**Transcript–– Gender Reveal Season 12, Episode 161: Lamya H**

Tuck: Cisnormative sex shops suck. Trans-owned Aphrodisia Boutique is different. They stock body-safe sex toys and lingerie for all genders, as well as packers and binders, breast forms and gaff panties, and books on sex, gender, and relationships. Shop online at aphrodisia.boutique and use the offer code GENDERREVEAL for 15 percent off your order, or visit their store in Port Orchard, Washington.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

Tuck: Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I'm your host and resident gender detective, Tuck Woodstock.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

Tuck: Hey everyone, hope you've all been hangin' in there. Welcome to this new 12th season of Gender Reveal. We've been publishing episodes for six years as of last week. I for one am just happy to still be here, so thank you to all of you for joining us today and always. This week on the show, I am very excited to share my conversation with Lamya H, the pseudonymous author of the memoir *Hijab Butch Blues*. I learned so much from Lamya and it was such a treat to talk with them about finding euphoria in her religious practice and queer themes in the Quran.

Lamya: A text is a text, and is always open for interpretation, and it's open to be claimed.

Tuck: As well as pinkwashing, parenthood, anonymity, accountability, and [dramatic pause] underrated subway stations. But before we get to all that, I just wanna mention quickly we've got three Palestinian solidarity designs in the merch shop right now. All proceeds on all of those benefit either the eSims for Gaza project, or the Middle Eastern Children's Alliance, which supports Palestinian children and refugees. And then separately from that, we also restocked the trains flag design, because RuPaul wore a little train conductor uniform on his TV show last week, and I took the bait. So, find all of that through the end of the month at bit.ly/gendermerch. And now, it's time for This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender segment chime theme music plays]

Tuck: We've got a very special This Week in Gender segment for you today. Former Gender Reveal guest Dakota Hommes has produced her own interview segment about union negotiations and trans healthcare, and I'm so excited to share it here, so I'll let Dakota take it away.

Dakota: This Week in Gender, a library union in Missouri has won their first contract, which includes a protection for trans healthcare. I'm Dakota Hommes. You may have heard me on a previous episode of Gender Reveal – Episode 133B – in which I told how a small group of trans people led the effort to organize Daniel Boone Regional Library Workers United, the first library workers union in the state of Missouri. Recently, on December 12th, after 14 months of bargaining, the union voted to ratify the first contract with the library. The contract includes language that protects workers’ access to gender-affirming care, by requiring the library to show preference to insurance plans that include trans healthcare. It is an historic win for a union contract, and especially for Missouri. To find out more about this trans union win, I talk to library worker, organizer, and my best friend – Tori.

Dakota: Hi Tori.

Tori: Hi Dakota.

Dakota: So – I was there for the first four-ish months of bargaining this contract, but in total it took 14 months. What has it been like negotiating this contract, and what took so long?

Tori: It's been hard, but really fulfilling also to be part of something that has been historic and groundbreaking in a state like Missouri, that is hostile to library workers, workers in general, and trans people. And we made significant headway for all of those demographics in one contract. That is part of why it took so long. We weren't willing to make certain compromises – like for trans healthcare – because we knew what was at stake in this state. While we were negotiating the contract, the attorney general did attempt to pass a full ban on trans healthcare. There was also threats against library funding, and so the bigger picture in the state was constantly on my mind. And it was more than just what was happening in our workplace, it was the rights and livelihoods of library workers and trans people all over the state that could be impacted by the conversations that we were having at the bargaining table. It was a lot of pressure, but I think that we did something really important.

Dakota: What is the language in the contract about trans healthcare, and how did you get it into the contract?

Tori: Oh, it took the entire 14 months. When we originally proposed it, as you'll remember, we were told that it was basically impossible that the library could, as an employer, give preference to trans employees in health insurance plans. Over the 14 months, we talked about the challenges of accessing health insurance in mid-Missouri. Literally what plans are available when we were writing the language about giving preference to plans that don't require this documentation or plans that don't consider trans healthcare cosmetic, non-medically necessary. It was said that this wouldn't be in an insurance plan, no insurance plan would ever say that something as important as gender-affirming care could be non-medically necessary. And then we, the trans people on the bargaining team, had to spell out how difficult it is to access whether it be hormones or surgery, and even share personal stories at the bargaining table which is such a frankly inappropriate time to have to share your transition experience just to get your employer to understand something like that. Abolish private insurance.

Dakota: Yeah, I remember at the beginning they were just saying like “none of the insurance plans we're looking at have included this, so it doesn't matter.”

