

"Our Strength lies in Our Unity"
One Region. One Struggle Campaign

March 8th 2016
International Women's Day

Queer Women's Voices

from North Africa



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Bedayaa
Mesahat
Transhomos

Bedayaa Organization for LGBTQI in Nile Valley Area Egypt & Sudan
www.bedayaa.webs.com

Mesahat Foundation for Sexual & Gender Diversity (Egypt & Sudan)
www.mesahat.webs.com

The Transhomos Organization (Algeria)
www.transhomosdz.org

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Together for International Women's Day for all Women
Lesbians ... Bisexuals ... Trans* ... Heterosexuals!!!



Nada

from Egypt

I'm a transgender woman. I am one of many people that did not know what is their identity or their nature. All the time since my childhood I felt that I was different and I am a woman. I live in a very bad situation because society in Egypt practices all forms of discrimination on everyone, who is different, and not conforming with it...A woman wearing Niqab sees an unveiled woman as immoral and straight heterosexual men think of themselves as "we are healthy and perfectly right" they don't like homosexual.

Society is contradictory...most of the people who used to tell me I should repent to "Allah" and seek His forgiveness and wondered what is this transgender thing all about... they came to me in secret and asked me for sex and asked me not to disclose it to anyone...This is already a sick society.

It hurts more than anything else that I live in a fake role not mine and I'm forced each and every day to fake a silly show in my work place...at my home...on the streets. If I became myself, even for a single moment which is supposedly no one's business; I face harassment and violence. They say that I'm worthless deviant person who deserves the harassment and mocking, while their real motives are their deep down dirty masculine instincts which pop out in such a filthy way. I feel I'm prey for anyone on the streets and a target for a society that does not know the meaning of respecting people's differences, a dogmatic society that have a sole way of thinking, which he grew upon, not even ask or understand why.

All this happens periodically every day until my body became immune to it; of course all of this affects my psychological health negatively because many conflicts remain inside me. ... Conflicts from the stares of people, of their words, even at home too ... Although my parents have a high level of education but unfortunately they have zero knowledge. If I tried to discuss with them the meaning of being a transgender would make me look like an alien for them.

One day I was kidnapped by a group of young men, they took all my money and belongings, they had beaten me severely that I fainted and when I woke up I found myself in a store house. I was being ridiculed, sexually harassed and beaten very violently. Finally I was able to escape as they felt that I was about to die between their hands, so they put me in a car and throw me on the highway.



I faced hard times and didn't get any justice because the police closed the case after they suspected that am different and as a result they told me directly "Do you like us to talk about other sensitive issues that could get you into trouble or would you prefer to close this case?", so I gave up my rights. I'm lucky because I knew how to escape but many others like me could have been murdered. How many trans women have been in this situation and got killed and no one heard about it?

I wish I could live in a society that respect people's differences, even if only to a small extent ... I used to tell myself that my lifeline is doctors who are supposed to understand cases of transgenders; but in reality I see that quite different.

There are a very large percentage of doctors who do not understand the issue of transgenderism and they are the people who practice the most and in all forms of discrimination against trans* people and against anyone who is different because they stand at a certain point imposed on them by society and they cannot help.... Doctors, who help trans people with their surgeries usually get in trouble from the Syndicate and they would be expelled from work and exposed to scandals ... Any doctor would say to himself/herself why would I bring trouble to myself and for that he/she stops at a certain point and say I cannot help beyond that, and consequently trans* people are left stranded and feel lost because they cannot complete the rest of their transitioning process.

I dream to find my inner peace, I dream that I could wake up one day and walk in the street like anyone else, rather than walking in shame and looking at the ground to avoid staring of people, their offensive words and their sexual harassment such as grabbing and touching my body. All this is a great psychological pressure because here I am being asked to sacrifice my wellbeing and psychological health and everything in order to barely survive. I wished that one day I would undergo the surgery and become a woman, I refuse because I am scared.... from the society, my family, our neighbors, the police, and the government.... etc. If I were in another country or in another society I would not have hesitated at all.

I dream to live in a country that respects people's diversity.... I hope the coming new generations, who have a similar situation like mine, do not go through the same experience. Overall, the situation is getting worse every day because society crushes on people's lives.

I want to tell every transwoman stand for your dreams until the last breath ... and be proud of yourself and do not let anyone break you.

Mariam

from Egypt

I am a lesbian woman from Egypt. Currently I live in a refugees' camp in Europe after applying for asylum. I was oppressed and mistreated by my family, society, and the police. My family tried to force me to get married and after several rejections, they wanted to know why, so they took me to a doctor to know if I am virgin. These times were really hard for me; it feels so bad when people are close to you; don't respect your privacy.

