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Queer and Shear Moroccan Societal Norms Impact on Queer Women

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Abstract

This paper examines how Moroccan societal norms and values hinder the recognition of queer women. Within this paper, family dynamics, language, and perceptions of homosexuality are discussed in order to highlight the lack of recognition that queer women receive in Morocco. Social norms in Morocco draw upon the conservative and traditional values, therefore queer women face societal persecution because they stray from the heteronormative culture and exist in a resilient patriarchal system. I will draw upon six personal interviews from queer women as they share their experiences and how they operate within their Moroccan families and Moroccan social norms. Throughout this paper I evaluate queer women in Morocco and the embedding of the patriarchal system within a marginalized group.

Key words

Gender Studies
LGBTStudies
Social Norms
Queer Women

Acknowledgements

Letter to Mom and Dad:

Salaam,

I don't really know how to start this letter, but I know I have to do it. I am the same person that you have always known….but I also happen to be queer.[1]

I know this might comeas a surprise, and may be very confusing to you based on my high school self. However, it wasn't until Elon, where I was provided with such a supportive and loving community, that Ifelt I had the awareness about various LGBTQ issues to fully understand my own sexuality. Yes I know, college changes people…

You may be wondering why I chose to tell you this in a letter… As we always joke about, I'mthe reserved one, while Riley's the emotional one… So, I felt that putting this into writing seemed most appropriate given my personality. Being the nerd that I am, and thanks to mom's academic push, I felt I was able to better express myself in writing. Putting this into letter-form also seemed most appropriate, given dad and I's simple and direct attitudes towards everything we do in life. We both enjoy efficiency, and this seemed pretty efficient.

I want you to know that this isn't a phase. Though I understand why you might think so, I promise, it's not just me being a social, liberal, hippie. I am out to my friends, who have been so supportive and loving, but when I come home, I always feel like I am hiding this huge part of myself from you. And that's the last thing I want to do. I was always scared to tell you, because I really didn't know how you'd react, and I still don't, but I felt it was time.

If you have any questions, which I'm sure you do, I'd love to talk to you guys about it, either on the phone, or in person when I get home.

Thank you so much for your love and support throughout my entire life.

Love always,
Catherine

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[1]I choose to identify as queer, as I feel this is less restricting than terms like "gay."; queer acts as an umbrella term that allows me to feel a part of the LGBTQ+ community while also not being confined to definitions.

Introduction

The LGBT community in Morocco is an oppressed group that suffers criminalization due to their sexual orientation. Currently the Moroccan government has Article 489 in place, which criminalizes all same sex activity deeming it lewd and unnatural("Moroccan Penal Code: Article 489," n.d.). The Moroccan government helps adhere the notion that homosexuality does not abide by societal norms by using the phrasing lewd and unnatural acts, furthering the lack of recognition and acceptance of queer women in Morocco. This oversimplified description of same sex activity is damaging to the LGBT community and contributes in determining peoples attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality. Overall Morocco reflects traditional and conservative values, which hinders the recognition of queer women because it strays from the heterosexual and conformist society established in Morocco.

Homosexuality in Morocco is socially constructed as "perversion" or "sickness" that tie in the religious component of sin (haram) and shame (hchouma)("Refugee Review Tribunal," 2006). The repetition of negative language and connotation surrounding homosexuality further solidifies the heterosexual norms that are established in Morocco. Morocco is defined as an Islamic nation, which fosters a homophobic society due to the Maliki school of thought that the Moroccan government abides by(Dialmy, 2017).Within in the Maliki School, same-sex intercourse is deemed punishable by law and individuals are viewed as perverted according to the school. With the strict social norms in place in Morocco, the LGBT community has difficulty organizing a strong movement on a larger scale to gain rights because individuals cannot gain neither recognition nor acceptance on a smaller scale within their families.

The purpose of this study is to examine Moroccan social norms and values in the context of female homosexuality. Female homosexuality is solely evaluated in this research because

there is a gap in information about queer women in Morocco as well as around the world. When evaluating queer communities on a global scale, gay men are the prime representation of the communities and activism for queer rights. Queer women are overshadowed within queer communities highlighting the embedded patriarchal system even amongst a marginalized group. Throughout the study, family dynamics, coming out experiences in relations to societal acceptance, and language are key areas of exploration. The research conducted for this study explores the lives of six women and their experiences as queer Moroccan woman as they stray from societal norms. To further elaborate on the research being conducted the following questions were proposed:

    1.How do Moroccan societal norms and values impact queer women in Morocco?

