

The Mic Drop, Season Three, Episode One: Parsa

Larry Hi there. My name's Larry Achiampong. And welcome to The Mic Drop. The Mic Drop is a collaborative podcast with the sole purpose of creating a space for migrants by migrants exercising an agency in exchange for a shared space of collective thinking, storytelling and debate. It is created for a long term collaboration between members of many hands, one heart and myself, supported by hearts of grass.

Mo Welcome to another sessions of The Mic drop. This is Mohammed Taher. I've done several interviews for this project with the members of The Many Hands One Heart, which is a group supporting people seeking asylum, refugees from LGBT community. And but this session is going to be a bit different from all the other sessions I've done, because this is with someone from my own country. I'm from Iran and Parsa is from Iran as well. And then apart from that, you know that we come from the same country. There's a lot of differences between both of us, which hopefully we're going to develop and talk about it today. I'm a 60 year old man and Parsa is a young 24 years old man. And he's as I said, he's seeking asylum here on his sexuality and his religion. Welcome to this session. So how are you today?

Parsa Thank you very much. It's a privilege to be here amongst you. Thank you for inviting me, Emily in Britney. And I'm Parsa I'm part time from south of Iran. And I'm here today to do this talk about life in Iran as a as a gay. And and that.

Mo I am I come from Tehran, the capital, you know, and basically, I can tell you a little about I come from Shimron, which is north of Tehran, is near the mountains and snows about two or three metres every winter you can get out of your house, you know, it's very cold and sort of like, you know, the image that people got about Iran, you know, is just very different from where I grew up. You come from the South Khuzestan?

Parsa Yes. It's a very.

Mo Which city you come from.

Parsa I'm from the city Schuster. It's south of Iran.

Mo Yeah.

Parsa And so who's a stand for for gays? LGBTQ is a little scary. The name is.

Parsa Scary and.

Parsa Strong because it's people are conservative and and the tribes that live there decide they are very homophobic and they're an open to to, to they're not open to other ideologies rather than their own ideologies or political beliefs or religions or sexual orientations. Basically, gay or LGBTQ is now defined in their ideology and their perception of life.

Parsa I think that's probably the case in everybody in Iran is basically the regime is a they've got a lot of laws against anyone who's not complying with. They're sort of like, what is normal? Okay. I admit that, you know, probably to Iran is a little more in regard if you call it progressive, you know, but you know, some of this is actually more what you just like talk about your city is just tell us the population how big it is if you know I mean, I know for the

fact that it's very very hot is roasting there it's yeah I remember once I went to when I was a kids, I went to Khuzestan and it was probably in the summer because he was just like how and I could actually I remember actually the the floor was melting as we were walking in the streets just wasn't it was that hot party was I just wanted to ask you actually to about where you come from, you know, where you lived back home in Iran. You know, tell us a little about the city and where you come from.

Parsa I'm from south of Iran, south west of Iran. The public school system and the city is called Masjid Soleimani. That's where I was born, but I grew up in a different city. Shuster And Khuzestan is hot in the summer. A extremely hot temperature gets to 55 degrees. You can basically roast an egg in 10 minutes. Even your brain gets damaged 5 minutes and there's well, bless you boils and melts away. And people are warm hearted but very conservative and accept part of our values, which is a capital and the other cities are not progressive or backward because the people are backward, they're more religious and they're not open to new things. So I don't mean like I was born in that city south of Iran.

Parsa I obviously had a lot of problems in regard to your sexuality and where you live because of the because people didn't accept that. Is that right?

Parsa And that is true. And you you mentioned something about Tehran being more progressive than the other side. I have seen families that, I know everybody in the same sex attraction. Homosexuality is not legal in that country and the punishment for that is execution by the state. The stat does that, simply is not accepted. Not at all. Not even little. But the families as well. In the north of the country, especially Tehran, as you said, Shimron, they are much better. They're much educated more than the south. The south will not. If, for example, a child has a. In his youth. In his youth, he has he he wants to be feminine. He wants his his identity is showing in that certain age, the family. It stops it. No, you cannot go dance. You must play football. You cannot have dolls like Barbie dolls because you are a boy. That is ridiculous. You must have cars or. I don't know. You know, you don't.

