

LGBT Voices

From Sudan



LGBT Voices from Sudan

Recording a Past, Building a Future



Mesahat Foundation for Sexual and Gender Diversity

www.mesahat.webs.com



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Acknowledgment

We are very grateful to all who have contributed to the production of this booklet and to all who have offered their time, efforts, and money to bring out this booklet in its final form. Our deep thanks and gratitude goes to all Sudanese LGBTQ community members who have participated to enrich the content of the booklet through the sharing of their stories and their daily struggles so it will play a great role in raising awareness of sexual and gender minorities issues and highlights human rights violations based on sexual orientation and / or gender identity in Sudan.

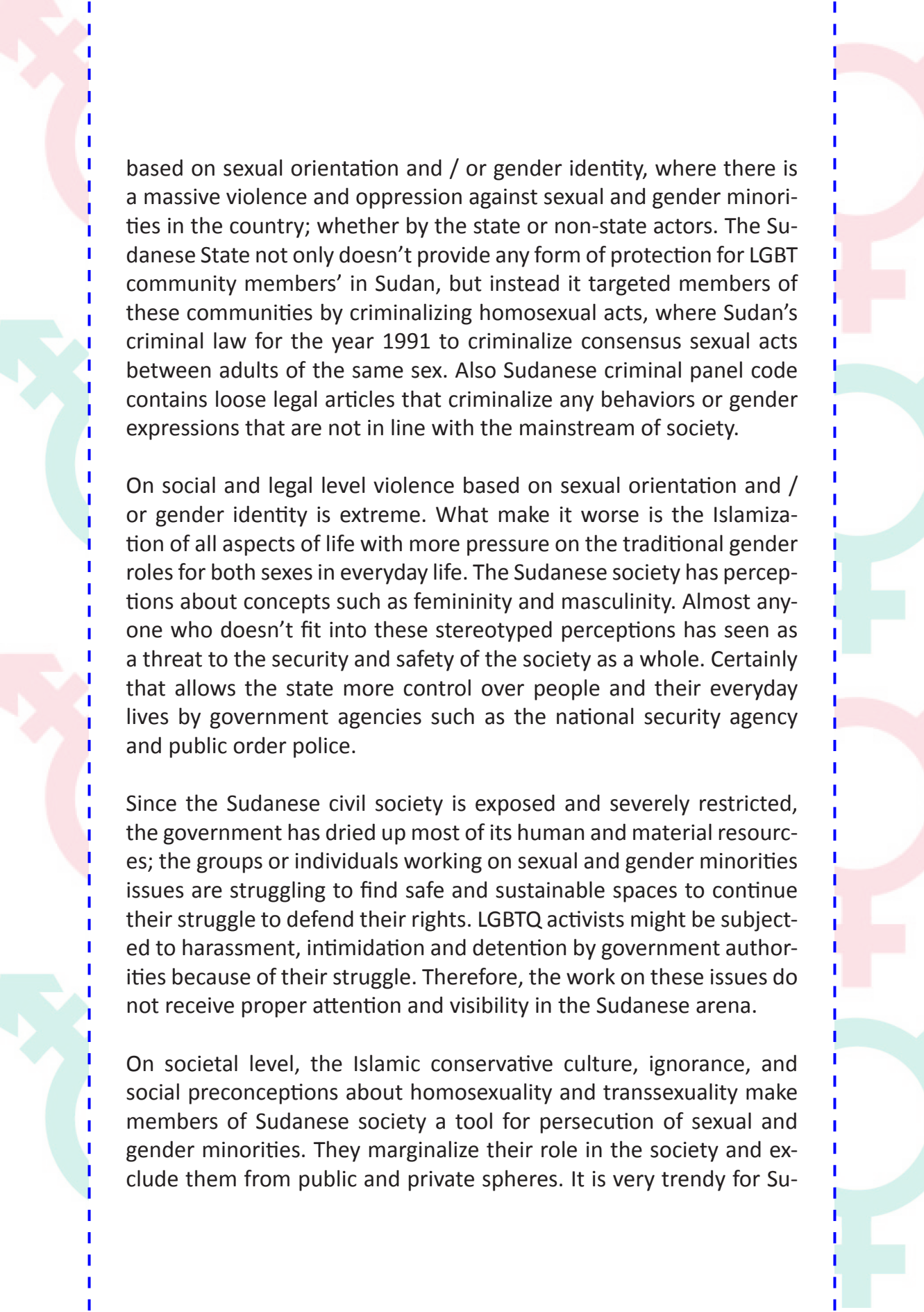
Best regards
Mesahat Foundation for sexual and gender Diversity

Introduction

The Republic of the Sudan is located in north-eastern Africa between Egypt and Eritrea, bordering the Red Sea in north east. It is bordered by Libya in north west, by Chad in west, by the Central African Republic in south west, by South Sudan in south and by Ethiopia in south east. Sudan has an area of about 1,882,000 million square kilometers, it is the second largest country in Africa. Sudanese cultural heritage consist of a formations of local cultures and imported ones over the centuries, which made a unique composition of a variety of demographics and ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversities.

Sudan liberated from the Egyptian British colonization on the first of January 1956 and burst into civil war since before the Declaration of Independence until 2005-except for intermittent periods of peace- as a result of deep conflicts between the central government in the north of Sudan and armed political movements in the south. civil war ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, between the Government of Sudan and Sudan People's Liberation Movement, then South Sudan became an independent state in 2011. Also in Darfur region of western Sudan, which represents about a fifth of the area of Sudan an armed conflict erupted since the beginning of February 2003, which has claimed thousands of lives. also large numbers of Region's population suffered from displacement and homelessness because of this ongoing war.

In recent years, Sudan has witnessed political, economic, and social changes rooted in the increasing public frustration at the deteriorating political situation, the economic environment in which it does not provide jobs and decent living, and the torn social climate because of civil wars and ethnic and tribal strife. Sudan Also has one of the most outstanding human rights serious violations records in the world. Supported by the country's repressive security machinery and the government's legal framework which does not provide any protections for the citizens. And these violations essentially include violations