Tori: And it was a big learning curve, I think, for our entire bargaining team to start reading insurance language, and understanding the challenges that we have with private healthcare and the limitations that employers do have with private healthcare in choosing their plans, and that what it really comes down to is that if they're choosing between Plan A and Plan B, and Plan A is transphobic and Plan B is not, we're just asking them to choose Plan B instead. Unfortunately, in America, with our state of healthcare, that really is the situation that we're in. We have limited options and we're just asking our employer not to discriminate against us when choosing health insurance. It was a 14 month battle to ask them not to discriminate against us, and it was not easy to sit at the table as a trans person and hear our employer say that that was not something that they were willing to do. And I'm still a little in disbelief that what it came down to was changing a couple of words in one sentence. Just as long as plans are equivalent in cost and coverage, they're willing to do it. Before that, it was just such a stalemate.

Dakota: So, the language is effectively the same, you just moved it. Like, change some words.

Tori: I cannot emphasize enough: all we did was rearrange the words in the first sentence. If all plans offered are equivalent in cost, coverage, and quality and then they were like “oh, we can agree to this now.” My livelihood depended on the order of words in one sentence.

Dakota: After union members unanimously voted “yes” on this contract, all that was left was for the library board to approve the tentative agreement as well. Instead, on December 14th, they rejected it. Actually, instead of voting on what the library and the union had already agreed to at the bargaining table, they voted “yes” on their own new proposal, which would require wage negotiations to re-open every year that the library's property tax income increase was below average. This was incredibly deceptive, as their “yes” votes were actually “no’s.” The library had rejected their own wage proposal that was agreed to at the table. Worst of all, the window to enroll in healthcare was closing in only seven days. Workers still did not know what their wages or insurance would be in 2024, while the library administration used their workers’ healthcare as leverage to get them to accept a bad deal. In an emergency bargaining session held on Sunday the 17th, the union rejected the board’s proposal, and requested that they actually vote on the agreement made at the table. Then on the 19th, the board voted “yes” on the original agreement. Thanks to the union’s efforts, health insurance was saved, and the first library union contract was finally, finally won. I'll let Tori have the last word. Here they are with a suggestion.

Tori: Unionize your workplace. It sounds like a lot of work– it is a lot of work – but it starts pretty simple. You just have conversations with your coworkers about your working conditions, like “what do you think?”, or “how much money do you make?”, or “here's how much money I make.” This has probably been one of the greatest experiences of my life. I've met my best friends through this process. I'm talking to one right now. So yeah, unionize your workplace. It really is one of the ways that we are going to get better protections as trans people at work. It is *the* way.

Tuck: You can find Dakota on TikTok at dakota.danger, and on this very podcast. This has been This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender segment chime theme music plays]

Tuck: We've got a TheyMail message for you today. TheyMails are of course little messages from listeners. There's a link in the show notes for you to submit your own. This message is from the author Luke Dani Blue, and it says:

For over a decade, Luke Dani Blue has been reading astrology charts for the trans and our fans. Book a one-on-one session to explore the mystery and meaning of your path through love, career, creativity, grief, health, and change. Multiple price points and gift certificates available. Book yours at seagoatastrology.com. That's s-e-a goat astrology dot com.

Tuck: OK, give me 30 more seconds to play this little ad for you, and then I promise we will get to the interview, ad-free the rest of the way. Here we go:

[Ambient music plays]

Believe it or not, I'm a pretty private person. I don't like to share intimate details with people I just met, and I certainly don't want strangers to be able to look up my home address or my family members’ names, or any other personal info really. And that's why I continue to use DeleteMe. DeleteMe routinely scans hundreds of data broker websites to make sure that my personal information is not easily available online. DeleteMe can also scrub info tied to deadnames and other aliases. You can join today at joindeleteme.com/genderreveal, and use the code TUCK20 to get 20 percent off your entire order. That is TUCK20 for 20 percent off at joindeleteme.com/genderreveal.

[Ambient music ends]

[Gender Reveal theme music by Breakmaster Cylinder plays]

Tuck: Lamya H is a nonbinary queer Muslim writer, whose memoir *Hijab Butch Blues* won the Brooklyn Library Book Prize, and has been featured on NPR, New York Times, Roxanne Gay's Audacious Book Club, and others. A Lambda Literary and Queer Arts Mentorship fellow, they live in New York, the best city in the world.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays out and ends]

Tuck: The way we always start the show is by asking: in terms of gender, how do you describe yourself?