Until now, I can't forget that incident ever and what made things even worse is that I ran away from home, I couldn't find any place to stay in and I couldn't even finish my education.

One of the people in my neighborhood threatened me with his gun and I was kidnapped because for them I was doing pervert and sinful acts. I never walked freely on the streets, even when I went out with my friends sitting on a café, as an example, we were afraid that someone might call the police, if we looked suspicious. It actually happened one time; an owner of a café where we were sitting called the military police to report us and one of my friends was arrested.

I never felt safe anywhere. I always felt like a person without any rights, that's why I decided to leave my country. I went to Turkey, a country where you can find rights for LGBTs or at least that what I heard. In Turkey, the feeling of danger and insecurity remained. So I decided to immigrate illegally, which was a very difficult experience, to the country where I am right now to get my rights and my legal, social and cultural protection. The positive thing in my life now is that, when I traveled I defended my rights as a lesbian woman.

Right now I live my life normally just like anyone else and I have the same rights like anyone. Even though I am in Europe right now, but I am having a very hard time as I live in a camp for refugees, which has lots of Arabs and they make it feel as if I am still living in an Arabic country, they still have the same perceptions and they still discriminate against LGBTs and the violence against us exists. I wish there would be a solution for this problem in the future.

I dream to see all homosexuals living in peace and living their life normally and that we wouldn't face any form of discrimination. I dream that one day we will have the right to marry in Egypt or in any other Arabic country. I would like to tell everyone, who used to oppress and mistreat and have no respect for the others people's rights that I am just a human being like you, I am neither a sick person nor do I have a mental problem. I am just a normal person. I have feelings and have rights same like you. I hope to live in my country where I have the rights as a human being. I just wish to feel safe and to be loved and among my friends, my family and my beloved ones.



Amal^{from} Egypt

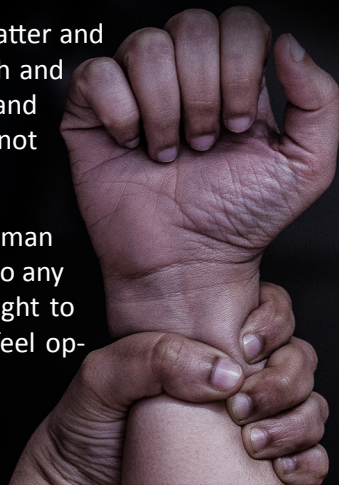
I am an Egyptian lesbian woman. The situation in which we live in is very bad; and I say “we” because I am a part of a small community where there are many people like me.... We live in a country that never respected any human rights, so what do expect the situation for a person who is different? As queer people, we are always required to hide our identity all the time because if it was exposed, we would be subject to an insult that could reach to physical violence. I always suffer from harassment on the street, “Tom-boy... Dyke.... Butch woman”, and a lot of other words that annoy me and always hurt me psychologically. I always keep silent, as not to get beaten up or hurt. My family is suspicious of my sexuality, as I was always refusing grooms who proposed to me. My family saw me as different.... At a time, I was really depressed, I left my job and as a result of my family pressure I ran away from home. I thought that my family will accept this situation but what actually happened was that they continued searching for me until they found me. They had beaten and insulted me on the street, passersby stopped to watch, while I was forcefully taken home against my will. As a result I was in a great mental suffering for long time after that incident.

The problem of our society is that it does not accept anyone who is different and attributes this refusal to religion. Even non-veiled women are seen as less equal and are being harassed ... On the personal level I do not see anything positive in my life, but in general, the presence of my friends around me gives me strength and in many cases when someone face a problem we support each other.

Sometimes I feel scared.... because it is difficult to face a society with such a mentality ... It is difficult to stand in front of my family and tell them I’m not going to get married because I am a lesbian, so I hide and conceal my inner feelings all the time. My dream is to get my freedom in my country, I dream to walk down the street without fear and to get society to accept to accept me as I am, as well as in the workplace and at home.... And if that did not happen, I dream to move to a country that respects human rights. I wish that the society understands that we are normal sane humans beings, we are not mentally ill and homosexuality is not infectious, not as what society thinks.

I see that my sexual orientation as a personal matter and no one’s business, it’s something I was born with and that society must understand this. I’m a woman and I am attracted to women like me. This should not hurt anyone else, as long as it is about me only.

I hope to be independent and to live with the woman whom I love in a home where I am not exposed to any harm or bullying from the neighbors. It is my right to I live in a country where I feel safe and never feel oppressed.



A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together, with fingers interlaced. The hands are positioned over a rough, textured brown surface, possibly sand or stone. The lighting is warm, highlighting the skin tones and the texture of the hands and the surface below. The background is blurred, focusing attention on the hands.