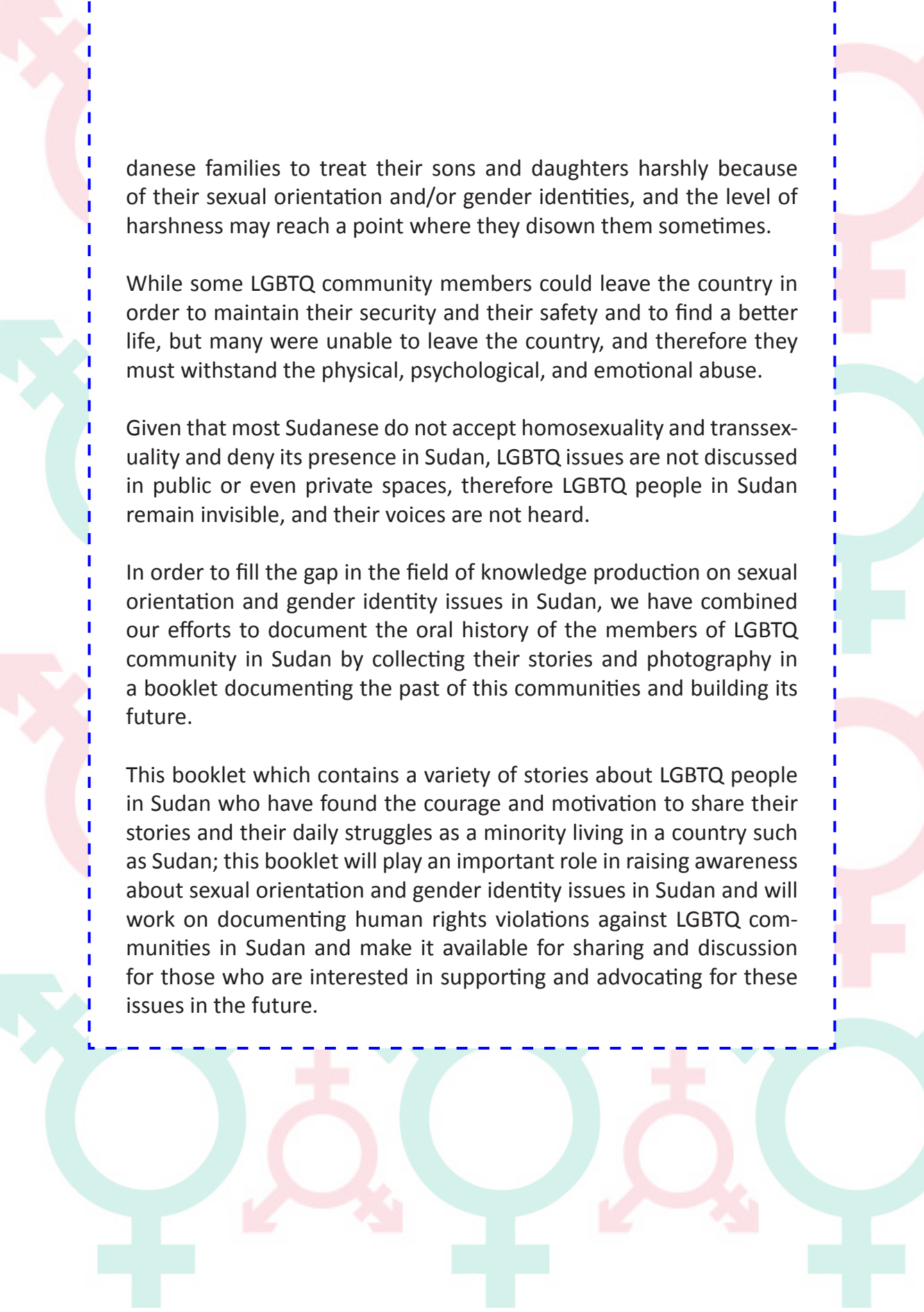


based on sexual orientation and / or gender identity, where there is a massive violence and oppression against sexual and gender minorities in the country; whether by the state or non-state actors. The Sudanese State not only doesn't provide any form of protection for LGBT community members' in Sudan, but instead it targeted members of these communities by criminalizing homosexual acts, where Sudan's criminal law for the year 1991 to criminalize consensus sexual acts between adults of the same sex. Also Sudanese criminal panel code contains loose legal articles that criminalize any behaviors or gender expressions that are not in line with the mainstream of society.

On social and legal level violence based on sexual orientation and / or gender identity is extreme. What make it worse is the Islamization of all aspects of life with more pressure on the traditional gender roles for both sexes in everyday life. The Sudanese society has perceptions about concepts such as femininity and masculinity. Almost anyone who doesn't fit into these stereotyped perceptions has seen as a threat to the security and safety of the society as a whole. Certainly that allows the state more control over people and their everyday lives by government agencies such as the national security agency and public order police.

Since the Sudanese civil society is exposed and severely restricted, the government has dried up most of its human and material resources; the groups or individuals working on sexual and gender minorities issues are struggling to find safe and sustainable spaces to continue their struggle to defend their rights. LGBTQ activists might be subjected to harassment, intimidation and detention by government authorities because of their struggle. Therefore, the work on these issues do not receive proper attention and visibility in the Sudanese arena.

On societal level, the Islamic conservative culture, ignorance, and social preconceptions about homosexuality and transsexuality make members of Sudanese society a tool for persecution of sexual and gender minorities. They marginalize their role in the society and exclude them from public and private spheres. It is very trendy for Su-



danese families to treat their sons and daughters harshly because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identities, and the level of harshness may reach a point where they disown them sometimes.

While some LGBTQ community members could leave the country in order to maintain their security and their safety and to find a better life, but many were unable to leave the country, and therefore they must withstand the physical, psychological, and emotional abuse.

Given that most Sudanese do not accept homosexuality and transsexuality and deny its presence in Sudan, LGBTQ issues are not discussed in public or even private spaces, therefore LGBTQ people in Sudan remain invisible, and their voices are not heard.

In order to fill the gap in the field of knowledge production on sexual orientation and gender identity issues in Sudan, we have combined our efforts to document the oral history of the members of LGBTQ community in Sudan by collecting their stories and photography in a booklet documenting the past of this communities and building its future.

This booklet which contains a variety of stories about LGBTQ people in Sudan who have found the courage and motivation to share their stories and their daily struggles as a minority living in a country such as Sudan; this booklet will play an important role in raising awareness about sexual orientation and gender identity issues in Sudan and will work on documenting human rights violations against LGBTQ communities in Sudan and make it available for sharing and discussion for those who are interested in supporting and advocating for these issues in the future.



Tales & Testimonies

A person wearing a bright pink long-sleeved shirt is shown from the side, holding a paintbrush and painting a wall. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The person's hair is dark and curly. The overall tone of the image is warm and artistic.

Sameer

Gay man

I'm Sameer, I'm sharing my story no different than many others. It's a story of a gay man who grew up in a country such as Sudan; in an area called "Sinnar" which is located in south east Sudan.

I grew up in a conservative family. According to my family; everything outside norm is considered a sin. I had very tough childhood, starting by listening to usual comments such as "stop playing with girls and be a man!" to being lashed for saying words like "Sagami or wob 3alai"¹. It was always me who is being blamed for being different even though at that time; I didn't know what was the difference. All what I knew was that I liked playing with girls, I liked to put on nail polish just the way all girls do. Simply; I was never happy with my body neither the attitude expected from me to act like a young man. I always wanted "3rosat Molid"² instead of the traditional horse. Pink was my favorite color not because all girls like it; but it was the color that I dreamed of painting my room.