Lamya: I really like words. I'm a writer, and there are words that just have stayed with me, and there are words that I have tried on and discarded. But the ones that are working for me right now are “nonbinary,” I’m old so I really like “genderqueer,” which has fallen out of fashion a little bit, but it's one that is so dear to my heart because I love the expansiveness and genderfuckery that's inherent in that word. And then I really like words that have a heft and an historic weight to them, so I really like the word “butch.” Those are the ones that are working for me right now.

Tuck: Great. You described yourself at some point last year as “trans-adjacent.” Why adjacent?

Lamya: Oh wow, OK. So this is gonna get really deep, really fast.

Tuck: Perfect.

Lamya: But I don't know, I think that sometimes I worry that because I wear a hijab, there isn't a material way that I'm read as trans. Which I know is something that people have actually been resisting with words like nonbinary, because what does it actually mean to be read as something or not, or pass or not? So yeah, I mean, I think my use of “adjacent” is playing into that, and it's something that is, I think, part of my journey. That I'm still figuring out which words work for me, and which words don't, and I know that not all nonbinary people identify as trans. And I'm still figuring out where I fit in terms of that. Does that answer your question?

Tuck: Yeah. I am interested in this though cause it sounds like it's more about how people are seeing you than about the gender that you're actually experiencing, if your one caveat that I'm hearing from you is because you're wearing hijab, people might see you a certain way, instead of like “that makes me feel a certain way.” But I'm also interested because I think you said at one point in your book that someone mistook you for a man or a boy while wearing hijab and I was just like, “what?” That was confusing separately.

Lamya: Yeah. I mean, it was confusing to me too, but in this way that's felt like “oh interesting, what are they seeing?” And this is a thing that has happened to me a lot, actually, surprisingly. Sometimes it’ll be when I have my hood up – I'll be wearing a sweatshirt and I have a hoodie, and someone will be like “oh, sir” and I'll be like “OK.” But it has actually happened to me as I'm wearing hijab too. This one time, I held the door open for someone and they were like “thank you, sir,” almost as a tic. As if they expect the people that are opening doors for them to be gendered sir in some ways, which I also thought was really interesting to me. It's also been this process of telling myself that just because I don't come off a certain way, or not read a certain way, doesn't mean that I can't feel a certain way. It's been a really interesting journey, and actually what's been really interesting is I have a kid. I have a 1 1/2 year-old who is just a ball of energy. But what's been really cool about having a kid is that it almost forces you to figure out some things for yourself, or it becomes this impetus to really think through things. So for example, I really like being called “baba,” which is “dad” in Arabic and Urdu, which are the two other languages that I have access to. But is also a word that is being reclaimed in certain ways and in more gender neutral ways in queer circles. So between that, and the fact that I don't identify with the term “mother” at all, and that I constantly have to keep reminding people that like “I'm a parent, I’m a parent, don't call me a mother.” I feel like that has also really helped in terms of me really stepping into my identity and feeling a little bit more like I can ask people to gender me in ways that are important to me, as opposed to defaulting to things out of convenience. Does that make sense?

Tuck: Yeah, absolutely. How do you approach gendering your baby?

Lamya: Oh, that is such a good question, and one that me and my partner have gone back-and-forth on so many times. It's hard because I also think of nonbinary as a gender and I think that like just using “she” or “he” are charged, I feel like “they” is also charged. And so to me, what's more important is that my baby have the ability to be around people who are gender-expansive, enby, and treated in ways that are gender-expansive. So for example, we don't correct people when they use whatever pronouns for my baby. We dress her in pretty gender-neutral ways. We mostly use she/her pronouns for her, but that's out of convenience more than anything else. But my goal is for her to really be able to come into herself and for us to constantly be exposing her to things and asking her what feels good and right for her and and being safe spaces for her to explore gender in ways that feel playful and not constricting.

Tuck: Hmmm. So much of your book and your writing is about the way that you compartmentalize different parts of your identity in different parts of your life. And learning you had a baby made me wonder, just on a person-to-person level, how that disrupted your ability to compartmentalize your personal life with your work life with your public life with your religious practice, and the people that you know through that. It just seems like it would be so much more challenging when you have to explain a baby? [laughs]

Lamya: That’s a great question. So first of all, having a baby is totally fucking overwhelming and no one tells you that, and no one also tells you that other parts of your life have to take a backseat while you're raising a baby. I’m sleep-deprived and totally overwhelmed, so part of it is that I haven't had to deal with some of those things, so the answer to your question, Tuck, is that more will be revealed. [Tuck laughs] But yeah, I mean it's definitely forced me to uncompartmentalize some things, and also draw further boundaries around myself, if that makes sense? I feel so protective of my baby, and I feel so protective of the way that she experiences the world in terms of homophobia and Islamophobia. And so in certain ways, I've had to be like “OK, this is what I'm OK with exposing her to, and this is what it is really important for me for her to not experience.” At least until she's old enough to really have words around feelings, and really be able to talk about things and contextualize them. So it's been a really interesting combination of choosing what's important to me, and then also letting go of some things.