    2. How do Moroccan societal norms and values play a role in hindering the recognition of queer women in Morocco?

    Notably the research questions I proposed evaluate the *recognition* of queer women rather than the *acceptance* of queer women. Recognition and acceptance are two different areas of study in Morocco. Queer women in Morocco struggle with simple recognition of their sexual orientation due to the norms and values established in Morocco. Whereas queer men, comparatively, receive more recognition. It is also important to highlight that recognition does not have a positive connotation in this context that it is simply acknowledges that a woman is queer whether or not an individual is accepting of the woman's queerness.

    By evaluating the social norms and values in Morocco I will highlight how queer women are overshadowed within LGBT communities in Morocco. Not only does highlighting the norms in Morocco demonstrate the lack of recognition of queer women in Morocco, but it also highlights how queer women on a global scale are overshadowed and unrecognized within the collective LGBT community. Analyzing queer women in Morocco highlights the embedded

patriarchal system that occurs even within a marginalized group. The state of Morocco allows for a further lack of recognition of queer women by criminalizing homosexuality in Article 489. Overall Moroccan societal norms and values create a community where homosexuality is unacceptable and dishonorable.

Key Terms:

Queer – This term acts as inclusive terminology since it reflects an individual's sexual orientation to meaning non-heterosexual. Using the term queer provides an umbrella term that reflects marginalized individuals based upon their sexual orientation. In this paper, queer is used to reflect any women who is non-heterosexual and is challenging the cultural norms in Morocco.

LGBT - This acronym acts as an umbrella term that encompasses individuals with the sexual orientation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender. The term is also used to reflect a community of non-heterosexual individuals. The purpose of this term in this paper is to describe the community of non-heterosexual people who live in Morocco.

Social Norms–A combination of rules that a group or society abides by. Within the norms there is a set of values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that are considered to be appropriate or inappropriate. Within this paper, social norms will be applied in a Moroccan context, which reflect conservative and traditional norms.

Literature Review

Family Dynamics: Children and Marriage

In order to have a clearer understanding of queer Moroccan women and their lack of recognition I analyzed Moroccan social norms. Moroccan social norms involve thevalues, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that are considered appropriate in Moroccan society. The social norms in Morocco revolve around conservative and traditional values. Family dynamics, which include children and marriage, sex, and the patriarchal system, are influential and primary social norms that will be evaluated in a Moroccan context. These will later provide context on the norms impact on queer women. I will also briefly analyze the Arabic language's influence on social norms in Morocco and how Arabic hinders the recognition of queer women.

Family dynamics are an essential aspect of social norms in Morocco. Family is often the most important value to Moroccans as they place family as a number one priority. A key element of Moroccan society is the importance of family honor and how an individual is expected to preserve one's family honor through lofty aspirations and achievements, which according to Njoku includes marriage and procreation for women in Morocco (Njoku, 2006, p. 105). In Moroccan society discussing homosexuality in general acts as an agent in dishonoring one's family and community. Family honor plays a key role in preserving values and acceptable behaviors in Morocco.

Procreation acts as a social norm in Morocco because women are expected to bear children - it is a central theme to the woman's role in society (O. Murray, 2005, p. 102). The norm of childbearing can also be evaluated as a social norm within Arab society as well as a global social norm due to the deeply rooted patriarchal system throughout the world. Within Morocco, women are able to negotiate power through procreation(Sadiqi, 2003, p. 73). Bearing

children allow women to access a power unachievable by males. In the context of homosexuality, procreation becomes problematic because queer women are unable to achieve childbearing in the way that adheres to the Moroccan social standard. In addition, due to the structure of family dynamics in Morocco, and family being at the center of Moroccan social order, children are "socialized in accordance with family traditions" and conservative Moroccan societal values and taboos(Njoku, 2006, p. 93). Thus children allow for the continuation of conservative social norms to dictate Moroccan society. To conclude,for women in Moroccan society obtaining a husband and bearing children are primary concerns, and education and jobs are secondary concerns (Sadiqi, 2003, p. 201).