I grew up to all these "Don'ts" and "No's" being said about everything I did, although nobody ever explained to me the reason behind all these prohibitions. All I knew that it's not acceptable for me to be soft or fond of pink color.

When it was time for me to go to university; I moved to Khartoum, the capital. Where things were different and I was away from parental control. There it was the time for me to choose my life the way I want it. Definitely it wasn't that easy.

I met a friend who shared the same attitude and feelings, or at least that what I sensed when I knew that “pink” is our mutual favorite color. That day I was very happy to know that I wasn’t very different after all, or at least there is one person on earth who shares the same things I encountered. I used to think I’m “a weirdo”. I started exploring myself and the world around me. Until one day I felt tempted to kiss this guy whom I met a few months back, so I did. That day my friend told me this is gay thing, which was an unfamiliar expression for me. So I started looking up the Internet, where I found interesting articles about the issue of homosexuality. On the internet I discovered that I wasn’t the only one neither were the two of us; which was of great significance to me. Nevertheless, living in this country where our sexual orientation perceived as a sin and a crime, I had to hide it, to be as discreet as possible.

One day a colleague at the university saw us; my friend and I holding hands. He started to harass us repeatedly. a group of his friends decided to wait for us outside the premises of the university, they beaten us up just for the fact that we looked womanly. It shocked me that strangers who do not have authority over you could beat you up for being different.

hey started to spread a rumor that we were married and we should be killed. I freaked out to the point that I left everything in Khartoum and came back to Sinnar. Though it was never better with my family, I put off my education for two years and isolated myself from everything that can endanger my life again. I denied my sexuality for two years. after a long period of isolation, I decided to leave the country and seek education elsewhere, where I won’t fear being judged or beaten up. So I went to study abroad. I learned more about life and myself, I met new people and made new friends. It took four years of my life. Eventually I

came back to Sudan stronger; capable of defending myself and standing for my rights.

Even though lots of things changed in these four years; all that perceptions about homosexuality as a sin in Sudan still the same.

- 1- Sudanese slang used by women and considered very feminine words.
- 2- Toy for girls sold in the festive season of the birth of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Sudan.



Saleh Gay man

While I'm sitting in the "back yard" of our house and recalling my childhood memories to type them down; I contemplate the amount of violence I was subjected too; only now it looks so ugly and cruel. I come from a mid-class family, who are well educated and highly intelligent, especially because we live in the capital, which is supposedly the most nourished and exposed city in Sudan. Nevertheless, this still didn't make any difference to my childhood as a gay guy, because it's never looked at differently, regardless of the education of the family. They saw lots of flaws in me and I was blamed for every word, move or act; everything for them was just too feminine and girly. It wasn't only playing with girls that gave them a hard time, but the fact I was always interested in music and dancing classes, which were mostly for girls. I was the only guy in these classes while other guys playing football. That was a huge disappointment to my family. I recall my parents never attended any of the open days we had at school, to avoid being insulted by other parents who can see me among girls singing and dancing.

They developed fear of my fey attitude. They chose to solve the situation in their own way; therefore, my dad decided to lash at me every time he sees me playing with girls or talking about dance classes in

school. One day he lashed at me to the point I felt I almost died. I became very depressed, I stopped eating and stayed in my room. I was just a 12-years old kid who wanted to be himself.

I remember staying in that room for 2 days without coming out, and all what they said was "It's good, so he would behave". Well that was a very traumatic bad experience. I grew up fearful of everything I used to practice. I fell in love with a neighbor who was 12 years older than me. I didn't know what was that by the time but I liked it.

Things went on this way for years. I meet the guy and nobody knows about us until he traveled and I felt something's missing.

So I started to acknowledge that I'm gay but society never gave me the chance to be myself. I was eyed by people in the street as if they knew something. I was harassed by guys and pinched in transport and that wasn't everything. Turned out one of our neighbors saw me and the other neighbor before. He approached me one day and asked me to sleep with him. I refused, but he was so smart to use my story to pressure me and make me sleep with him almost every day although I never liked him. This went on for a while until one day my parents found some gay porn videos on my laptop, that he used to watch. When they asked me about it, I said it wasn't mine and it's that guy's videos and I never knew they existed on my laptop. They told his family and made a huge fuss out of it and it was the first time that I wasn't blamed for something.

There is more to my life than these few events. I learned from these things to remain discreet, and live away from trouble. I always found a way of letting these troubles out in painting. Art was my only source of happiness. I think each and every one of us have their own stress-release techniques, to which we get back in those times. What's better if you have a close friend that you can speak to, but only if you trust them."



Jameela

Transgender woman

A rebel was my name since I was a kid because everything to me was not acceptable. I wanted to change everything starting from the ruling political party to the mentalities of people I grew up with. I even wanted to change my body! Yes, my body.

I'm Jameela, 34 years old Transgender woman. I was born with a man's body but I never felt good looking like a man. That was my main act of rebellion in life; how I could become a girl who is pretty and feminine. A girl who can put on short dresses and high heels. Where I come from in Sudan; if you ever thought of doing such thing; don't expect to face less than cutting off your head but I insisted.

I had to make tough decisions and take it the hard way. I left my family and all the people I knew and went to Port-Sudan city. In Port-Sudan I became a singer and made a great career for myself. I was more of a drag queen and people used to make fun of me but all what mattered for me that they enjoyed my music and I enjoyed myself as well. But things got worse in time; the police kept crashing into all the parties I was singing at and I was arrested and beaten up for trying to look like a woman.

I had to pay large amount of money in order to be released. Being tortured by the police didn't only leave marks on my back; but it also scared my heart. Every time I was deprived from my freedom; my heart bruised and a huge mark was left inside.

I stopped working and now I can't practice any job. Therefore, I'm staying home and running a small business from far just for a living. In Sudan it's never easy to be successful in your career if you are different; we don't understand differences; that's why our country is ripped apart, we got separated to North and South; and what's next?

Ali

Gay man

My name is Ali, 28 years old gay man from Sudan. Growing up in a masculine macho community was difficult. Gay men are perceived as failed men. Homosexuality is rejected both culturally and religiously. From early age; I have been taught that being gay is wrong and shameful; It's against nature and God will since Quran says that homosexuality is a sin. I have learned that homosexuals are going to hell and they should be stoned to death. Moreover, the punishment for same sex conduct in Sudanese law is death penalty. It was difficult for me. I have always felt that I'm different than others and that I don't fit or belong. I was often bullied and people made fun of me for being so feminine. At school I have been given different names such as sissy, faggot.... etc.

I had to hide my identity and act as masculine as I could, in order to avoid getting into trouble.