Tuck: I wanted to circle back to the gender of it all, because you said something in Electric Lit that I thought was so interesting. Which is that being able to use the word “nonbinary” for God let you give yourself permission to use that word for yourself, and I just thought it was so powerful. To me it seems much more intense to assign a word to God than assign a word to myself, so I was just wondering if you could talk about that and your experience with that.

Lamya: Yeah, so the way that the characteristics of God work in Islam is that there's this idea that God has these 99 names, and the 99 names are all characteristics. Like the most kind, or the most merciful, or the opener parts. And these just really, really beautiful, expansive ideas. And to me, those have always felt aspirational just as a person I'm never gonna be able to achieve those things, right? I'm never gonna be the person who's the most kind, or the most merciful, but to me those characteristics have always also felt like something that as a person I want to emulate and aspire to. I want to be someone who’s kind, and I want to be someone who’s caring, and loving, and all of these other named characteristics of God. So to me, thinking of God as nonbinary – it's really interesting that that is something that has really upset a lot of people about my book. Because to me, that's the way that God is talked about, was talked about throughout my entire childhood. God has no gender, God is not a man or a woman. So to me, being able to use that word for God felt a little bit like I could claim it for my own self. Because this thing that felt aspirational, or something that I didn't quite have permission – which is also fucked up, right? Permission from who? Who gives you permission to identify a certain way or not? But that idea of God is the ultimate being that is nonbinary and beyond gender and trans in this gorgeous, beautiful, glorious way, made me feel like I can lay claim to those things too, because I don't have to be this perfect version of those words. I can claim those words for what I am and for my identity because it feels good, and it feels like something that is both aspirational and achievable, and can take whatever form it is for me.

Tuck: That's so beautiful, thank you for sharing. Very, very related: I was speaking with a friend of mine who is also queer, and nonbinary, and Muslim, and they said that the Quran is "full of concepts that are essential to queerness.” And I was wondering if that is something that resonated with you?

Lamya: Yeah, 100 percent. I mean, the first chapter of my book is about seeing myself as a dyke through the story of Maryam, also known as the Virgin Mary. And the story goes that this beautiful man angel came to her as she was in seclusion, and this beautiful man angel comes to her to tell her that she's pregnant with Jesus. She doesn't want him to come in, and she doesn't want to hear what he says, and she has no interest in him. And at 14, I remember reading that and being like “whoa, there are people like this in the world, and not just in the world in the Quran, too?” And I totally agree, I think the Quran has all of these concepts that are really beautiful and queer. I think about Moses for example, Musa in the Quran, who the first time that Moses/Musa talks to God, God tells him to go overthrow the pharaoh. And Moses is scared, and he expresses that, and he says “hey God, can I take my brother?” There's something about that idea of playing with what a nontoxic masculinity that asks for help and admits about being scared and nervous and anxious for so many of these moments, that feels so expansive. I know other people have also written about this, but it feels strange to me almost that it's not more mainstream that there are all of these beautiful, subversive moments in the Quran that lend themselves to queerness.

Tuck: Yeah! I mean, reading your book and having your book being one of my first exposures to these stories in general, just because I’m not super informed on any of the Abrahamic religions – you're making a very compelling case. To me, I'm like “yeah of course, why wouldn’t anyone believe this?” [Both laugh] But there are also people reading your book who obviously are very familiar with these concepts and particularly I'm sure tons of queer and trans Muslim readers are enjoying this. What do you think this book is offering queer and trans Muslims who are already thinking about these concepts a lot?