Parsa Basically, they easily. I mean.

Parsa Should they shape your characteristics? They force what they believe as what you what you need to be in that and that and the certain age. But you don't see that in the in the north in Tehran. I have seen I was, I had a friend in Austria. His name is Maureen. Basically, he just survived the cancer. He's he's gay and he's very brave and powerful. He's like one of the. He's a hero to me because he he'd been through a lot in his life. And he said, My family always accepted me as a gay. I was feminine. He's a man. He's pronouns is he and his. But he he says that I was feminine. I like I.

Mo Where was from, was he from Tehran?

Parsa From Tehran, and his mother his mother. Father, their doctors.

Mo Well, it comes from education as well. Yes. Middle class and sometimes second class as well. But I definitely agree with you that certain parts of Tehran, although everywhere, it could be a little more easier for people, especially in regards to the families and friends. I mean, when I lived in Iran and I left, you know, when I was 17. And it was always sort of like, you know, used to I'm actually think about that quite a lot. It was really a shame of the way I behaved. Well, we behave as a group to our one of our classmates who was a bit feminine and camp, you know. And I used to we I remember that, you know, even the

teacher used to make fun of him. And we all used to laugh, you know. And something that I as I said, I did my after 40 years. So I still feel really guilty about. And I think it was really ironic or funny about the whole thing, was that because we were all in the boys school, there was no sort of like, you know, even like in the short time we, you know, we didn't have it was very difficult to have a relationship with the gay. A lot of boys, they used to go to the toilet and do all sorts of sexual acts with each other. You know, what did you.

Parsa Call them to, if.

Mo You read, called, appears in no day, you know which the word in Iran is? Kunio. Then it would be like, you know, basically they would punch you in the face. And also there was all sort of a sort of a stigma attached to it, but everyone sort of like knew that. And like I said, some people are doing it anyway. So was that symbol for you? Was it sort of like, you know, when you grew up, did you feel that, you know, you were different? When did you actually realise that you were different and how did they react to you, if anyone from your friends, classmates and all that? You know, obviously you explain about your family. But, you know, I'm just trying to see what was it like to grow up in that city, in that sort of environment.

Parsa But especially in my case, since middle school, I had a I had a classmate whose name was Shayan, and he was a little feminine and he had sexual desires for boys. And a lot of boys loved him and liked him very much. And soon he lost his respect because the boys that had relationship with him, they obviously made him become notorious and they said bad stuff behind his back. And he and I was watching him before I became an adult, before my adulthood, before my self. It was a real analyzation of being gay, was saying, okay, I'm not going to be like that. And that boy deserves it because why he does deal with but with with other boys, this is bad the way he is and the boys are treating him the way he deserves it. But then I realised, wow, after the age of 16, like 15, between 15 and 16, I realised that I don't like girls. I'm just, I'm becoming just like Shayan and that's who I am. I had a lot of problems accepting it, but I felt so close with him and I felt and I felt all his pain, what he's having through. But I never wanted to be treated that way.

Mo So you kept this, like, secret from all the friends you had in the school.

Parsa For a short time? Yes, I had to. I had to do that for a short time. But in my university time, I couldn't just take it. I wanted to be who I am. And it was just dealing with depression, anxiety, and they just want to practise freely. I saw my neighbour going out with his girlfriends, but I just couldn't choose the person who I want to spend time with that if I went to somebody in my house, everybody would have thought, Wow. Two boys went inside the house. What's going to happen? You know what I mean? I, I realised that I'm gay and they do 16 but I couldn't practise my same sex attraction because I didn't have freedom and the, the culture was not open and whatever the culture was teaching me, the family, the friends, the school was against. LGBT identity. And it wasn't welcome.

Mo And when was like, you know, when I if you want to talk later about your relationship, did you have any relationship with other men or boys in when you were like 16, 17? When when did you actually have a sort of have relationship with or the same sex relationship?