Alaa

from Egypt

I am an Egyptian bisexual girl. I always have a problem getting to know men, especially men who are so oriental and traditional. If they know that I am bisexual they might change the way they treat me or maybe some problems will happen or maybe I will just keep distance from them so I don't feel comfortable or get mentally abused.

Among my friends I am the weirdo girl, they always look at me as some sort of a "man" even when I am dating a man they still feel like I'm taking the man role in the relationship. They think that I always dress in a masculine way and they always ask me why don't I care more about feminine things, I always answer "I feel comfortable that way" even though sometimes I feel I am not normal, on the streets people always call me "boy girl". I get depressed a lot, thinking am I not normal? Or what am I exactly? Anyway that's how I feel. I always feel oppressed not only by heterosexuals but also by homosexuals, they always say those bisexuals can't determine what they really want and that they still haven't figured out their sexual orientation yet.

Two similar situations happened to me before; the first one was when I liked this guy and he told me that he liked me back, so we decided to start dating, but after a while he told me that I am acting so much like a "dude" and that I don't look like normal girls, which he didn't like.

At this moment I haven't told him that I am bisexual yet, but he always made me feel that I am not normal and that all of my thoughts, interests and my life are too manly, which he didn't like off course, so I just decided to walk away without saying a word.

The second situation happened a while after, the same thing exactly ;I liked a guy, he liked me back and then someone told him that I am a lesbian and I always uses guys and then dumb them, so he came and asked me "are you a lesbian?", so I just answered no I am bisexual and it's okay if you don't want to know me again, but as usual he tried to convince, that being bisexual is a sin and god created all of us as Adam and Eve not Eve and Eve or Adam and Adam and that it's wrong to have sexual attraction to the same sex. He said that maybe the reason that some people have sexual attraction to the same sex is that they were sexually abused when they were young or maybe they are mentally sick and anyway it's just wrong and a big sin.

sometimes I have this thought, that it might just for my best to spend the rest of my life alone, it would be better than having endless discussions anyway, and those discussions will just cause more inner struggles within myself and for me to doubt myself. I reached a point when I thought, that I finally accepted myself and that I am not afraid of someone knowing my sexual orientation and judge me, but those last two situations made me feel that I still don't understand anything and that I am still afraid and I still haven't accepted myself.

People and the society can accept everything even if it was wrong, but not being attracted to the same sex, even my parents, I can tell them lots of things I do even if it was wrong, but I can never tell them that I love a girl or that I am dating one, even my friends who work in human's rights and women's rights might not accept that someone might have different sexual orientations and just like all people they feel that those "LGBT+ people" just would make them look bad.

“ I don't know how to be myself, there's so much pressure on me that I can't even go on anymore. I just wish to live without discrimination and without feeling oppressed.”

Salma

from Egypt



I am a transgender woman...And I am not living anymore in Egypt. I have suffered a lot in Egypt and the situation was getting really bad. I had huge negative energy that was dragging me down and made me feel very frustrated. Now I am trying to direct myself to help others like me to reach safety and to find inner peace after suffering from racist Arab societies. I work as a volunteer in an NGO helping LGBTI refugees from Arab origins.

Since I was young, I felt different. I used to tell my mother I want to marry my friend in class. She used to reply, no you can't. A boy should marry a girl and a girl to marry a boy. I was convinced that I want to marry a boy. I used to think that when I grow up that I will turn into a girl. However, when I grew up, I understood and knew the problem. At that time I was filled with anger and severe frustration because from society's view of you, I am a pervert. I met with psychiatrists but it was hopeless, they gave me anti-depressants. I used to save money from my pocket money to pay to these psychiatrists; even one of them sexually harassed me. I used to feel that I am the only one on this planet like that. I used to be introverted and had no friends. However, this has changed when I got to know people like me; at that moment I felt that they are my family and they used to support me a lot. We stood for one another when someone of us faced a problem.

Egyptian society is racist to the greatest extent and is repressive and society's culture rejects who he/ she is different. They judge us without knowing how we live or how we think. No one has control on how he walks or his hand movements or his voice.

When the "Queen Boat" incident happened, I used to cry every day because there were people I knew who got arrested on that day. I used to go to that place with my friends and on that day we went late and we witnessed from far away people getting arrested. Later the newspapers published the arrest of satanic worshippers and blasphemy and practicing sexual perversion with one another. When I read the news, I was very infuriated and wanted to shout out loud and say that they are liars, what happened was the fear of people. I was afraid to go out of home or to be late outside.

My dad hit me badly when he knew and until now I have a scar in my face from beating.



“Once, I was taken to a police station and was interrogated. I was beaten up severely and there are still scars and signs on my body and this incident that made me leave Egypt”.