Lamya: Wow, that's a really, really, really, good question. I think that it offers the chance to be in conversation with the text of the Quran and it's really interesting because some of these stories and some of these interpretations I came to in conversation with my queer and trans Muslim friends. So the story of the whale, for example. Yunus, who was swallowed by a whale -- also known as Jonah -- and I really came to that realization with one of my friends. I'm having an argument with one of my friends about that story and I've always thought about the whale as punishment for Jonah, but my friend was really adamant that it's protection. And so to me a lot of these interpretations were born out of conversations with my queer and trans Muslim friends, so I hope it gives queer and trans Muslims the opportunity to have similar conversations and to also think about the text in these particular ways. And personally I would love to be in conversation with other people as well who are thinking about these things. And so one of the things that's been really lovely is getting messages from other queer and trans Muslims with whom the book really resonated, and hearing their interpretations of things, or stories that have sat with them for a really long time, and stories that they found solace in. So this is a way to say that I hope it contributes to a conversation that is already happening and offers different explanations and solace and is a reminder of the expansiveness of text. A text is a text, and is always open for interpretation, and it's open to be claimed in some ways. And I hope people feel like they can do that, not just with the Quran, but with other texts too.

Tuck: This is a very silly question, but I know that this book, as you mentioned, is starting conversations, continuing conversations in queer and trans Muslim circles. Has anyone ever tried to discuss your work or gossip about your work to you not knowing that it was you?

Lamya: Oh my God, yes! OK, so a close friend sent me my book on Instagram being like “hey have you seen this book, it looks so interesting and totally up your alley” and then I was like “oh hi, yeah I actually wrote it.” [Tuck laughs] Totally made my day, 100 percent day made. Because it also felt like, OK, so she learned about it from a totally different source and brought it back to me” – you know what I mean? That full circle-ness of it. It was my first moment of like “oh, OK I wrote this thing that's out in the world, and not only is it out in the world, but it's also spreading enough to come back to me in ways that didn't originate from me.” So it was this really powerful, cool moment. Almost as good as the time that someone told me that they talked to their therapist about my book. I was like, “I have it made.” [Tuck laughs] This counts as a resounding success in my mind.

Tuck: No, absolutely. I'm glad that the person that this happened with was someone that you could say like “I wrote it” and you didn't have to be like “yeah, sounds interesting, I’ll check it out.” But you said in the past that a lot of people in your life – in your community – know that you wrote this book, so it still feels like you're accountable. And I was just wondering if you could talk more about ways that you think about accountability, and context of public anonymity.

Lamya: There are various levels that you have to really think about accountability when you're writing a memoir, and one of them is how you portray people in your life. Which in some ways was easier for me because I was writing it anonymously, and so the people that I was writing about weren't under any version of their names. Even in the acknowledgments, people are not listed by their names, they’re only listed by their initials. And so, I felt grateful for that level, but I did have everyone who is in the book read it and let me know if there was anything that they wanted changed, or if there was anything that didn't jive with them. I mean, I think that there's so many levels of accountability when you're writing a book – and especially a memoir – not just to the people that you're writing about, but the circumstances. And it's so funny, because memory is such a slippery thing, which is partially why I wrote this book out of order. Because memory is so fragmented, and it's not linear, and there's certain things that you're never going to be able to remember, like dialogue. And people forget that, the reader forgets that – I mean in the best books I think the reader somewhat forgets that and has a feeling of being in the moment. But yeah, I think what has really helped with the accountability is having a community of friends and people in my life who I know will tell me if I'm doing something fucked up. Which honestly is one of the biggest blessings of community, and queer community in particular, is yeah this idea that you build a circle around you that will hold you accountable, and that will call you out, or gonna gently call you in when you're doing something that is fucked up. I also really appreciated the people who read it who had strong backgrounds in Muslim texts, scriptures. I really wanted to write something that would feel accessible to folks and that people wouldn’t be turned away by. One example of this is actually the title. The title of the book was originally going to be *Maryam is a Dyke*, from this moment that I had when I was 14 when I really felt this kinship with Maryam. And I still have this huge love for that title, because I love how unapologetic it is, and I love the word “dyke” because of some of the things I talked about earlier – it has a historical heft to it. But I had people read the book, I talked to folks about the title, and some of the people that I talked to who are more traditional Muslims were like “yeah I wouldn't give this book to a lot of my friends because they would be so defensive about the title.” And they read the chapter when I told them where the title was coming from, and then they were like “oh OK, I totally see why this works,” but it still felt to them like a barrier for other folks to get into the book. So I ended up changing the title to one that I actually really, really adore. I think Leslie Feinberg is a fucking literary hero, and *Stone Butch Blues* when I read it in my 20s really, really changed how I thought about writing. But yeah, it was really interesting to hear about the title from other folks and just be held accountable to what the title was doing.

Tuck: Yeah. Speaking of community, you talk a lot about how finding community has really changed your life, and you said in one interview that finding community taught you so much about organizing, conflict, and how to be in community with people that you wouldn't necessarily choose as your friends. Can you talk a little bit more about that distinction, and what you have learned being in community with people who you wouldn't necessarily choose as friends?