One day while I was attending a public party, the police raided the place; arrested us for being perceived as gays. It was a nightmare. We have been tortured and abused by Public Order Police (POP). After a few months of ongoing court trials, I got convicted according to the article "152" of Sudanese criminal law (Obscene and Indecent Acts). Furthermore, I had been stopped and harassed by the police for a while because the police suspected that I was a member

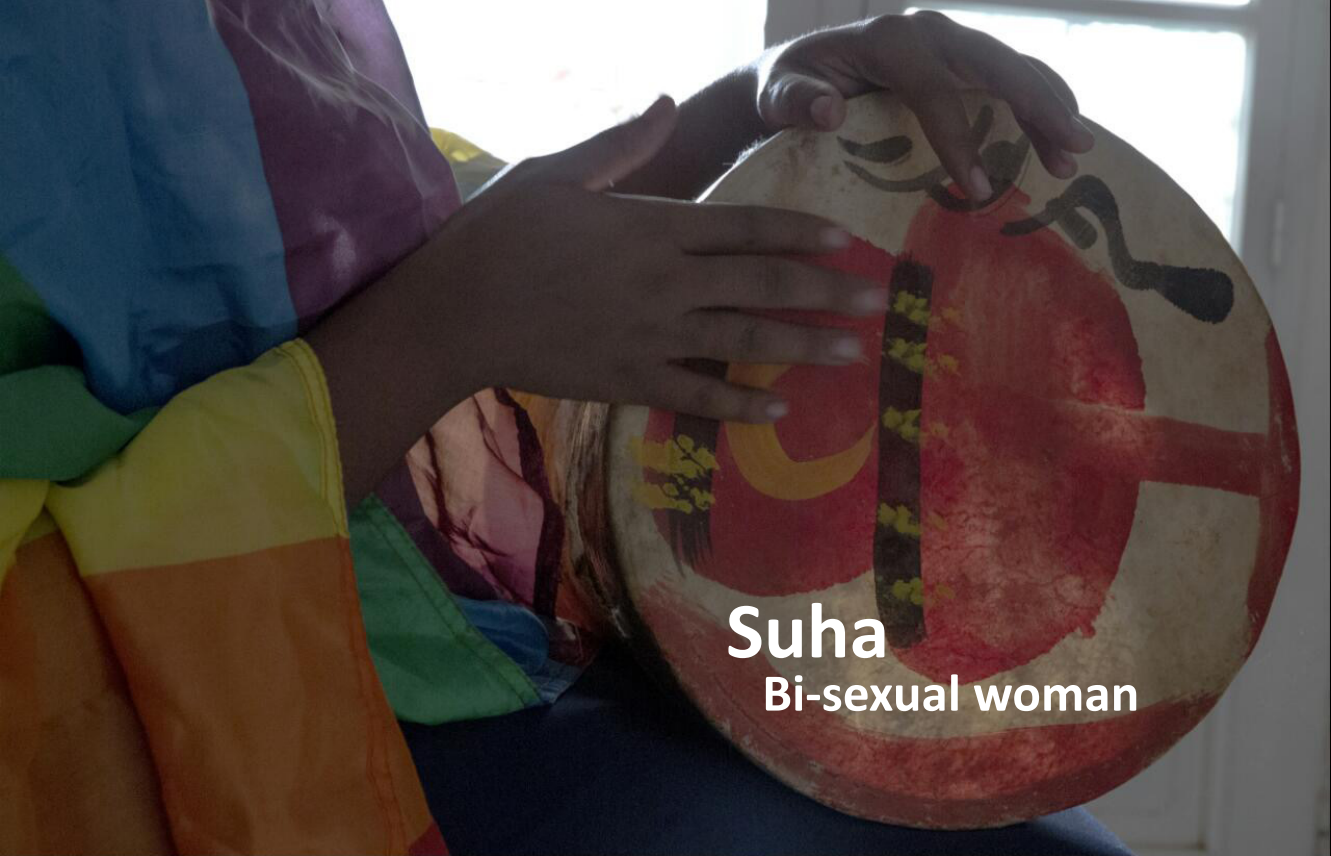


in Sudanese LGBTQ organization since I facilitated a workshop about sexual health for a group of gays with this organization.

Life became extremely unsafe for me in Sudan. That forced me to leave to Europe where I have been working and living for the past three years. Starting over in a new country wasn't easy in the beginning, but I'm very happy about how things turned out. I got back my strength and took the opportunity to open up and be myself; to accept my sexuality and most of all love myself.

Now I know there is nothing wrong with me.; but rather with the society that doesn't accept me!

It's been a privilege to live my life openly! I remember the first time I walked in the gay parade, I put on the same outfit that I have been arrested with in Sudan and marched in the parade with my head up, with no shame nor guilt; away from taboos. Being myself and proud of who I am was an amazing and overwhelming feeling. I dream of the day which will come when the situation changes in Sudan. When we will get our rights and be treated as equal human beings. I dream of a day when I could walk with my people in Khartoum in a gay pride! Walk the walk of pride!



Suha

Bi-sexual woman

I'm Suha, 26 years old Bi-sexual Sudanese girl. I have parents from different nationalities, my Dad is Sudanese but my mom is foreigner and that was always a blessing for me as a kid. I used to travel every year and explore the cultures I come from. We used to live in the country where my mom comes from. For me It was a land of freedom because I always did what I wanted to do without being judged. I never feared to speak my mind which got me into trouble with my family later. When I started high school; I told my parents that I'm confused between choosing a girlfriend or a boyfriend. That day was the day I knew I was a bisexual, furthermore I knew that I can't always speak my mind nor have absolute freedom of choice.

A week later I was sent back to Sudan to be treated by a religious healer who use Quran for exorcism. So I had to carry on my high school over there. I lived with my uncle, who used to take me every weekend to the "Khalwa"¹, where they would keep reading holy verses from Quran over my body and try to treat me from the "Jin"² inside me. They thought it's the "Jin" that wanted to take me to "Jahnam"³.

Since that time I never went back to my mom's country except for vacation. I was always kept away from family events and was never treated equally. They always believed that as long as I like men, I can be back to being a heterosexual again, and practice the normal life of marriage, family and husband. Nonetheless I promised myself, if at point in the future I choose to have a female partner; I shall fight the world to be with her.

- 1- "Khalwa" is the Islamic Teaching School for Kids or adults in Sudan
- 2- "Gin" is the Arabic word for the Evil spirit
- 3- "Jahnam" is the Arabic word for Hell

Ahmed Umar

Queer

I insisted that day to escort my cousin from Khartoum to half way to her home, Bahry Central Station. It was my first time to go to Bahry by public transport.

I was a young, naive 18 years old boy and have been in Sudan for few months only.