I started taking hormonal replacement, when I was still in Egypt, when I accepted myself and that I am a woman and that will not change. Unfortunately, currently I can't afford to continue taking hormones because of my status as a refugee I can't, also I don't have a work permit to be able to afford going to a private clinic. I thought about sex reassignment surgery, but it is too expensive and I am also afraid of the procedure itself and I heard of people committing suicide after the surgery.

From my personal experience that I have been through in Egypt, I advise everyone not to surrender to violence nor oppression because I was subject to a lot of violence, more than once over the years. I used to say, “NO!” and maybe the situation would get better in Egypt.

I was against the idea of going away and leaving my country.

Sara

from Sudan

I identify myself as a Sudanese lesbian woman. Currently I have stable life to some extent but the Sudanese society by its nature tends to judge people, so I have faced lots of verbal violence. People were calling me words intended to insult me like Mostarjila (masculine). That is why I had to travel and live outside Sudan so as to live my life and not to face any kind of violence.



The Most difficult situation happened to me because of my sexual orientation is when my family knew, they're educated and sophisticated people , but they did not accept the idea of my sexuality, my father asked me one question: "Is it possible for you that one day you will marry a man and have children from him?" I felt from his words as if I was still a teenager and will change later!, I left home and I told them that I would not go back until they called me and tell me to come back and that they will accept me as I am, and actually on the same day they called me. When I came back home I found my father had brought a bottle of water from the mosque next door and told me that a Sheikh had read some Koran verses on it; you need to drink it, I was overwhelmed and filled with bad feelings from the fact that an educated man can act this way. Then my family kept silent; especially after I made an engagement deal with a man so that they will forget this issue and stop the pressure.

But my mother always reminds me of this matter, if I'm speaking in the telephone she comes and tell me" When will you stop knowing all these women?" And when I introduce her to a female friend the first thing she asks is, "have you slept with her?" And if I'm taking some pictures she tell me will these pictures be sent for those women...The hardest thing for a human being is to live a double life just to conceal his or her sexual orientation. After I came out naturally my family prevented me from wearing trousers and forced me to look more feminine; wear dresses and have only male friends, and come home before sunset. I really agonized, and this was the main reason I had to travel outside the country.

Currently I'm psychological comfortable, because I'm no longer compelled to live the double life that have lived previously in Sudan. Now I'm the one who is responsible for my actions.

I never been physical abused but the verbal violence was psychologically much influential, especially at the university when I get to know a new girl; people were always talking behind our backs saying that we are together intimately, and perhaps that was not true, they always calling me disrespectful nick names such as "Sarah Aldkranh" Sara Tomboy.

When my friends introduce me to someone, the first thing she asks about "Is your friend a lesbian "Sohaqiya"? And when they know I am a lesbian; their primary concern is to have a sexual relationship with me just for the sake of change and adventure.

I am proud of my sexual orientation but for a society like the Sudanese society it is impossible to accept this idea despite the fact that sexual orientation is something personal that doesn't hurts any one, I hope the societal perceptions about this issue will change in future; even if a little bit so that we can live our lives and not have to run away from our country or our families.

I believe there is something positive in my life because I currently feel a state of stability and security, as I am out of the country that discriminates against homosexuals.

I dream of the day when I will marry my partner and I wish the situation with regard to the issues of homosexuality in the Arab world will improve, as I know that escaping from the problems is not a major solution.

I want to convey a message to the Sudanese society that

"I wish one day I can live with my female partner and express my love for her without any restrictions".





Shireen

from Sudan

I identify myself as a Sudanese Bisexual woman. Right now my life is unstable and I face lots of stress and psychological pressure because of hiding my sexual orientation. I had to marry a man so as to maintain my social image; although I have a female partner.

My life currently is positive to some extent, as the Sudanese society gives absolute freedom for a married women which provides me with the opportunity to spend more time with my female partner and exclude the idea of my different sexual orientation from people minds.

When we were at the age of 7 years, my girlfriend and I, a girl from the neighborhood who was at age of 12 years old, used to come over my house to play with us, she had started touching us in our sensitive areas, and we were kids; we didn't understand what was happening, and that continued for a period of time and then gone, my girlfriend and I discovered that we have become used to do it. We continued to do so until the age of 14.

The issue for us was more of addiction not feelings of love, and then my friend left, and all that stopped. But I was always thinking about it, and in order to forget about it I started to get into relationships with men, I had to open a Facebook fake account so as to get to know girls, who have the same attraction, and I knew one of them through Facebook groups, her name was (N). The story was differed with (N); as with me neighbor it was molesting, and with my friend was addiction, but with (N) for me it was a serious relationship, but it did not continue because of a family situations, so we disappeared from each other for 5 years; during which I was engaged to my cousin, I was always thinking about it and I missed her, but I knew this relationship was doomed to failure, We accidently met again, and now we are together for more than 10 months. I hope the joy of the relationship will continue, since my marriage of my cousin gave me the freedom and the space to be with her. Sometimes I feel it is not fair to her, but I got married for the sake of the social image. If we were in a different society that accept homosexuality; I wouldn't get married to a man, I would marry my partner and I live with her. I dream in a parallel world that I can marry my female partner and be happier.