Lamya: I think sometimes and especially as queer and trans folks, I think we have a tendency to surround ourselves with people who are like us and who have opinions and lives that are like us. And to me, that totally makes sense. It's a protective measure. It's so hard to be around people who are attacking who you are, or even if they're not doing it directly, are just disapproving, or making snide comments, or being passive-aggressive. And I don't know, everyone has different relationships to their family, but there's some ways in which there are people that you have to be surrounded by that do all of those things that it's hard to choose to be around folks who are doing things like that. So to me, it's actually really important to be around people that I wouldn't necessarily choose as my friends, or even people that I don't get along with super well with or dislike, because sometimes people bring so much richness to your life in other ways. And again, I'm not talking about people who deny your existence or are just making you feel shitty on a regular basis. I mean more just in terms of as I was growing up, I was around a lot of people who I didn't necessarily like just cause I didn't choose to be around them, but was forced to be around them because of school or whatever. And I think that really taught me a lot of things, like how to disagree in ways that are kind, how to have conflict. And I'm not saying I'm a pro at any of these things – I'm still a very chaotic fighter – but there's this way in which I really appreciate being in community with folks who are not the same age as me, not the same class as me, and not the same race as me. People that I can learn from, and who’re not necessarily people that I jive with on a personality level, but who still teach me a lot. Honestly one of the most beautiful communities that I've been in is the queer Muslim community that was really around I would say in the early 2010s, that has since dissolved for various reasons, but it was just an incredible community of folks that were all ages. I was in my 20s at that point, and there were folks with kids, folks in their 50s and 60s. Folks who had really lived through different eras where queerness and transness worked very differently. And they weren't necessarily people that I would be friends with, or seek out or hang out with on a regular basis, but being in community with them and being able to learn from them just really, really brought a richness to my life. And that's something that I want in my life, and it's something that I want in my baby’s life too: for her to be around people who have experienced life differently and who she can learn from and vice versa.

Tuck: One more question about gender and religion in the book. You talk in your book about having gender euphoria when praying in a space not segregated by gender for the first time. I was wondering if there were other moments when your gender and your religious practice and beliefs have informed and inspired each other.

Lamya: One thing that comes to mind is I led prayer a few years ago in a mixed gendered setting and it was really incredible and really, really powerful. It's something that I had done before, but in women's-only spaces, or in school, like an all-girls’ school. But there's something about praying next to someone, especially communally that feels really, really powerful. And to be able to do that for a group of like 30 people at the queer Muslim retreat a few years ago was a really, really incredible experience, and it felt like this moment of gender euphoria through something that I had only seen men do growing up. It felt good and it felt right.

Tuck: Amazing. Your social media handles across platforms is “lamyaisangry.” There's obviously so much to be angry about, but why was it important to you to make anger your personal brand to the point that it is in your social media handles?

Lamya: I mean, it’s the reason why I started writing. I mean, the reason that I started writing is because I would tell these stories of times that I was really angry at the world, and something would've happened, and I would be upset, and then I’d tell people. And the act of telling the story was cathartic in some ways. Until my friend pointed out to me that the anger dissipates when you tell a story, and if you don't do anything with it, it just dissipates into the ether and nothing happens, nothing changes. And she was like “oh, you should write” and I was like “I guess this is a thing that I can try.” It was also someone that I loved and respected so much that I was like “OK, I'll take your suggestion,” and yeah so I started writing. It felt like a way to channel the anger into something, and I'm not gonna pretend that writing changes the world – although it doesn't *not* change the world. But there's this way in which the anger really guided my writing and motivated my writing. So when I first made my social media handles, it felt natural to use “lamyaisangry,” because a lot of the things that I would post about were things that I was angry about. Sometimes it feels like anger is seen as this really negative thing, and I know for some people it can be – it can be blinding and it can take over in some ways. But to me, it's always been something that's motivating. To me, anger is a sign that something is wrong, and that I should be thinking about it, and working out what feels wrong and what is making me angry, and then how do I fix that. So it’s a big part of my life, and it's something that I've worked on channeling and it's a big part of how I interact with the world in a positive way.

