BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT

HIJAB BUTCH BLUES: A MEMOIR

LAMYA H

“A MASTHERFUL MUST-READ.” —GLENNON DOYLE, #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF UNTAMED

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A Memoir

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2023 BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY BOOK PRIZE FINALIST
BOOK SYNOPSIS

A queer hijabi Muslim immigrant survives her coming-of-age by drawing strength and hope from stories in the Quran in this daring, provocative, and radically hopeful memoir.

When fourteen-year-old Lamya H realizes she has a crush on her teacher—her female teacher—she covers up her attraction, an attraction she can’t yet name, by playing up her roles as overachiever and class clown. Born in South Asia, she moved to the Middle East at a young age and has spent years feeling out of place, like her own desires and dreams don’t matter, and it’s easier to hide in plain sight. To disappear. But one day in Quran class, she reads a passage about Maryam that changes everything: When Maryam learned that she was pregnant, she insisted no man had touched her. Could Maryam, uninterested in men, be . . . like Lamya?

From that moment on, Lamya makes sense of her struggles and triumphs by comparing her experiences with some of the most famous stories in the Quran. She juxtaposes her coming out with Musa liberating his people from the pharaoh; asks if Allah, who is neither male nor female, might instead be nonbinary; and, drawing on the faith and hope Nuh needed to construct his ark, begins to build a life of her own—ultimately finding that the answer to her lifelong quest for community and belonging lies in owning her identity as a queer, devout Muslim immigrant.

This searingly intimate memoir in essays, spanning Lamya’s childhood to her arrival in the United States for college through early-adult life in New York City, tells a universal story of courage, trust, and love, celebrating what it means to be a seeker and an architect of one’s own life.

BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT: HIJAB BUTCH BLUES
Lamya H is a former Lambda Literary Fellow whose writing has appeared in *Vice, Salon, Vox, Black Girl Dangerous, Autostraddle*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. She currently lives in New York with her partner.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT LAMYA IN THESE SELECT MEDIA INTERVIEWS:**

- **SAPPH-LIT** – [Saphh-Lit in Conversation with Lamya H](#)
- **PEN AMERICA** – [The PEN Ten: An Interview with Lamya H](#)
- **BOMB MAGAZINE** – [Lamya H. Interviewed by Bazeed](#)
- **THE STACKS PODCAST** – [Ep. 253 I Tend to Write About It with Lamya H](#)
BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

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.

THESE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WERE CREATED BY THE PUBLISHER THE DIAL PRESS AND ARE NOT AFFILIATED WITH BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY.
For many years Lamya worried that the “core” of herself 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?

“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?

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?

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?

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?
FOR GUIDES, ARTICLES, AND RESOURCES FOR LGBTQIA+ AND QTBIPOC PEOPLE AND ALLIES:

- **Tarab NYC**: Tarab NYC, a non-profit, fosters an inclusive and safe community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and/or gender non-conforming Arab, Middle Eastern, and/or North African people in the greater New York City area.

- **Salga NYC**: A social, political and support group for queer and trans people who trace their descent from the South Asian region from the countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma (Myanmar), India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Tibet as well as people of South Asian descent from countries such as Guyana, Trinidad and Kenya.

- **Trans Lifeline**: Trans Lifeline is a grassroots hotline and microgrants 501(c)(3) non-profit organization offering direct emotional and financial support to trans people in crisis – for the trans community, by the trans community.

- **MASGD**: MASGD works to support, empower, and connect LGBTQ+ Muslims. In their work, they challenge root causes of oppression, including misogyny, racism, capitalism, and xenophobia. They celebrate gender and sexual diversity within Muslim communities and promote an understanding of Islam that is centered on inclusion, justice, and equity.

- **Masjid Al-Rabia**: A BIPOC-led, LGBTQ+ affirming, and radically accessible Islamic community center in Chicago with a mission to provide spiritual support for marginalized Muslims with healing justice practices in mind.

- **Queer Crescent**: Queer Crescent imagines futures where LGBTQIA+ Muslims are building possibilities towards collective liberation. Their work is shaped by resisting gendered violence through cultural organizing, base-building, and defining Muslimness as an expansive and racialized identity.

*CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE*
Callen-Lorde: Callen-Lorde is the global leader in LGBTQ healthcare. Since the days of Stonewall, they have been transforming lives in LGBTQ communities through excellent comprehensive care, provided free of judgment and regardless of ability to pay. In addition, they are continuously pioneering research, advocacy and education to drive positive change around the world, because they believe healthcare is a human right.

Audre Lorde Project: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Trans and Gender Non Conforming People of Color center for community organizing, focusing on the New York City area. Through mobilization, education and capacity-building, they work for community wellness and progressive social and economic justice. Committed to struggling across differences, they seek to responsibly reflect, represent and serve their various communities.

FIERCE continues to serve as one of the nation’s few grassroots organizations whose mission is to engage LGBTQ youth of color in community organizing in response to unjust social issues largely impacting their communities, including some of the poorest neighborhoods in New York City, to actively direct their own social change agendas.

HEART: Their mission is to promote sexual health, uproot gendered violence, and advance reproductive justice by establishing choice and access for the most impacted Muslims.
BKLYN BOOKMATCH READALIKES

Did you enjoy Hijab Butch Blues? Want to read something similar? Check out these readalike titles below.

- *We Have Always Been Here* by Samra Habib
- *What is Home, Mom?* by Sabba Khan
- *What We Will Become* by Mimi Lemay
- *A Part of the Heart Can’t Be Eaten* by Tristan Taormino
- *Nobody Needs to Know* by Pidgeon Pagonis

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