In Morocco, marriage is also deemed an important insitutition and social custom (Sadiqi, 2003, p. 200). Marriage is viewed as a norm that will continue to be influential in Morocco because of the influence of Islam on the Moroccan state and culture, and largely dictatesthe status of women(Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2008, p. 85). Moroccan women are socially defined by their marital status and society clearly categorizes married vs. unmarried, deeming married women as the ideal and desired status for all(Sadiqi, 2003, p. 200). In Moroccan society, young girls during developmental ages are constantly reminded that their "ultimate aim in life is to secure a husband and a family" (Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2008, p. 85). There are a lot of negative attitudes towards unmarried women in Moroccan society that create less opportunities and choices for unmarried women, creating a great divide between the married and the unmarried in Moroccan society(Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2008, p. 85). At times women may discontinue their higher education opportunities if it conflicts with marriage options, which reinforces the norms of Moroccan women marrying young and society inflicting the ideals of marriage as an essential value and behavior to partake in (Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2008, p. 86).

When evaluating married vs. unmarried women in Moroccan society, one can highlight the role of the embedded patriarchal system.Under the law, women are not considered free agents and are defined in relation to their closest male kin, thus unmarried women are defined as women without men and are marginalized by society (Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2008, p. 86). Unmarried women are expected to remain in the home until being married. Unmarried males are often granted more freedom in terms of leaving the household and living independently because of the male privilege they possess. When a woman is not married in Moroccan society, the general publicoften assumes a lack of purity and virginity of the women,and thus undesired by men. This social attitude towards unmarried women highlights the power of marriage status in Morocco and the social norms attached to it.

Marriage between a man and a wife is a considered a sacred relationship and a desired lifestyle by society. Families place value on finding a respectable and successful marriage partner for their daughter in order to preservethe families' lineage and maintain honor and respect (Njoku, 2006, p. 95).Thus in a queer context, females may choose to marry but live a double life of queerness in order to preserve one's family honor. At times individuals are caught between declaring their sexuality to their families, facing any repercussions or accepting the fate of marriage (Needham, 2013, pp. 297–298).

Taboos of Sex:

Overall Morocco embodies sex as a taboo topic. Within Morocco, representation of married heterosexual sexual conduct is heavily censored in Morocco (O. Murray, 2005, p. 97). Not only does premarital stray from the social norms within Morocco, but homosexual sex is not considered legitimate sexual activity. The topic of sex is rarely discussed in Morocco allowing for the topic to quickly become taboo amongst society. Considering heterosexual marital sex is

considered an inappropriate topic to discuss in Moroccan society due to the social norms established, thus all other forms of sexual discussion are even less welcome. When sexual activity is discussed in Morocco, society defines sex as penetration by a man. This definition delegitimizes same-sex activitybecause society holds the understanding that there is only one version of sex (Dialmy & Uhlmann, 2005). Notably, in historic Arab societies female-female sex was defined as situational homosexuality, which highlights that in ancient Islamic societies, societal norms were accepting of same-sex sex. The rationale behind female situational homosexuality in Arab societies was that women needed to have sex with one another due to the lack of male partners available in society (O. Murray, 2005, pp.99). In terms of social norms in Arab societies, there was a distinguished acceptance of female situational homosexuality because of the attitudes and recognition that it occurred. Noticeably, the rationale involving situational homosexuality is rooted in the patriarchal system and the heteronormative culture in Morocco. The taboo topic of sex in Morocco also dictates society's perceptions of masculinity and femininity. The construction of gender in Morocco plays a vital role in the perception of homosexuality creating a distinct gap of recognition of queer men and queer women in Moroccan society.

Arabic's Influence on Social Norms:

The structure of the Arabic language also contributes to the patriarchal system embedded in Moroccan society. Both the Moroccan dialect Darija and classical Arabic Fusha are influential factors on Moroccan social norms as they highlight male superiority and outline appropriate behaviors. Language is regarded as a social means through which identity and gender are constantly being negotiated, and Arabic acts as a prime example of this relationship (Sadiqi, 2003, p.277). When examining the Moroccan Arabic dialect, Darija, notably there is a lack of

vocabulary to describe homosexual women. In Darija there is no word for "lesbian"(Dialmy, 2017). As a result,there is a lack of recognition of queer women specifically in Morocco. Society interprets the lack of having a word for queer women as meaning that queer women do not exist. Alternatively, due to the lack of recognition, lesbianism is less punished by the Moroccan state because lesbian sex is not considered sex asit lacks penetration (Dialmy & Uhlmann, 2005, p. 19). Classical Arabic or Fusha also plays a role in the lack of recognition of queer women in Morocco. Although Fusha is not widely spoken in Morocco, it is the primary dialect of all government documents and most importantly the dialect of the Quran. Linguistically the Arabic language reifies the domination of maleness over femininity not in the context of homosexuality(Dialmy & Uhlmann, 2005, p. 19). Thus when in terms of female homosexuality, femininity is amplified because it is perceived that both women take on the submissive role during sexual relations. Amplifying femininity causes an even greater lack of recognition of queer women in Morocco because women are deemed the weaker sex in society.