-“Hey Ahmed!” Someone shouted enthusiastically!

-“How are you doing, darling, I have missed you a lot!

How are you doing at school? ...How’s Motaz (A close friend of mine) and the other guys?”

In a total shock, I answered; “They are all fine. But excuse me, I don’t know if we know each other from before?”

He then says; “Are you serious Ahmed? how dare you! It’s me: Alsadiq”

-” Sorry Alsadiq, in my whole life, I knew only one person by that name; and that is definitely not you”

- “Seriously, Ahmed! Come on ... shame on you...any way I’m in a hurry now, give me your phone number and I will call you later to explain more”. I felt embarrassed and ashamed of myself that I might have not recognized a friend of mine, so I gave him my phone number.

He called in the evening and began talking like if we knew each other for years. He actually knew many details about my life, when and where I got in or out of the house, who were my friends, and where they lived...etc.

In the course of the conversation he began talking about his admiration for my appearance and my body. He insisted that we should meet, become closer to each other. I was totally



puzzled by the fact that so called “friend” knows all this information about me. Each time I asked him for an explanation; he would tell me that he will say it all when we meet.

I was hesitant and somewhat terrified about meeting someone this way, so I recounted and discussed the incident with one of my cousins; Amjad.

Amjad suggested that I should meet him to know what’s behind this mystery and what are his intentions on condition that the meeting should be at my uncle’s restaurant. Amjad assured me that he will be around in case I needed his assistance or if anything happened. Alsadiq agreed on the phone to meet up at the restaurant.

When we met in front of the restaurant he immediately asked me to ride with him the same “Rickshaw”, but I politely refused. We entered the restaurant and ordered a juice, and before even we drank the half of it, Alsadiq started reaching out and touching my thighs from under table, confessing his love and that he is turned on by me. I shivered from fear, I couldn’t move, and I didn’t know what to do!

At some point I was courageous enough to ask to leave him to go to the toilet. I went directly to Amjad and told him that I am not comfortable with this person, and that he touched my body, and all what he said to me. Amjad was angered by what happened and he said that he will be coming to in a minute, once his hands are free.

I returned to Alsadiq; he looked somehow anxious and about to leave the place. He rushed out of the restaurant tightly holding my hand, then he stopped the first “Rickshaw” in the street and gave the driver my accurate home address!

Amjad was calling me out from the restaurant door but Alsadiq was clutching my hand firmly. I completely did not know how to deal with the situation, I literally felt powerless and I just didn’t know how to confront this person.

When we reached the house; I refused to get out of the ride. He grabbed my hand and forced me inside the house. He then quickly became sexually aroused and rampant, he was trying to kiss me in all parts of my body that I couldn't protect. He forcibly hugged me steadfastly. While I'm pushing him away, we heard some steps coming down from the stairs, we were both afraid, he asked anxiously "where should we go?" I was terrified too so I told him we should go back to the restaurant!

He held my hand again and dragged me out where we found a taxi near the gate. We headed back to the restaurant.

While in the taxi I asked him "Why you are doing all this?" He told me that he loves me, and wants to have sex with me". He said that he was keeping a daily eye on me for over a month and I should get ready for the biggest scandal of my life, if I didn't comply with his requests. Finally, we arrived at the restaurant where I found Amjad anxiously waiting for me. I told him what had happened and what I had faced. Amjad asked me to take Alsadiq outside. When they were both out, they argued loudly. Things have developed so they started to physically fight. While they were fight, a security agent arrived and arrested both of them and they were taken to the police station.

Half an hour later they came and took me arrested me too. When I arrived Alsadiq was under investigation and have been beaten in a very humiliating way. While I stood in the office, the police officer took out Alsadiq's wallet and began on search it. Among the things that he found was more than six identification cards for secondary schools and a group of adolescent boys' passport-size photos.

The officer became agitated therefore kicked Alsadiq very hard with his boot, in his head and face. He ordered him to sit on the ground like a dog! After a few minutes of this ugly scene it was my turn for the hearing. They took Alsadiq to another office. They told me literally" Whatever he wanted to do to you, we will do to him tonight,

this deviant will not sleep tonight"! The investigation with me started quietly, but suddenly turned to chaos, they started to hit and insults me without even giving me the opportunity to complete my briefing. The officer was yelling at me and telling me that "all what happened is because of your naivety and your wired western style and attitude! It is your fault! You are the one who attracts this kind of people and that's why such things happen to you! And he continues asking me "Do you know what is the name of your hairdo?

I replied that I do not know. He answered saying "It's called the Faggot lost his mind" Your hair has to be shaved now!

The policeman came with a scissors and asked me to cut my own hair. I begged the officer to give me the chance to go to the barber but he bluntly refused. And as a punishment for my request, he ordered me to cut only the front line over my forehead!

Under the beatings, I cut my hair, but he was not convinced so he told me to cut it from the roots so I would be a lesson for me and others! After a short time, my legal guardian arrived, my uncle. The officer explained to him the case. I was standing near the door of the office when I heard my uncle, with a low voice, asking the officer; "Give my boy an extra dose, we want him to man-up!".

I was beaten up again, while my uncle is watching and joyfully smiling!

Sally

Lesbian woman

My name is Sally. I am from western Sudan where people get little of education. Their knowledge lies on religious basis, and some of the local cultural heritage. I'm 28 years old, married to a girl. We are raising together a child that I got pregnant with when I was 20 years old. My pregnancy wasn't by intention but I'm happy with my little girl. This pregnancy happened when my family knew about my sexual orientation. They heard that I love and sleep with girls, and to them that was a sin and a disgrace. So, they decided to marry me to my cousin, and when I refused to do so; my cousin got really mad and frustrated. He decided that he won't let it go that easily, and if I wouldn't marry him, he will rape me.

That night my family went out for a wedding party and left me alone at home. I was watching the television, relaxed in my pajama, enjoying my loneliness, which was better than the bitter words I heard from my family every day. Suddenly my cousin; with this scary look, sneaked into the house, dragged me into my parents' bedroom and forcibly raped me.

I was traumatized and in shock until my family came back. When they came back I told them what had happened, they blamed everything on me. They decided to kill me so I had to escape and run to Khartoum. Although I knew no one here; but I started with the little cash I had and the help of friends to work as "a tea lady-seller" while staying at my friend's cousin's house. Two month later I figured out that I was pregnant, I didn't know what to do but all what I was sure of was regardless of what is going to happen, I want to keep the baby, and I did. Days passed and I kept saving until I gave birth, afterwards I found a good job as a maid, which provided a good income for me and my baby. Things kept getting better. Later I worked as a waitress in a good restaurant. Then I became a manager of the same restaurant. I used to work during the day and acquire some time for my daughter at night.

These days I'm happy with being an athlete while studying and working. I'm sure it will make my daughter proud when she grows up.