I wish to improve the situation regarding LGBT issues in Sudan and I say to the Sudanese society "leave us alone; the sexual orientation is a personal freedom".

Azza

from Sudan



I identify myself as a Sudanese lesbian woman. My life at this time is stable and I live with my female partner outside Sudan, of course, Allah make it easy for us to find a large queer community to be for us as an alternative family instead of the Sudanese society who oppresses us. I had a lot of problems in my life because of my sexual orientation and identity since of course the oppression, discrimination, and emotional violence starts when I hide my sexual orientation from the closest people to me and I had to continuously to live a double life in this society. Add to that the psychological pressure that I have from the society and my family in order to get married and start a family and have kids.

I have faced a lot of embarrassing situations because of my non feminine appearance which is not conforming to society's perception of a woman. There are people in public places, for example, refuses to allow me to use the women's bathrooms because they have doubts that I'm a man. Simple in daily life walking on the streets can always be a difficult and uncomfortable experience.

On one occasion while I was sitting in a House of a friend of mine along with other queer male and female friends, we have been attacked by a group of men who forcibly entered the house and beat us, stole our money, our telephones and threatened us if we inform the police they would tell them that we are (Shawaz) "Homosexuals". This experience as it physically hurt me so I had to go to a hospital and run some medical checks; but it emotionally -and for a long time- hurt me. I felt as someone without value in society and that my life is cheap and has no meaning. And if not for the support I had received from many friends around me this experience could turn me to a shattered character.

In order to live freely; I had at first to pretend that I am a heterosexual; so I was engaged to a gay man so as to maintain the social image but later I couldn't continue this silly game and I decided to leave the country. My life is currently fairly positive, because my family is a little bit more open-minded than the rest of the Sudanese traditional families and that's what gave me the opportunity to travel and live on my own and also helped me to be with my life partner whom I married and started with a beautiful and happy family.

I dream in the future to live a stable life and to see a day when everyone in the Sudanese society and the rest of the Arabic communities receptive to sexual and gender minorities with all of its different spectrum and I hope that the members of the LGBT community in Sudan can be more active in defending their rights and raise awareness of Homosexuality and Trans sexuality issues in the Sudan.

History tells us that the Sudanese society always was tolerant towards different sexual and gender identities and violence and cruelty toward gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender is strange to Sudanese society and it is a direct product of the Islamization of society by political Islam movements, I wish our society would return to its authenticities and know that LGBT are their sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and their neighbors. They are part of the social fabric of this country and you have to open your minds and your hearts, and see this diversity as a natural phenomenon and a positive matter; not an abnormality or deviance from nature.





Samar

from Sudan

I am a Sudanese lesbian woman. My life is too bad in terms of relationships due to family pressure, I finally became clear and confessed to my mom that I am Lesbian and since before she recognized the fact that is already known, my life was different from other people, whether they were Homosexuals, or heterosexuals, primarily because of my family doubts about my sexuality. Now I'm forbidden from bringing any female friend to the family House regardless if she is just the friend or colleague who doesn't know about my sexual orientation or a lesbian woman; while all my brothers and sisters are allowed to invite their friends into the House and possibly they can stay overnight at the homes of their friends, these are all things I am banned from.

After I finally could say it out loud that I am lesbian, my life has become harder than ever, I'm always a subject of mockery, disrespect, and laughter from my brothers. My mother told me "I certainly committed a mistake or I didn't do well raising you, but I won't leave you like that, you must undergo treatment and get married, you should look for a husband".

I spend my whole time working even during my official holidays, I work seven days a week, for me, work is an excuse to get away from home.

I have no relationship currently because there is no woman who can accept the way of my life, I can't spend time out over an hour once a week or every two weeks because my family always over my shoulder "where are you now? You have to come back home by 9:30 p.m. and if you are late again don't bother coming back.... are you hanging out with your Masculine women (Dakriyat)? ".

I have witnessed discrimination and oppression from my Queer community in the Sudan in the past. When I meet a new group of queer women they were always dominated by the idea that I just knew them for the sake of a sexual relationship and this matter was very uncomfortable. I left this stage of my life behind and now I know how to deal in a manner where there are red lines no one allowed to cross them.

