got caught and I had to pay a fine. I was kept overnight at the far end of a prison cell, where there were women in cages piled on top of one another. It was very, very scary, because we could see people getting hanged. Oh God, it was scary.”

As reports come out of Jeddah on the four Saudi princesses who continue to be held under house arrest by their father, I ask Leila what she would change back home. “The education system, they focus on only educating men and I would change that. Also a lot of women want to drive back home. I’d just let everyone be as free as they can; you should be able to hold onto your religion and be free. You should be free to walk down the street and hold your girlfriend’s hand.”

In a letter to the Huffington Post, Dr Mohammad Naseem, the chairman of the Birmingham Central Mosque writes gay men and women share a common trait with murderers and paedophiles. Will it ever be accepted to be Muslim and gay? “A lot of people argue no, because our religion that tells us you are bound to go to hell if you lie with the same sex. I don’t think it will ever be legal for Saudi girls to enter into civil partnerships and have children together. I guess it all comes down to religion.”



Photo credit: solomonsmfield

Leila is engaged to an older man back home and accepts her future will be with a man. It is this allegiance to her faith, her families’ faith and their reputation back home in Saudi Arabia, that suppresses any

evident resentment. "I have a Saudi passport and so I can't marry a woman, whether she's English or Italian, I'm not allowed to. If they found out in Saudi there would be a huge problem. My family don't accept my sexuality, only my father."

While Leila's mother is keen this marriage goes ahead, her father is "very liberal" and has given her the choice. "My mother was against it at first because she was raised a certain way, and is very Saudi minded. She tells me he is perfect because he is older, financially stable and in a position to provide me with security. But my father has told me that it is my decision."

This young woman thinks it is possible to be bisexual and a Muslim, but not a lot of people would agree. According to a Gallup poll carried out in 2009, Muslims in Britain have zero tolerance towards homosexual acts. "Hopefully it will happen in Saudi Arabia, but I don't think it will. On the path that I am I accept I will be marrying a man and I'm fine about it. I'm bisexual, so its not just that I only want women.

"I was an atheist before I came here, I did not believe. I was extremely rebellious and it was only when I came to the UK that I really started to pray." Can homosexuality and Islam ever be anything but mutually exclusive concepts? "I see it another way. I see this as something I don't want, but what my body wants right now. It's what I need. I try to restrict myself from it, but its so natural to me that I just leave it. I do everything that I have to do to be a good Muslim, from praying everyday to reading the Koran and fasting. But I still make the mistake of not covering up and sleeping with girls and boys."



One comment

Syah

13 Oct '15 at 1:15 pm

Platinum LOL .anyways anything is prttey much good and if he doesnt want to wear gold try buying him white gold and see what he does lol??It usually works and u can say its not gold lol

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