Amina

Trans sexual Woman

I'm Amina, 30 years old, Sudanese Transsexual woman, I realized I'm different in an early age, and I experienced the discrimination as well.

As we take our steps in maturity, the society pushes us to engage in the Life Set for grown-ups; standing in a gray area is not an option, there is no escape from the confrontation. Coming out of the closet on the personal level, being aware of your gender identity and deeply accepting yourself are very important things, on the other hand coming out to family members and the society comes at great cost.

I got a scholarship to study medicine at a prestigious University, but discrimination and derision of my colleagues; and even my professors, led me to drop out. I was incapable of studying or scoring academic achievement. I met a doctor, a member of the teaching staff in the university, I talked to him about my problem and requested his assistance. Unfortunately, he looked at my case very unfairly, and accused me and people like me of living in a state of delusion imported from the West as a result of deprivation from Islamic teachings!

I was unable to continue my education. I was presented to spiritual healers (sheikhs), some of them tried to harass me. I was unemployed for a while, Then I had to work independently in the free market. At first it was very difficult for me. I had to put up with insults and innuendo of co-workers, and clients' harassment which never came to an end. But I had no choice but to continue.

Over time, I acquired the boldness needed to emphasize on my distinct gender identity. I fought a lot in the medical society, to recognize the problems around Transgender issues. I consider my case a success - even partially- to trans people in the Sudan; for their identity to be accepted by psychiatrists, the recognition of the issue, and the issuance of a medical report, perhaps for the first time ever in Sudan. I started the hormonal treatment to enhance conformity between my appearance and my identity; and as a result verbal and physical assaults against me increased in public places, in restaurants, and transportation. furthermore, I was threatened by male relatives unless I change the course of my life they will forcefully do it.

(of course, I don't like to bring the tribal piece here but I will mention this point because it is relevant) I am from a famous Sudanese tribe- my people are very intractable!

I left Sudan, and I sought refuge in an Arab state while waiting for the resettlement into a safe country.



Khaled

Gay man

I'm Khaled, a gay man from Sudan. Since my early childhood, I knew I was different and of course I had no idea then about homosexuality. Adolescence period was a contradictory stage in my life, I wandered between being religious and experimenting some sexual activities in school as did most of the boys in my age. Of course, this life was full of hypocrisy and duplicity. University years were a turning point in my life, where I started to develop feelings for one of my colleagues, who was heterosexual. I used to study in a university in one of the Arab States. My feeling towards him was accumulating every day. Finally, I faced myself with these

ings and the fact that they are abnormal. I started questioning myself but there were no answers, this was in the 1990s, where the information revolution was not that well-known. I was looking for answers in books and references in order to understand myself, but there was no sufficient information. I was looking for a second opinion, the point view of science. I have decided that I need to find answers even if I have to tell someone else; he was the head of the Department of Psychiatry at the University. I told him my story in his private clinic and his answer was that homosexuality is a mental disease and curable. He asked me if I had any sexual relations, but I denied it. Of course, he advised me to consider reading Quran, commit to prayers, and hold on to religion, etc. Moreover, he prescribed to me several medications; sedatives, sleeping pills, anti-depression pills and sexual inhibitors. Of course, I didn't take any of these medicines because I was convinced that I was not physically ill; all I needed was to speak with a professional; so I have not attempted to contact this doctor again.

As growing up in a religious society, the most pressing question was “What is the opinion of the religion on homosexuality?”. Therefore, I decided to speak to the imam of the mosque in which I used to pray who knew me personally. I told him that one of my friend has sexual desires to the same sex, so he asked the same question; “Did your friend engage in any sexual activities before?”. I didn’t know why it’s so important if he had sex before or not. He said that the opinion of religion is clear on this matter, where the Islamic law “Haad” must be set on him and to be thrown from the highest mountain in the city, but since “The Friend” wants to repent, a proof of his pursuit of knowing the opinion of religion, thus he must continue to practice his religion duties and be in the company of the Islamic fighters “Mujahedeen”. Jihad in Afghanistan was then the trend and martyring in the sake of Allah was of the highest grades.

I used to think about the words of the Imam and the opinion of the religion, “So I must go to Jihad and die in its optimal path or I don’t deserve to live like the rest of all human beings” ... “So why Allah created me with this sexual orientation, if he doesn’t want me to live life?” etc. So many questions were in my mind. I was depressed and unconscious. I lost my sense of the world around me; consequently, I failed at the university and did not care. Those were the most difficult days of my life; I was 18 years old, the need of morals and values within myself collapsed. I met a stranger in those days and I talked to him; he seemed like an experienced person in life. He spoke with me a lot and told me that I’m different and this difference is not a problem. He said, I must accept and love myself. He suggested I should hang out with people like me, so I started to meet gay people and hang in gay places until I developed the sense of belonging to the LGBT community. I felt I’m no longer stranger in this world. I have had friends, loved ones and even enemies. I understood myself better, also I built my character and my experiences with success and failure, but my experience with religion and science has always been the reason behind of my sleepless nights. I grew up and matured, and I started to see the world through my own eyes. I saw gays in Sudan and how wonderful

they are; but they need so many things. So I started to help and advise people around me and pushed them away from what I have suffered before. I helped them to appreciate everything in their lives. I met Sudanese people who have had the experience and the same aspiration to support the LGBT community in Sudan; so we began together to create an entity to represent us.

In my recent years in Sudan, I suffered significant harassment from the authorities, so I had to migrate abroad. Currently, I live in a European country; where I met my soulmate and we have been living together the last 3 years.

A person is walking from left to right in a dimly lit, industrial-style setting. They are wearing dark jeans and sneakers. The background is dark and textured, possibly a wall or a large door. The lighting is low, creating a somber and gritty atmosphere.

Reem

Lesbian Woman

I'm Reem, 24 years old Sudanese lesbian girl. I discovered my sexual orientation in a late period, I have always been attracted to my female friends and even when I was in relationships with boys, I have always had the feeling that there was something missing. I kept those feelings until I was in my third year at the University.

I had a friend, whom I had a good relationship with, but this relationship quickly developed into something else. At the beginning she wanted us to have sex, but after it happened she was shocked and full of the sense of guilt, she decided to make me pay the price, so she told our mutual friends that I sexually harassed her in the students' dorms. She also reported to the Guards at the university.

I was held accountable and as a result I was suspended from the university for one year. The relatives of the girl came to my house to threaten me. I heard them cursing me with bad words. No one wanted to stand on my side. Everyone I knew before broke off their ties with me. I went through a whole year waiting at home. I do not know how I lived, the whole day I was lying down on bed, my face to the wall and I did not speak with anyone. I've thought a lot about hurting myself, especially when my family got upset and were angry because I was suspended from university. After a year, I returned back to the university in the hope that people may have forgotten what had happened. I also returned because I liked so much my field of study; there was no way that I could change it. At first I was exposed to a lot of bullying. Some people stared at me with their looks of disgust, others were laughing sarcastically and many were calling me names such as "Reem Alsaqor"¹. I've lost everyone, but have withstood everything until I completed my studies and graduated.