Currently I have a pressing family that pushing me to leave the House; this is of course apart from the harsh language that makes me feel I am grubby, and unwanted by my family. And because of this I became rejected in the homosexual community, especially women, because they are afraid of me to rock them in my problems because of my family and my heavy work schedule.

I haven't look for any solutions to my situation, however; I work longer hours as much as possible so as to forget the miserable reality of my life. I sometimes cry and always come to the idea that my life has no meaning. I have no idea how can I change my current circumstances, but I continue my work and I don't see any end to this situation and am not sure how long I'll keep like this.

The positive thing in my life that I know I'm not alone and definitely they are many women like me, their lives could be harder or maybe they were forced to marry heterosexual men while no one is forcing me to do that; this is something good and positive because my family against the forced marriage.

I dream that I can change my life and to live freely. And also I dream one day will I overcome this stage of my life and I can help people like me; LGBT in Sudan to get



to the stage where our voices becomes loud and we could one day have rights like anyone else.

Sometimes I pass through days where I lose hope, I wish if I didn't born lesbian but I'm aware this is not in my hands. Sometimes I feel my life is revolving in a vicious circle, and every time I return to point zero; like a person who spent years building his great Palace of sand on the beach and here comes one wave and destroy his efforts in a glimpse and again I go back to build my place over and over.

“I was born a lesbian, and I will continue be one, I hope that people won't see me or the other lesbians women as freaks because we're by your side everywhere and the work that we do here could build you a better life. I don't say that we're Angels but I say that in every society there are good and bad human beings. The only difference between us is that God didn't create you Gay”.





Noor

from Sudan

I am a lesbian Nubian Sudanese woman. I live with the women I chose but outside Sudan. We lived together for several years. I had to choose between living in my country or living with the woman whom I loved and I chose...It was a difficult choice.

Any human being has multiple identity components but always there are priorities. The priority to be yourself; not hiding the truth about your sexuality for me is the most important thing. I face discrimination continuously in the streets; each day people see me as different, their daily stares and comments would disappoint me and make me depressed for long days. I suffered a bad experience that I was attacked and beaten when I was with a group of queer friends in the house of a friend of mine. A group of neighbors from the area where my friend lived didn't like our appearance. This experience was painful physically but the psychological damage is always a hundred times worse than the physical abuse, the feeling that you're trapped inside yourself all the time, afraid to speak freely or express the fact that you are different or think differently from the others.

For long period of time I was afraid to attend any social occasions; I had a fear from all people and their comments "Congratulations... When we will see you at your own home "...I hate this kind of comments which interfere with my privacy in a silly way. So now I live a double life; while living with my wife, my family and the society doesn't know that and consider us as if we are friends who are sharing



housing, I always must pretend and deal with my family and the society with a fake character other than my real one and the feeling that I'm pretending all the time is tough and painful.

Of course it took me long years until I accepted myself...About 5 years of denying my identity and my different sexual orientation and thinking that I'm the only different woman on this planet. I thought about suicide, and at some point I thought about marrying a man because I thought this would be the solution to my problem.

Another 4 years of psychological suffering, depression and fear of society a moment came where I discovered that I will not change and this is my nature and that there are a lot of people like me. At this moment I thought I should leave and disappear from my family and not let them know anything about me, but I couldn't do that because there was always an internal conflict between my love and respect to them and to be myself.

The positive thing in my life is having a partner to my side which always comforting and having friends who are like me and accepting to all differences which gives me hope that one day we can have a existence in the Sudanese society. I dream that one day I can tell my family the truth about me and they will accept me and support me. I also dream that the Sudanese society will accept the diversity and gives a real space to accept the others who are different.

Now after years of accepting myself and there are a lot of a positive things around, the psychological conflict and the social fear is still exist but less than before.

I want to say to Sudanese society "we are normal, we are exist around you everywhere but you don't want to see us"



Horryia

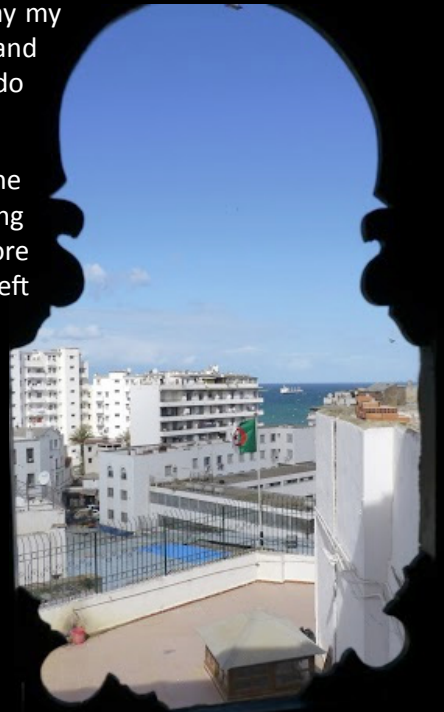
from Algeria

I was born in winter in the early 70s in a small village south western to the capital "Algeria", as the first male child after 3 daughters. My father was so happy after knowing that I was born. For him it was all about honor and knowing that I will carry his name after his death, but what mattered the most for him was his family. My father came from a big family; he had 8 brothers and 4 sisters.