Parsa In my high school time, I, I couldn't have a relationship because I was dealing with my identity was find out what I am and and what is what's wrong with me. Because that's what that's what they were teaching us. You are wrong if you do this. It's wrong in a religion with so much strong, you see that Islamic God talking about what to do or what not

to do if you do that. What's the punishment on earth and what the punishment and the other side and nobody there was literally nobody who could tell you that you're gay. So you just basically can you. Right. You like man, boy. We like the boy. But you didn't know that this type of thinking and behaviour is it is it has a name and it's identity and it's real is accepted. But we didn't know that as you said. The that that kind of boy like me or Cheyenne called Shawnee means a faggot as those who like to have sex with other boys. So that was pretty much everything that we knew about being gay, not not being accepted as an identity in that time. So I was having a lot of problems finding out what I am. And I was and I hated myself most of the time, all of the time. And I felt regret when I was watching a porn that was that was gay porn or thinking about having sex with a boy that I go to school with. There are not one. There were in my school. There were there were two in my class that they had same side attraction. And I was thinking, should I approach? Should we not approach? Should I go and tell them I'm like you? Will they tell it the others? Will they going to hurt me because they have nothing to lose for me? If my father finds out, he would kill me. If my uncle finds out he's crazy. He has no job, no education. He will he will definitely won't accept this. You know, I called my cousins and they will cut off my head and just they do it every time. And they're killing people for same sex attraction or changing the religions. Pretty normal. Yeah.

Mo Just I mean, let's go back a little bit all you know, what is your life in general, not just for the gay people? What's it like in Iran? You know, just to give an idea what to the people today, you know, for example, you know, as you said, you come from very hot part of Iran and, you know, women to have to cover themselves lots of times with very dark or black cover over their head. And also that's obviously it's going to be really sort of banned if you just basically want to go out and show your body and stuff like and that's probably happens for the men as well. You just mentioned about porn and like, you know, I sometimes watch porn here is no law against it. But what would happen, for example, to you if you were called that by your parents? You can tell us what happened if you by parents, but what would happen if the government or people authorities you know with them you know, Revolutionary Guards and they or is it Basij, you know, they find out that you were like watching porn or you, you know, sort of have some sort of sexual feelings or stuff, lot of.

Parsa Yeah, well, according to the who the Islam it's the punishment for this is it's not as equal as adultery, but it is punishable by a slap by lashes. Right. And I got I had a friend who had a shop company, the shop, and he was distributing movies, you know, lending movies. People came, gave him their identity card and he he lent them movies and he had a computer. And in that, in his hard drive, he had pornos because he also had special type of costumers who he distributed pornos for them. And one time they ran him out and the Internet Intelligence Service or they were Internet Sega service, they came and they took all his stuff in custody and later he, he, he went to jail. He went to jail. He got beaten up in the prison because only he had only pornos in his hard drive, but they labelled him more things. Yeah. You are promoting the West with Western.

Mo Stars as well, you know, you promoting anything to do with West. But what you were saying before in regards to your sexuality, you said, you know, you you suffer from depression, anxiety, you know, because of your sexuality, you know. So you could basically you said you watch porn, but was something that you basically were risking. So that's itself for a young person. You know, that was a risky business to do that. Could you drink alcohol in Iran?

Parsa Drinking alcohol is forbidden. Basically, there's no place for you can buy alcohol. It's illegal. And you have to find alcohol, you know, with drug dealers. And it's hard to find alcohol in Iran. And they're very.

Mo Like, what happened to you if you were like him? You know, we just before earlier on, you know, in Liverpool, it was a nice sunny day. And we a group of us, we went for a picnic. And men, women, young, old, we have a laugh and joke. What will happen to you as a young man if you were in Iran and you went, there's a nice sunny day and you went to the park with the group of friends. What would happen to you?

Parsa Well, as long as. Everybody are same sex. Like a woman with women and men with woman. You couldn't do that. They eat and they don't find they don't face trouble. But if women and men are mixed and they are having a party together or going out together, they're either people or the police have to interfere and and make problems for them.