Last year at the university was in fact a big tragedy. I did not do anything wrong to deserve all this hostility and aggression, especially that what has happened has happened with the consent of both parties. After I graduated, I decided to start my life again, away from everything that had happened previously. I got a job in my field and I have become so busy at work; I couldn't find the time to think or engage in a romantic relationship.

A year later, my manager told me, "I've heard what had happened to you at the university and as a respectable place; we do not accept your presence with us, you represent a real threat and danger to our women employees", that is how I lost my job. This incident made me isolated, I lost confidence in myself. In the period of this introversion, I had the chance to read a lot and I was able to accept myself. I began looking for other people like me and actually found a lot of good people, who have helped me too. Nowadays, my life is semi-stable but I'm still unemployed. Every time I apply for new job, they ask my previous employer; then they find a good excuse not to hire me. So I decided to start a private business and to be my own boss. We, as gays and lesbians, live a very difficult life in Sudan. We face threats from all directions, our families, society and even in the work place.

1- Alsaqor" in Arabic literally means the Falcon, but in the Sudanese slang it means "Dyke or butch lesbian"

Sarah

Lesbian Woman

I'm Sarah, a 26-year-old girl. I grew up all my life in western countries where I had absolute freedom of choice literally in everything I did, starting from the way I dressed, all the way to making up my mind about my sexuality and that was even fine with my parents.

Till the age of 25, I never faced any objections towards my sexuality; neither my manly attitude nor my appearance. Then I moved to Sudan, my homeland. The moment I arrived at the airport I was harassed by the policemen. They were offended by my short hair and tattoos covering all my body. They questioned the fact that I'm really Sudanese.

Later on, after I reached home and became among my family and loved ones I was quite comfortable in my skin until they all started giving me looks of disgust, so I started wondering if there was something wrong with me. Everything was quite fine until one day I invited my girlfriend over at home, like every other girl would bring her friends over. Then my uncle opened the door in a rude way and decided to kick out my friend, simply because he had a bad feeling about us being alone in my room.

He started lecturing me about my attitude and how these western thoughts of "Shezooz"¹ which we don't accept here. Starting from that day I was forced to put on a head scarf and I was never allowed to leave the house unless for work and under the condition that I would come back home before 9pm.

1- "Shezooz" Arabic word for deviance

Ahmed

Gay Man

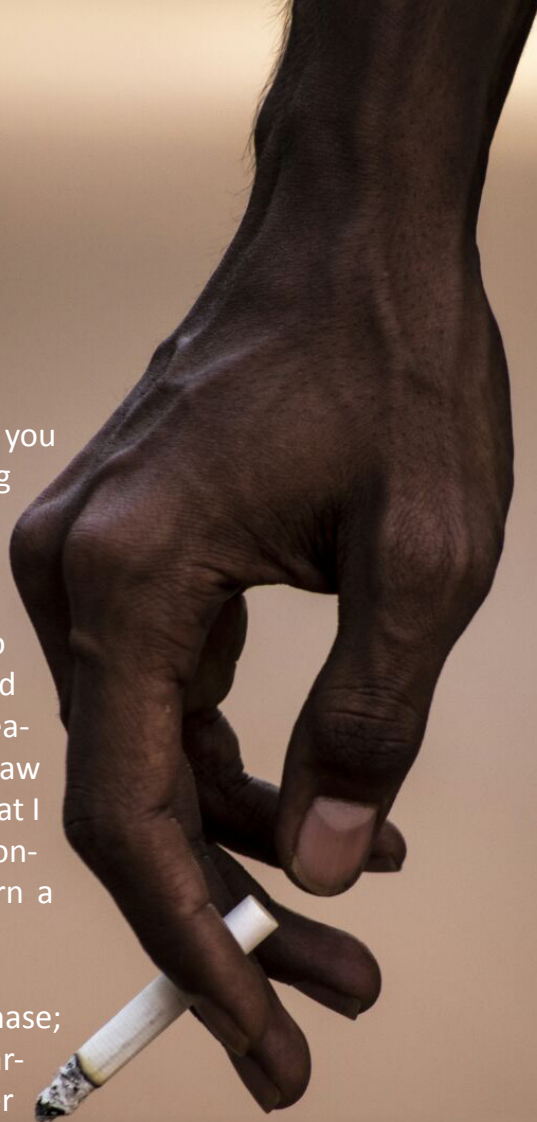
I'm Ahmed, 31 years old gay man. Once you hear my age, you can guess what I'm going through now.

I come from a typical Sudanese conservative family which eagerly wants to see their son married and having kids and their family grow before they die. Their eagerness increased particularly after they saw some conversations and nude pictures that I used to send to guys and that was very concerning for them, but they chose to turn a blind eye on it.

They thought of it as a temporary phase; which will disappear completely after marriage. They were very convinced that after I get married my situation will get better.

When I tried to evade it by making excuses, such as I have to pursue my higher education and work hard to have good income, they got really frustrated, they forced me into getting married to my cousin.

They prepared all the wedding arrangements and I was the last to know and the last to be consulted on anything until my wedding day. That day, I decided I have absolutely no option other than telling my cousin the truth. Thank God, she understood the situation very well, rejected the marriage and put off the wedding plan. However, that wasn't it! I'm still being chased by my family for marriage. I know they're not going to give up, but I also know that I cannot give in to their demands as well as marry a woman because I love men too much.... I'm GAY!



A person is shown from the waist down, wearing a white shirt and a rainbow flag apron. They are holding a long-handled spoon and stirring a pot over a fire. The background is a rough, textured wall.

Osman

Gay Man

I remember how it all started. I was a teenager and we had a wedding at my home. At midnight, while I was walking to the bathroom, I saw the cook kissing his assistant who helped him preparing for the next day meals. That was something I thought about a lot and always wanted to do. Next day, I woke up thinking about how this guy and his assistant were socially accepted regardless of their feminine attitude.

That day all I had in mind was how I can become a cook because I supposed that would be the only way my sexuality would be socially accepted and perceived as normal. Not knowing what exactly was the actual reason behind that acceptance, I grew up with this idea lingering in my mind.