Tuck: Well, speaking of things to be angry about, I am curious what your experience has been like these past few months obviously there's this ongoing genocide. I am specifically interested in your experience as someone who put out this book about being queer and trans and Muslim at a time where so much of the Zionist rhetoric is focused on how it's silly for queer and trans people to be anti-Zionist and pro-Palestine because it is such a bad place in Palestine for queer and trans people, how could you possibly support them? And it's just been so frustrating to see those misguided statements being made in the middle of a genocide, but since you have such a close relation to that specific topic, I was just wondering what that has been like for you to see?

Lamya: Yeah, I mean it's been enraging, talk about anger. It's felt like this really fucked up way to instrumentalize queerness queer Muslimness/queer Arabness in ways that feel decidedly racist and xenophobic. And not just that, but that are actively contributing to the occupation and the genocide of Palestinians. It's felt really, really, really deeply enraging. But I've also been really heartened to see so much organizing happening around pinkwashing, which is the name that people have been using for what Israel does in terms of LGBTQ rights, and how it positions itself as a haven for queer folks while also carpet bombing Gaza. One of the things that I've been recently really energized by is that a lot of queer Muslim organizations have been calling for mainstream LGBTQ organizations to make statements about Palestine or to take a stand, and really targeting organizations that are big, like GLAAD, HRC, etc. It's been really powerful to see the ways that those are called out. There was a queer Muslim Jummah, Friday prayer, at Stonewall a few weeks ago, which was again resisting the idea of pinkwashing and really grounding the importance of solidarity of queer and queer Muslim solidarity with queer Palestinians who are experiencing oppression and marginalization on so many levels but mostly from Israel. So yeah, it's felt both enraging and heartening, and one of the things that I keep coming back to over and over is the idea that we're not freeing Palestine, Palestine is freeing us. What is it helping us clarify? What is it helping us crystallize? How are the ways in which organizing around things like pinkwashing and the occupation are helping us build community and build networks for a different world?

Tuck: Yeah, and it's also clarifying in what you said, which is like you're seeing who you can trust and who you can’t trust, and I’ve been really struck by the number of queer and trans people who are really stepping up…

Lamya: Yeah.

Tuck: …and the number of queer and trans organizations that are being *so* disappointing, and it's not that they haven't been disappointing in the past. It's not like anyone was like “the HRC is really here for us,” but… [laughs]

Lamya: Right right right, yeah.

Tuck: …it’s still, I think, really clarifying to see.

Lamya: Yeah! But it's also really interesting because we've known about some of these things. I think about the LGBTQ center all the time, and the way in which it shut down a lot of Palestinian talks and panels, and they basically had a moratorium on talking about Palestine for two years. So we've known a lot about this, we've known about the mainstream queer organizations that have been terrible about Palestine. But yeah, it's not like we have receipts now. Does that make sense?

Tuck: Yeah, absolutely. OK. Speaking of fear, I feel like so much of your book is about loneliness and fear – a very different kind of fear than you just described – but fear nonetheless. I'm curious if that loneliness and fear has gotten less intense over the years and now that this book is flowing around the world – or I guess it could be more intense now that your secrets are out – or just how you’re feeling these days.

Lamya: Yeah, I mean what I didn't realize as I was writing the book was how much I would be revealing about myself by writing a memoir. But again, I can't believe I didn't put two and two together. [Tuck laughs] But when you're writing, writing is such a solitary activity in some ways. You have a screen, you’re typing or whatever, and then people read it and then they know all of these things about you. So one of the things that happened when the book first came out was that I felt really, really vulnerable, and really scared. I felt scared about having my words out there in the world. I felt scared that people would be angry, or not get my book, or be upset at the ways that I interpreted the Quran and various scriptures. But as the book has been out in the world, some of those fears have dissipated, and they've turned into something that actually feels really lovely. It's been really lovely to see the kind of reception that the book has gotten, and there's still people who are mad about a lot of things in the book, but it's felt good. And that sense of vulnerability is still there; I don't think that'll ever go away. This idea that “wow, I just told everyone all of my secrets.” But I think what's been really cool about the book being out there in the world is that it's felt OK. It's felt like vulnerability is uncomfortable, but not in a bad way, and can lead to these positive things. So who knows, maybe I'll be a lot more vulnerable in my life in other ways.

Tuck: Hmm. Well, I’m impressed, because I just think that's so so scary of anyone to do, and so anytime anyone writes a memoir and then they come on the show I’m always like, “how did you do it?” [laughs] “How did you say these things to people?”

Lamya: I forgot, that’s how I did it. [Tuck laughs]

Tuck: I sent all these questions over to my producer, and they were like “please ask this one, even though it's really silly,” so I'm gonna do it. You write in the book about how college is the first time that you were able to access museums and in-person art…

Lamya: Oh yeah.