Mo And, you know, I became I have figures in my head about unemployment, especially in the young people, you know, because I think when I read somewhere that Iran is one of the youngest country in the world. You know, more than half of the population of the country, but they're under 30 or something like that. So it's very, very young country in regards to the population. And and another thing I know. Well, you can confirm if I'm wrong, it's the unemployment is quite high, especially in the young, young people. So it's. Can you just explain I don't know if you were working what you were doing, but is it easy to get jobs? Is it easy to have some sort of a social life? All that you know, you just explain a little more for us to see what it was like. I, I want I want to know because I've been off for about 40 years.

Parsa Well, Iran's population is is young and and that is true. But people and their heart and their mind, they are growing old day and day because they're losing their hope to live. Poetry is is making everything hard in that country. And the corruption that is inside the system of of of the authorities in that country is is making everything hard. Right now, what I'm talking about that I'm I'm having flashbacks there. They're mild. But I remember myself living in that society and I. I was a student and I was always supported by my parents. But there were there are people struggling for food, jobs, money. There is no chance for them to live in that country.

Mo It is stunning as well. And my sister, when she was in university, you know, she's always laughing jokes, quite loud. And basically she was told that if she laughs loud, they throw her out of the university also. And I think it's, you know, a game if you're politically active against regime, then there's a good chance that you get thrown out of the university as well. The way we picture want to sort of like us to imagine is what it is like for a young man who is, you know, is not like everybody else in regards to his sexuality. But also, what is it like to live? You can't I mean, you can't drink, you know, alcohol can go out, enjoy yourself. You can't really find a job is very difficult for you to study. You mentioned about the corruptions because at the same time, you see a lot of people that they are doing things, you know, what they want to do because they've got relatives or their parents. Father is either always in the government or jobs in Asia. So that is what I'm really interested to see how you felt in regard to you know, you actually mentioned about no hope, you know, anything you could just see it was any way out in Iran or could actually survive in Iran sort of thing.

Parsa Well, for me as a homosexual, I don't I don't think I could I could I could survive in my childhood only because I had a horrible childhood. And later I had to leave the country because of severe problems and threats.

Mo Do you want to tell us a little bit why it was horrible? You don't want to touch on that subject?

Parsa Well, we we can we can do this to this next question. So I was saying. As a homosexual. It is hard because literally nobody understands you and nobody wants to understand who you are. You are born wrong. You are. You don't. You're not worthy of living because of what you believe. Because of. What you are. I mean, I'm a gay. This is my identity, and it only concerns my bed. Like, I can have a job. I can be a teacher, a professor. And that does, in effect, my life. But I want to have a man in my bed instead of a woman. But they don't want it. So you feel like you're isolated. There's nobody there to understand you or to want you for who you are. And even if you. If you find the right man for you so he can fell in love with that man has. Could have many more motives and reasons to. To hurt you, to abuse you, to manipulate you. Because it is not legal. You are not doing illegal thing. You're not living with. With dignity.

Mo You live in a life.

Parsa And my life and you must hide yourself. If they find out they're going to kill you, there's no way they let you alive. If government finds out, they're going to kill you. If your brother finds out, if your father's finds out, they're going to kill you because you simply lose your worth for being a gay. That goes for women as well. A woman has to be a mother. A man has to be a father. That's all they know. And they must be together. That's what they believe. But if you are something that they don't want. You cannot live there as a child. Your life is supressed. And they will beat you. To. To. To act like him. And to be like him. But maybe I wasn't always like this. Maybe I look less feminine. Although I don't believe that gays must be feminine. We have to like. Then Sport Miller is his. A great man. And he's not feminine. But he's a gay. And he's a man. His pronouns. His. He and his. But when I left my country and when I when I had to leave, flee that country, I saw the real life. I saw that I must not be weak. I was weak for a year and a half and I lost my everything. A lot of things happened to me. A lot of bad things happened to me in that country. I lost my moneys. My mother sold her goats, took a loan for me because she was the only one.

Mo Who.