My father decided to give me the name "El Taher". And as our traditions says, he spent a week touring me around all the other tribes so they get the chance to see me and to give him presents. When I was six years old my uncle's wife "Miriam", who is originally from the capital "Algeria", came and took me to her house. For me "Miriam" was the one person I love the most in my family, even more than my mother. She couldn't have kids and she used to work as tailor. I loved to play with cloths with her after school. One day she decided she is going to make me a dress. That dress became the only thing I cared about, I became addicted to the idea of having address, I just couldn't stop thinking about having it.

I watched her while she was making the dress until one day the dream finally came to an end and it became a reality. The dress was done. The dress remained my secret passion for a while. Until one day when I was 12 and "Miriam" had to leave to the capital "Algeria" For days because her father has just passed away. I couldn't put my hands on the dress until one day my uncle went to work and I decided to sneak into his room and wear the dress. I was so scared but yet so determined to do it. I wanted to wear that dress no matter what.

I got inside the room and wore the dress and also took the makeup box. For a moment I could feel my heart beating out of happiness, but suddenly my uncle came in and before I realize that, he start beating me up and then he just left me in the room. I still remember that day so well. At that moment I had no idea what is going to happen to me. Two hours later my uncle came back with my father. I wanted to scream when I saw my father because I knew he was going to beat me up too. But he put his hands on my mouth quickly and threatened me that if anyone heard me screaming he would kill me with his bare hands.



My uncle left and my father kept on beating me up as he was beating two persons not just one. I was silent the whole time. After he was done; he threw a bucket of water on me; maybe because I was peeing my pants the entire time. From that day on I knew that I lost my father and I knew for him I was no longer exist. My dad didn't tell anyone about this and I think he asked my uncle not to tell anyone as well. My mother didn't understand why is my father so cruel to me and why did he change the way he treats me. She kept on asking me. She really wanted to know the missing link and reveal the mystery. But the whole subject was just a secret now. When "Miriam" finally came back I couldn't keep the secret; I cried while I was in her arms and I told her everything. She was crying even more than me. Now she understands why I couldn't see her as much as I used to. Despite the fact that I gave up my dreams of becoming a princess and stopped wearing the dress but I couldn't change the way I talk or walk.

My dad kept of treating me badly. The bruises kept getting worse and worse. My mother couldn't do much expect crying. The only time when I forgot my misery, was the time I spent with "Miriam". For me "Miriam" was my shelter. "Miriam" accepted the fact that I am a woman even before I came out to her. She always said that I am a woman and the nature must have made a mistake. I used to see "Miriam" secretly because at my age I am not even supposed to sit with women.

On my 16th birthday, "Miriam" got me a cake to celebrate. My dad was in the house so he went all mad on me. He always hated "Miriam"; for him she was a town girl who came here to spoil his child. He threw the cake away and locked me up in my room and on the next day he went out and took the key with him. My mother kept on crying outside the door and kept on asking me how am I doing. As for myself I just kept silent as I always did.

Suddenly "Miriam" came back to the house. She broke the door's lock and gave me some money; she took all her savings in front of my mom, who didn't understand anything of what was going. At this moment Miriam told me "from now on your name is Horriya (Freedom) you're a free woman, Leave this place". I took the train to the capital "Algeria" and never went back to my small village. On this day I started my journey as a Trans-woman but without my family.

"Miriam" passed away 15 years ago from cancer. She died on the same day I started my hormonal replacement therapy. I tried to call her to tell her but it was too late. She passed away without knowing. "Miriam" was not educated or went to any school during her life time, but she understood what it means to be different, she understood diversity and freedom... I owe everything to her.



Oruti

from Algeria

“Those who give up easily, they will always find shadows”

My name is “Oruti” and I’m a lesbian woman but I never show that, instead I always pretend that I like men, even though I know it’s just an illusion and not true. What I felt towards her was something I never felt before and I don’t even want to feel it towards anyone after her. The unconditional love...The love that I couldn’t even measure. Every time I confront myself with these facts, I feel myself drowning.

In a society like the one I am living in, I had to lie everyday about who really I am, I couldn’t be open about it, lying all the time won’t make me stronger at all but just weaker, that’s why most of the time I just kept silent rather than drowning in my own lies.