In modern Arab society, terminology that describes homosexuality continues to reflect negative, derogatory, and judgmental views reflecting how Arabic enforces the social norms involving same sex relationships (Amer, 2012, p.383). Words describing female sexuality in Fusha have non-normative connotations attached to them. The terms *Shadha* (feminine form of pervert)and *Sahiqat* (lesbian) are vulgar slang terms in Arabic to describe female homosexuality. Often these words indicate inappropriate behavior and are often associated with women who are addicted to drugs and alcohol as well as women whom are perceived as promiscuous (Amer, 2012 p.383). However, in recent years, Morocco has begun to reclaim words that provide a positive connotation to describe the LGBT community. The LGBT community in Morocco has begun to spread the word *Mithly*, which means "like me" in the Moroccan Arabic dialect, Darija

(Dialmy, 2017).Notably,the Arabic language uses vulgar and demeaning words to describe female homosexuality and the structure of the language reinforces the patriarchal system in Morocco(Dialmy, 2017). Although lesbianism is considered less grave, less punishable, and less dangerous in Morocco, this notion causes an overall lack of simple recognition of lesbianism as an identity. The lack of recognition of lesbianism contributes to society perceiving queer women as going through a phase. Overall, the lack of recognition of queer women is closely tied with the Arabic languages influence on social norms in Morocco.

Methodology

In order to obtain information concerning Moroccan social norms and the Arabic language's impact on queer women in Morocco, I conducted a qualitative study. A qualitative approach provided an in-depth analysis of why Moroccan social norms and language hinder the recognition of queer women. I spoke with six women who belong to the LGBT community in Morocco, where we discussed their experiences as queer women and how Moroccan social norms have impacted them. All interviews were conducted in English in order to avoid using a translator, which allowed for greater confidentiality and more trust in the relationships. Admittedly,only being able to conduct interviews in English did limit the amount of women I could speak with since neither my Arabic nor myFrench are proficient enough. In order to maintain confidentiality I used pseudonyms for five of the six women. In my research I will use Hajar Moutaouakil's name as she expressed that she would like to be named as a form of activism. Please see appendices for the pseudonyms of the women and their sexual orientation, the chart will assist during my analysis.

Three of the interviews were casual interviews that took place at LGBT friendly cafés in Casablanca. The interviews followed an open dialogue format where the interviewee and I conversed about herexperience as a queer woman in Morocco. During the interview I asked specific questions, but the interview remained conversational, as both the interviewee and I were able to share our experiences as queer women and how our two cultures and their respective social norms/ familial dynamics impact us. Allowing myself to be vulnerable and personal with the interviewee allowed for a genuine and authentic interview to take place. Sharing my sexual orientation and relating back to the interviewee was an essential part of my methodology because it allowed for a greater understanding of the LGBT community in Morocco as well as the global LGBT community and the importance of unification. However at the same time it is essential to note that because I am a part of the LGBT community, my guidance of discussion during interviews does posses an insider's bias.

The other three interviews occurred over WhatsApp because the women lived in locations not easily accessible to me due to the time constraints and my primary residency in Rabat. Conversing over WhatsApp was needed in order to obtain the information, however in-person interviews are preferable and allow for a more genuine connection with the participant.

To obtain interviewees I used the dating app Tinder. In my profile I explicitly detailed my purpose of being on Tinder, which stated, "I am currently conducting research on queer women in Morocco. I am interested in Moroccan social norms and the Arabic language's impact on queer women in Morocco. Message me if you would like to discuss any of these issues". When evaluating ethical concerns while using Tinder, it is important to note that when using the app I would only swipe to match with a woman whose name, authentic pictures of themself (not cartoons, celebrities, or graphic words), and English appeared in her bio section on her profile. I

also obtained interviews through word of mouth. I met many Moroccan students while taking courses in Rabat, who later put me into contact with their queer femalefriends. The LGBTcommunity in Morocco is very underground and in order to operate within the LGBT community it requires knowing friends of friends. This became difficult because I had to first gain trust and build relationships with the women in order for them to open up to me about their personal stories and lives as a queer woman. I also felt that being a queer woman aided me in being accepted into the LGBT community in Morocco.

In the end it is essential to note my positionality and privilege that comes with the research I conducted. Although I am a queer woman and can identify with aspects of the LGBT community in Morocco, there are aspects I cannot relate to, for example the overall criminalization of homosexuality in Morocco. My American positionality is greatly highlighted while conducting research because I unconsciously viewed LGBT issues in a western context. Many of my interview questions had a western bias and often compared the advancements of LGBT rights in Morocco to needing to be on par with western LGBT rights.