Tuck: …and obviously the first time went terribly due to racial profiling. You’re dissociating and you’re not having a good time. But when you *were* finally able to access IRL art in a meaningful way, was there a big profound moment, or are you just like “well there it is”? [laughs]

Lamya: It’s really interesting. In the pre-Internet days – or I mean, I guess it wasn't pre-Internet, but before we used the Internet the way that we use it now – I don't know how I found things. But one of the things that I found early in college was Dadaism, and this idea of absurdity, and really playing with the absurdity. And I had read a lot about it in – I am also like “where did I read about this?” – I guess I must've read…oh, there was definitely a moment where I went on Encyclopedia Britannica. [Tuck laughs] But I had read a lot about it and just had never really seen the art in person. Or I had read Dadaist literature, and I had just never seen that as art. And the first time I saw Dali, I remember being so blown away. Yeah.

Tuck: Your website says that you have a goal of traveling to every subway stop in the city. So, I don't wanna dox you, but other than your stop, if you love your stop for some reason, what is your favorite stop in the subway so far?

Lamya: Oh my God, OK! I really like Court Square. I think it's so underrated. There's so many lines that connect there, and what I also really like about it is that it lends itself really well to pre-walking which is my favorite thing to do in the subway. Which is when you stand exactly where you need to stand so that your transfer is easier.

Tuck: Mhmm.

Lamya: Yeah so it would have to be Court Square. I mean, literally so many trains go there, it's really magnificent.

Tuck: No, I use Court Square all the time, it’s very, very useful. Very agree. Would you ever do that wild thing that people do where you try to speedrun through every stop in the subway?

Lamya: No, wait! Stop. Wait. What does that mean? Tell me!

Tuck: Oh yeah, so people will do this thing where they try to beat a record for going through every single stop in the subway in the shortest amount of time…

Lamya: Ohhhhhh…

Tuck: …and so you have to really time like “when do these certain lines run,” and like “where do I start”…

Lamya: What?!

Tuck: …and “how do I do my route?” ...I'm introducing this to you, you can consider it for your future. [laughs]

Lamya: Stop, this is blowing my mind! Wait, but this is also brilliant, because there's so many considerations, and you have to *really* know what trains do and don't run on the weekend, things like that.

Tuck: People plan it for like years, and they'll – if you miss one stop – they’ll just be like “well I'm over for now!” [laughs] You know, like “I gotta try again later!”

Lamya: Oh my God. Hey, now I'm gonna go look up what the record is…

Tuck: It’s like a day, yeah.

Lamya: No, oh my God. [Tuck laughs] Wow, this has been a really revealing experience, Tuck. [Tuck laughs]

Tuck: Great, we titled it correctly. [Lamya laughs] OK, great. Well the way we always end the show is by asking: in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

Lamya: The word that comes to mind for me is “playful.” It's the kind of experience that I'm trying to create for my kid. Yeah, I just want people to really – and myself included – I just want us all to be able to really play with gender and feel expansive and free to play with the way that we express ourselves. Not just in the moment, but also through time.

[Gender Reveal Theme music plays]

Tuck: That's gonna do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time or learned something, please share this episode with folks in your community. You can find Lamya at lamyah.com and @lamyaisangry on Twitter and Instagram. *Hijab Butch Blues* is available now from your favorite local bookstore or library, and the paperback edition will be released on February 6th. You can pre-order that now. You can of course find us at genderpodcast.com, where we've got transcripts of every episode, and grant winner information, and all sorts of other info. And you can also find us on Instagram and at bit.ly/gendermerch, and at patreon.com/gender. And as a thanks for supporting the show on Patreon, we will sign you up for our weekly newsletter, full of sneak peaks and behind the scenes info, as well as our bonus podcast Gender Conceal. This episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Llinas Goodman, and by me, Tuck Woodstock. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music by our friends at Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender. Free Palestine.

[Gender Reveal Theme music plays out and ends]

Tuck: The other day, I found my Tumblr login…

Lamya: Oh no!

Tuck: …because I wanted to pull something from 2011 to 2012 [Lamya laughs] and it was so much worse than I could've possibly imagined. [both laugh] It was like, “I gotta go, I gotta get out.” [Tuck laughs]

Lamya: OK. I will one-up you on that. [Tuck laughs] I found my old livejournal…

Tuck: Oh no. [laughs]

Lamya: ...yeah, yeah.

Tuck: Did you learn a lot about yourself? [laughs]

Lamya: Oh, so much. So much.