I am a lesbian just one month in a year. The rest of the time I am just like the religious woman who tries to cover her hair in her Hijab or like a French teacher who hates the system and just want to run away. I never screamed that I am a lesbian instead I just whisper it or just write it “les” or “L”. Maybe I was always afraid of my mother finding out that I am a lesbian.

In order for me to be able to just live; I pretend, lie or just remain silent all the time. I killed all my feelings, I became so numb.

I can’t hear my lover’s voice or smell her scent, I can only see her pictures being happy away from me. I am very sad but her happiness is my happiness.

I want to carry on in my life, I have to run far away so I don’t suffer in this horrible society.

“I think there’s happiness waiting for me somewhere out there, but not in Algeria”.

Mariam

from Algeria

My name is Mariam, a feminist and a bisexual girl from Algeria, this is how I started to define myself in the past few years. I am 30 years old and the experiences that I lived during my life time are what making me shout and demanding my rights now. I am not afraid to say that I am a feminist or that I am attracted to women and rarely men, who know where their limits is.

Right now I am married or at least that what the papers say, a contract that was made only to sit me free from a complicated social status. But despite all of that I am having a romantic relationship with the man that I am married to on papers. We vowed that our relationship would be open and free so we don't lose our identities.

I knew that I was a feminist when they called me a feminist as an insult, just because I didn't understand and rejected the injustice I was living in.

During my teens age my body started to become tasty for others, a piece of meat everyone tried to get his hands on. I hated my body so much after I was raped for the first time and many times after. I hated my body and my brain because I knew so well that what was happening is abnormal. I saw how they treated me at the streets, at my home and at my university just because I am a woman.

I knew that I can't be open about my sexual orientation when they called me a deviant at my university just because I praised another woman's beauty. I defended myself t saying "I am talking about beauty in general and not because I am attracted to her".

When I moved to live in a European country, I became finally open about my sexual orientation. At some point of my life moving to Europe seemed like the solution to all of my problems such as depression and the fact that I wasn't virgin anymore. I needed to move to Europe so I can make peace with my body, so I can learn how to love again. But the main reason of moving was to run away, to run away from confronting my society and my family with my sexuality.



I was locked up in my house and got beaten up when they found out that I smoke, I would rather not imagine what they would have done to me if they found out about my sexual orientation.

Europe allowed me to get out of my anger and actually understand it. But even there I found racism and homophobia as well.

For lesbians, I was considered a “fake” lesbian. They always tell me “you attracted to men, you make our identity and battle a luxury”. I wasn’t loved by lesbians, although some others offered me some exotic sexual plans to please their own fantasies.

For me those were just a white women, I still felt strong. They didn’t affect my life they weren’t my family or friends or people I care for, so I always answered them with pride and anger all in the same time, this phase gave me the chance to express myself and in the same time to understand my complicated feelings and thoughts and get to know and accept myself.

Today after I came back to Algeria, to my society. The way I deal with things changed, I understood more the principles and traditions that controlling our life in Algeria. Finally I realized that anger is the right answer, It was anger that let me become free and trust myself again. Anger for me was my backbone against injustice.

I hope that I will be able to transfer my creative thoughts to other women. I hope that I can open new horizons for them as well. Women in my society, who were always intimidated by the masculine society, I just want to tell them that you don’t need a protection, because you are the power and authority.

A message to my society

“I am a part of you as much you’re all part of me, I will never forget what happened until I wipe all my tears, but accept me so I can accept you”.

Aile

from Algeria

My name is Aile.

Is my sexuality something I just discovered? Is it exist since I was born?

I really can't tell but there's one thing that I am sure about now, I like women and I never felt much happier.

When I remember the first time for me with a woman. It wasn't just about trying new feelings, for me that makes the whole homosexuality is just an act of curiosity, but in my case I had a true desire from human being to another.

Today, I define myself as a lesbian feminist woman.

The biggest discrimination I face as a lesbian woman, is being a Stranger to my family, I have to hide who I am. Fear cripples me.

Fear of what exactly? Fear that I would lose my family, or my parents find me disgusting or see me as a bad example for my siblings.

My friends always try to comfort me, and tell me that will never happen, but still it's too risky for me to come out to them.

I am partially happy, I am 33 years old and I still dare to dream of freedom, dream of not remain captive by my fear and not to feel ashamed of who I am, all what I feel is because of their ignorance, anger and madness.

I want to live my own story. I want to shout and scream with the love I have inside me for the woman I love, but will that ever happen? In my society? I really doubt it. What should I do? Run away? Run away to where? To my freedom outside my country? And then what?

Lose my identity and dignity, No I refuse that.

I always think of this silly words "to live happily, you have to be invisible", today I am applying it to my life and I don't have any other choices.

"For all of those who truly loved me, I am a lesbian and I am still the same person".

