

HIDDEN IRAN (LGBT COMMUNITY)

(FREE THEME)

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, transsexualism is legal. After Thailand, it is the nation with the most gender reassignment surgeries in the world. Part of this surgery is even helped financially by the government. Transsexual people have to go to the psychologist and after being diagnosed as sick people, they can commence a long and difficult pathway of changing gender. This apparently normalised reality is not as simple as it seems. This surgery is not an option, it is an obligation in order to be accepted by society. Many transsexual people feel comfortable with themselves and don't want to take the surgery and so they live under unfair impositions created by a close minded government and society. The case of the homosexual collective is even worse, as they could be confronted by capital punishment.

CAPTIONS:

01: Arvinadnadi was born with male genital organs, but she is a woman.. In order to act according to the policies of her country's government, she should visit a psychologist, admit that she's sick and then have surgery. For that, she would even get financial help. Nevertheless, she doesn't want to have surgery, she wants to be accepted as she is and not be obliged to change sex by the sex reassignment surgery. She is 20 years old, and lives with her grandparents and her mother, who is sick. She loves wearing make up and going out with it on; this is something that creates problems both at home and outside. Her grandfather, head of the family, does not accept her, and she is stared at in the streets, as people don't know how to categorise her. She always dreamed of being a great artist.

02: Amirali was born with female genital organs, but he is a man. He doesn't want any surgery but sees a psychologist in order to please his family. He is 22 years old and studies animation. He loves wearing black and listening to music. When he goes out he has to wear the hijab, as everyone recognises him as female and it is compulsory for them. He explains to me that in Iran, he feels more free inside than outside of home. "It's not easy, we have to give visibility to our problem, we exist too", he says.

03: Parsa, is 21 years old and he is studying art at the university. He likes to have sex with men. In terms of sexuality he is third gender. In his opinion gender is just a label. Third gender or third sex is a concept in

which individuals are categorized, either by themselves or by society, as neither man nor woman. Parsa is also Arvinadnani's best friend.

04: Arvinadnani and Amirali are long time friends. The three of us visited the well known Nasir-ol-molk Mosque (aka Pink Mosque) in Shiraz, but the police kicked us out. When they saw Arvinadnani with make up on, they demanded she wore the hijab, but she showed her ID, which showed she was a 'male'. The police then replied that male couldn't wear make up, so we had to get out. Arvinadnani doesn't have the need to wear female clothes to show that she is a woman.

05: Ayda is friends with Arvinadnani and Amiraly. She studies Arts too and is lesbian. The LGBT community in Iran would be very close-minded if their homosexuality was known and they could even get permanently suspended from University; they have to keep it a secret. Tehran is famous for its art galleries. I took this picture in one of them. Ayda posed for me with her face uncovered without any problem.

06: Ari is 20, he studies Arts too and he's an English teacher. He's gay and his family accepts it without any problem. He is very proud of his country but he admits that there are things that have to be changed: he'd love to hear that homosexuality was legal. He hides his true identity out of fear.

07: Sadeq is 21. He is gay and his family doesn't know about it. He's fed up with hiding it and he would like to live in a country where he could be completely free and not be treated like a criminal. He hides his true self out of fear. I took this photo at a private Halloween party. Sadeq posed in front of the camera. Sometimes, youngsters buy alcohol in the black market, even though it's prohibited. This alcohol is not always in good condition, so people have died intoxicated by it.