By the age of 25, I finally graduated from university. I decided that it's time for to pursue my dreams of becoming a cook so things would be easier for me. I got into the field and with the help of my partner I was able to receive some wedding and funeral food preparation orders. I was good at it. Also my feminine attitude was socially more accepted, but only in those occasions. My family had no idea about my new career and when they knew, I was disowned from my family. I wasn't allowed to attend any family gatherings, my friends from the neighborhood abandoned me. I was harassed in almost every way whether verbally or physically. I heard hurtful words such as "Battil"¹, and "Lotti"². I was bullied and some of them tried to rape me.

In spite of all these bad things that have happened in my life, but I am grateful that I lived some days in my life where I felt accepted, even if this acceptance was not genuine, but rather a kind of compassion for people like me who represent a minority.

1- "Battil" in Sudanese slang used for calling a person who is very feminine, it is usually used to refer to a person who is sexually impotent.

2- "Lotti" a word used in the Sudanese slang negatively to refer to homosexuals.



Hala

Lesbian Woman

That morning all girls at my work place found red flowers in their desks for Valentine's Day, while I found nothing, as my girlfriend wasn't able of passing by like all the other guys to drop off a gift for me. Not because she wasn't brave but because we have always been hiding at backstage. We always covered in the heterosexual women's sheets.

Now I'm 34 years, but I can't enjoy my freedom and choice of having a family with a girl. I have to keep faking all my moves and words. I have to memorize all my lines in this play that I act.

However, I'm not perfect and sometimes I slip, once it happened in front of my boss at work that was my first job after graduating. I thought things were different at that time because I was a graduated adult woman who can speak

her mind freely and express her feelings especially that the topic was brought to the table. It started with people debating on whether homosexuality is a sin or

not. To my surprise; everyone there was very accepting and spoke positively until I came out to them in an indirect way. Everyone at that table looked at me in disgust and frustration. Fingers were pointed at me and fusillade of questions poured on me.

“How can you be okay with yourself being a sinner?”, “What’s going on your mind girl?”, “You need to stop what you’re doing because that’s gross”, “People like you shouldn’t be alive; they shake the throne of almighty God”, etc. Others just walked away. That was very shocking! I couldn’t believe how all those who spoke positively a minute ago; who were just supportive and accepting, became all of the sudden against the issue! What really happened? ... That what I couldn’t understand.

That night, I went home learning not to trust anyone no matter how accepting they are, no matter how supportive they act. It is better to stay always in the closet.

Next morning, I went to work as if nothing happened. The moment I came in I was summoned by my boss. He took me to a corner in his office and whispered in my ear saying, “You need to be treated by a psychiatrist. I’m sorry but we have no place for mentally ill people here in our office. The only place for you is the hospital”. I walked out not knowing where to go but I knew one thing that this is how I was born and it’s not a mental disorder. It’s just me ... I’m a lesbian!

Farah

Bisexual Man

I'm Farah, I'm 20 years old bisexual Sudanese guy. I was 8 years, when I noticed that I focus in my teacher's dick prints and curves sexually and I imitated movies with my friends in the classroom. I kept doing this thing for a period of time; not understanding the nature of this feeling. When I was in high school, I had a hard time accepting myself. I was in a severe state of denial. I tried to enter into relationships with many girls just to prove that I'm "straight", but these relationships with the girls were always incomplete, each time I see a man I feel I'm attracted to him. I felt that I must have both girlfriend and boyfriend to fulfil my sense of a full relationship. I finished school and in the vacation before I started my first semester in university, I had a sexual experience with a boy.

This experience made me look for answers to many questions in my head and after a great effort and diligent reading and thinking, I accepted my sexuality.

I'm an artist, I play Guitar and I sing, my attitude is little bit feminine. Once, I uploaded a recording of a song on Facebook, where my face appeared. The comments were very negative that I was intimidated, "Who is this?", "What is wrong with you boy? Man up!", "Aren't you ashamed of yourself looking like girls?" ... etc. Then some people began to send me threatening messages, "If I see you, I will not have mercy on you", "Where is your family?", "Man up! You are a disgrace to manhood.", "Is it because you have been raised by women? If that the reason, then you will need me to straighten up!". This video reached more than 1,000 Sudanese persons. I had 1500 friend on Facebook, but on the next day I found that I have 400 friends only.

I had to unfriend a lot of people because of bullying, then I struggled to reveal my face in my songs. I downloaded songs in pages of close friends; without a name or face. At the moment, I stopped completely singing and playing guitar; the thing that I love the most because my identity is unacceptable and because the Sudanese society does not accept a feminine man.



Safa

Lesbian Woman

I'm an athlete, muscular, strong and furious. I ride a horse like a warrior and swim in water like a fish. My sexuality has not been an obstacle for me in my sports field, but when it comes to my social life and my surroundings, being a lesbian has always been a great deal to whoever would know about it. I'm sick of being celebrated every day and still feel the pain, when I'm alone in bed. I can't celebrate my real self yet. The fear of the society made me build these double lives that I can't maintain any longer.

I spoke to my best friend about it before. I thought he would be the most understanding and supportive person in my life, since he always held my back, but to my surprise, he broke the bone of trust. He made a scene out of my sexuality and tried in all possible ways to break me down.

He spread the news and brought hate into my life, almost everyone that I was around turned out to be homophobic. All those who knew me, started hitting on me and making fun of me. Those who tried to support me, in their own way; they took me to a psychiatric for mental counseling, as if I might be treated from the mental disease I have.

I was weak to face all these people. I thought of taking my life, but again I was too weak to kill the only living thing I love and proud of. It took me a while to overcome this suffering. I found real supporters and became more comfortable. I finally can celebrate my achievements with absolute happiness.

A close-up photograph of a person's arms, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, holding a small object with colorful threads (red, yellow, green, blue) attached to it. The person is also wearing a black wristband on their left wrist. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light beige color.

Huda

Sudanese Bisexual

That evening I was playing with my little daughter this game, where you have to choose a lover or a partner to help you throughout the game. I remember her asking me “Mom, would you prefer to have a guy or a girl to be your lover?”.

That question brought lots of memories to my head, back when I graduated from university and like every other girl the next step was marriage. I wasn’t given the option to choose. I had feelings for my mate at the university and she felt the same way about me, but Sudan is not the right place where we can end up together. We both knew that and that’s why we kept it discreet. We cared and loved each other so much and yes we had feelings for men as well, but at that period we fell in love with each other and wanted to carry on this love.

Days have passed and we both weren’t thinking of marriage because we preferred each other’s company. Until one day my aunt caught us kissing and told my mom.

I was in my room later in the day, my mom opened the door and said one thing “Your cousin and his family are coming over next week and you are getting married to him”. She closed the door and walked away. I was listening to her steps, while all what I could think of was my girlfriend.

Three month later, I was a bride to a man whom I haven’t chosen and away from a girl that I have always loved. My problem wasn’t the fact that I got married to a man, but it was that I had no choice in my future and my life partner.

I’m now 43 years old and I’m still attracted to both women and men.