Parsa Wasn't 100% supportive in my life because she's educated. Maybe that's why. But I'm her son. And she loves me, I think. Although we barely talk together. So you told me. Now you're in a safe country. Make us proud. And I'm hoping to go to university and finish my studies. Maybe I can find Western values in their eyes.

Parsa When we talk, we'll talk about your future plans as well.

Parsa And not get distracted.

Mo No, no, no. He's all right. It's interesting. You know, I just talking about your mother, you know, I remember another Iranian gentleman. It was actually probably was the face and gay man that I met from Iran in Liverpool who actually said the same thing that he said. You know, first of all, when his father find out that he slept with a man, he was okay because he thought it was just a one off, you know. And as I said, you know, a lot of boys

in the school, they go on to the toilet. And then he actually had to say things that. No, no, that I actually don't like women. I'm gay. They paid for him to come out, but they said they'd never want to see him again and they never wanted him to come back. And I remember he was like wearing the t shirts and it was a very cold and he didn't have money to buy a jacket and he could then ask his family to buy a jacket for me. So just basically a little bit, just finalising, you know, tell us a little of what you plan to do if you get the status here. If you become, you know, obviously will be able to live here. What are the things that you want to do?

Parsa I just want to be a worthwhile citizen of the society because I choose to be in the UK because my heart wasn't there. I was living in Austria and my my situation, mental health was, was horrible. I nearly made suicide and they sent me to hospital. I was living in that village with three straight men and in a hostel. In a hostel. And there was no support for me in Austria. And I asked and I applied for to see a solicitor at all, to see a psychologist, a therapist, and I have their email still. They gave me an appointment for a next year. So there was I couldn't speak with people because their language is it was German. I didn't have any friends, no support. There wasn't there was one LGBT community around in that area. And it was in this capital of the time, Mark, and far away from me. So my mental health deteriorated that I had to leave the country and come to UK because I spoke who spoke this language? And I felt, okay, this is the this is where I want to be now. I want to leave only I want peace.

Mo Are you in a relationship here?

Parsa Yes, I'm relationship now.

Mo With an english gentleman

Parsa Yes. He's a doctor. He's a university professor. Okay. Yes.

Mo Do you want to go to university as well? Do you say.

Parsa Yes? If that's my plan for my future, I'm hoping to to go to university. Studied computer science because I was a student in Iran. I was a third year student of bachelor. And he had to had to flee everything, had to leave everything behind. In the middle of my studies, I only had one more year to of to get my undergraduate degree and maybe I planned to go to to Europe, but not like this. Not to risk my life, not to lose everything. But it's just fate. Maybe God had different plan for me, although in that time I didn't believe in God. That was an atheist. I didn't care about religion or anything else. But now I'm a Christian. I became a Christian, so that's a fate. Faith's wants me to be here, and I have big plans for my future studies. One of them finishing my studies. One of them.

Mo Maybe get married.

Parsa Married.

Mo Aren't you? Which you were mentioning something before to me in the car that you you might plan to do.

Parsa That, but if I'm lucky, if I'm worthy, yeah, I should.

Mo Anyway. And I think thanks very much for your time. It was quite interesting, you know, and one of the things we sort of realise, although we there's a big gap in age, so I think we both like the same singer in Iran. W You know, and we were singing the song before and I was just thinking we could just finish with that song again. Is okay with you?

Parsa Well that's on my favourite song. Well, we can do that. Okay.

Mo You sing your favourite song around me.

Mo But listen, we don't see you in.

Mo The song and I see if I can carry on with you.

Parsa Okay, so we listen to the Irish to cry. It's when I was. When I feel. When I felt down in my country I needed to cruise very negative. Listen to the Irish. And I cried the day.

Parsa It's a. You want to sing your favourite song?

Parsa Should I sing now? All right. Well, can we test this? Yeah. Right. So I want to sing now. The music is just moment values. .

.Sings in Farsi

Parsa What is this restaurant? Fantastic.

Larry My name is Larry Champion, and thank you for listening to The Mic Drop. If you'd like to listen to previous episodes of the series or to tune in for more episodes coming forward, please check out heartofglass.org.uk . Additionally, The Mic Drop can also be found at anchor.fm