

HIJAB BUTCH

BLUES

LAMYA H



BOOK CLUB KIT

AUTHOR NOTE

DEAR READER,

Hijab Butch Blues is a memoir in which I reconceive stories from the Quran as queer, brown, immigrant narratives in order to better understand my own queer, brown immigrant life.

I wrote this book for myself:

The self I was in my early teens, when I was figuring out my sexuality and didn't have any queer, brown models to turn to for guidance. I turned instead to the Quran and the rich stories and complicated characters it contained, seeking validation of my anger, queerness, and gender-nonconformity. These stories helped me feel less alone.

I wrote this book for the self I was in my early twenties when I moved to a new city and realized that this was a chance to start over, to invent myself anew, to live an authentic queer life. That life didn't adhere to mainstream, traditional ideas of how an out gay person should live, but it was true to me and who I was, and that felt both thrilling and terrifying.

I wrote this book for the self I am now, in my thirties, building a family and a community of my own. I am healing from the racism, homophobia, transphobia, and Islamophobia I experienced and sometimes internalized. This book is a record of how I'm unlearning these things. It is one of the ways I am fighting for a better world.

Since I was a teen studying in Quran class, I've always read to solve my problems. The stories of my people, our traditions, and our sacred heroes offer examples of how to live. I identify with them, the situations in which they find themselves, and the way their faith guides them when they feel lost or afraid. In my adult life, whenever I encounter a problem, a thought that gets stuck in my head, a feeling that won't go away, I write. I write to tease apart the strands of the issue, to organize my confusion, to make sense of my experiences. In *Hijab Butch Blues*, I marry these two problem-solving techniques—reading and writing—to make new meaning of my experiences, to identify more loving ways of living, to practice letting go of coping mechanisms that were no longer serving me, to realize that I was not and never have been alone, and to deepen my faith in humanity, my devotion, and myself.

While I hope that queer, Muslim people will see themselves in my story, this book is for anyone who's ever sought to build a life for themselves without a model, without a map. At its core, my story is about the ways we explore who we are, trying to find our way in a world that may not always value our experience. *Hijab Butch Blues* is, simply put, for anyone who seeks to be thoughtful about how they live.

I hope that you will come away from this book feeling less alone in your difference. I hope that my story helps you to see that we can turn towards our differences, instead of away from them; that our differences can actually help us—to build community, love more deeply, and live in a way that feels true. I hope that on these pages, you will see and come to love how messy faith can be, and how that messiness makes space for us to grapple with the contradictions that make us human. Messiness is—at its best—generative; it allows us to ask ourselves the truest, most important questions about what it means to be alive.

Thank you for reading,

LAMYA H

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever read the Quran? How much did you know about Islam before reading *Hijab Butch Blues*? How, if at all, did this book affect your understanding of Muslim life in America or beyond?
2. “Not a day goes by that I am not terrified . . . that people can see through me.” Talk about why Lamya H, a queer Muslim currently living in the U.S., chose not to author her own book using her full, real name. What does her anonymity say about her perceived place in the world? What does it communicate to you as a reader?
3. “I don’t have words for this feeling,” writes Lamya, recalling her early adolescence, “just nebulous thoughts about this thing that is not talked about in my family, my culture, in Islam.” How does the author learn who she is—and what she believes in—through the words of the Quran?
4. Take a moment to talk about the stories, characters, and themes in the Quran that shaped Lamya’s sense of self. Which story from the Quran that Lamya shared resonated with you the most? How did it change your perspective, and did you learn something new about yourself?
5. Do you believe that ancient holy books should be up for modern interpretation? You may wish to discuss, as a group, whether scripture plays a role in your lives, and how.
6. For many years Lamya worried that the “core” of her self was both “wretched and wrong.” But when she enters college, and lives on her own in New York as an adult, Lamya is determined to find a way to be both queer and Muslim. How does she reconcile her sexual identity with her religious faith?
7. “I feel so politically aligned with womanhood,” Lamya writes, “and yet hate inhabiting it.” Talk about how the author presents herself, and how her body is “read” when she wears the hijab. What does her hijab show to the world about who Lamya is—or appears to be?
8. Lamya wants to believe that a more inclusive Islam is possible. But she is also “not naïve enough to think [queer Muslims] will reach this utopia in [her] lifetime or possibly ever.” What do you believe—or wish for—after having read *Hijab Butch Blues*?
9. How can one person’s story, such as Lamya’s, speak for all people—victims of sexism, Islamophobia, and homophobia among them? Do you believe that books, in general, have the power to change the world? Which is mightier: the pen or the sword?
10. Let’s say you had the chance to invite Lamya to your book club. What kind of questions would you ask her? What would you like to learn most about her life now?

RESOURCES

For guides, articles, and resources for LGBTQIA+ and QTBIPOC people and allies, we recommend the following organizations.

The Trevor Project

Trans Lifeline

MASGD

Masjid Al-Rabia

Queer Crescent

Salaam Canada

Muslim Youth Leadership Council

Muslim Justice League

Callen-Lorde

Brown Boi Project

Audre Lorde Project

Fierce