

Dr Muhammed Reza Tajri

Dealing with Dichotomy: LGB Persons from Shī'a Muslim Backgrounds

This presentation offers preliminary findings from an ongoing pioneering research project, into the experiences of people from Shī'a Muslim backgrounds, who either experience same-sex attraction and/or identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). The currently progressing research uses qualitative methods to elicit narratives from respondents. The presentation highlights the previously under-acknowledged prevalence of the LGB experiences within Shī'i societies, and underlines the possible adverse ramifications of continued inattention.

The research participants vary with regards to their ethnic backgrounds, where they are geographically based, and even the degree and nature of their engagement with the Shī'i lived tradition; their shared common characteristics being limited to self-identifying as being from Shī'i backgrounds and their lack of hetero-conformity.

The presentation firstly uses textual sources to position mainstream Shī'ism as doctrinally antithetical to homosexual performances. These doctrinal positions factor into explaining the absence of non-heteronormative identity, and its non-acceptance in mainstream Muslim societies. Thereafter, the garnered research data is used to demonstrate the various ways participants have negotiated the seemingly dichotomous aspects of their identities. The research, therefore, frames the participants' standpoints as responses to a backdrop of normative lived Shī'ism, and Shī'i orthopraxy, which is determined as incompatible with homosexual acts.

The data collected hitherto reveals an assortment of participant responses to this supposed dichotomy. These have included disenchantment with Shī'i orthodoxy and disengagement with it as a lived tradition, estrangement from wider Shī'i communities, and even endeavours at coalescing the two aspects of their identities through narratives of oppression and the battle against social injustice.

On that note, the presentation concludes by tentatively probing theoretical frameworks through which the positions of the research participants can be viewed, and through which effective data analysis may be undertaken.



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Muhammad Reza Tajri began his seminary studies at the Ḥawza 'Ilmiyya of London and went on to complete a BA in Islamic Studies (Middlesex University). He then moved to Damascus to study at the Ḥawza al-Imām al-Khumaynī. Whilst in Syria, he also completed the advanced courses in Arabic language at the University of Damascus.

Upon returning to the UK, he completed an MA in Islamic Studies (Middlesex University) and a second MA in Islam in Contemporary Britain (Cardiff University). He completed his PhD (Lancaster University) researching evolving perceptions of Shī'i religious authority on British university campuses.

He has been a Lecturer in Arabic at the Al-Mahdi Institute since 2015. He is the Head of the Department of Studies in Comparative Religions (DSCR) and Director of the Centre of Intra-Muslim Studies (CIMS).

His research interests revolve around Muslims in the UK and Europe, contemporary Shī'ism and Shī'i identity, religious authority, and the impact of gender on religion. He has presented his research at numerous conferences across the UK.