To conclude, my research was extremely small scale and I was given a finite amount of time. Throughout my paper it is essential to note that what I have stated is not a final claim on this issue. My work is the beginning of a new area of explorations that deserve to be unfolded. My analysis and findings are based off of six queer Moroccan women's experiences and do not reflect all queer Moroccan women's experiences, nor the entirety of the Moroccan LGBT community. Given the topic of my research and the precautions necessary to protect the women being interviewed, extending the length of my research would be beneficial and allow for a greater analysis of more queer women's lives in Morocco. This topic has a lack of exploration and deserves to be further investigated. A recommendation for future researchers that wish to

continue this topic is to focus the research in Casablanca. Although Rabat has a large LGBT community, many of the people I interviewed resided in Casablancaallowing me to establish a greater network there. I would suggest making the primary location of the research Casablanca because the LGBT community there is much larger and I feel that individuals were more open to speaking with me about LGBT issues in Morocco.

Assumptions

Before beginning to collect my primary data on queer women in Morocco, my first assumption that was proven incorrect immediately was that women would be unwilling to discuss and meet with me about their experience. Luckily, I had great success in building a network and finding many people to speak to. I also assumed that queer women would receive a lack of recognition in Moroccan society and often be told their sexual orientation was a phase, which proved to be correct. Another assumption of mine was that the Arabic language would play a prominent role and be a key component on hindering the recognition of queer women in Morocco. However, from my research I have concluded that social norms playa more influential role, are more interesting and easier for my interview subjects to discuss and reflect upon.

Findings and Analysis

Family Dynamics: Children and Marriage

In the context of family dynamics for queer women, children and marriage are key social norms that dictate the lives of queer women in Morocco. When asked about children and marriage, the majority of women emphasized that they would like to do both. Jamila explained that having kids is extremely important to her. Since she identifies as a queer woman who is

attracted to men and women, she envisions adoption being the best option for her(Jamila, 2017). Jamila emphasized that starting her own family is something she has always wanted to do and something her parents have always wanted her to do(Jamila, 2017). Notably, Jamila's desire to extend her family aligns with her abiding to the social norms as her desire to have children was engrained due to the social norms established in Morocco. However, modes of procreation like adoption would not abide by Moroccan social norms because the purpose of procreating is to continue one's blood lineage. There are elements of social norms that queer women would like to abide by but must take an alternative route due to their sexual orientation. Although she is queer, there are aspects of Moroccan female social normsthat remain intact because, despite her sexual orientation, she is still a Moroccan female.

When evaluating Moroccan marriage norms in the context of queer women, collectively the six women whom I interviewed were adamant in that they would not suppress their queer feelings in order to preserve family honor. However, in the circumstances of Hajar, she explained that she was not fully aware of her lesbian identity, due to her lack of awareness concerning sexuality, when she married her ex-husband(Moutaouakil, 2017). She elaborated, stating that her family pushed for the marriage and she thought that marrying a man would help her feel a greater connection with men. Hajar momentarily lived a homosexual double life highlighting the power of social norms on queer women because marriage is deemed the ultimate goal in society (Moutaouakil, 2017). Not only does it highlight the pressure of marriage in Morocco but it also reflects the divide between married and unmarried women, emphasizing how Hajar did not want to remain in the unmarried social category and status. On the other hand, marriage for Amira, a lesbian woman, is an essential thing for her to abide to, as her family constantly pushes for her marriage and has avoided marriage thus far by continuing her

education. Amira's family is unaware of her sexual orientation and she believes that they would react poorly and ultimately force her to marry a man. She states that her family is "concerned with her marriage because they want to save the family's honor" (Amira, 2017). Amira's experience with her family underscores the link between marriage and family honor in Moroccan society. Based off of Amira's experience, the norm of marriage impacts queer women's ability to be recognized because of the expectation automatically assumed that a woman will marry a respectable and successful man in order to reflect positively on her family. To conclude, the concept of marriage in Morocco is a difficult norm to surpass because of the heterosexual connotation attached to it. In addition, queer women who do seek marriage to another queer woman are not able to obtain the overall norm of marriage because of the illegality of it. In either circumstance, abiding to the Moroccan social norm of marriage creates a lack of recognition of queer women, as there is a clear heterosexual definition surrounding the expectation of marriage.

With the deeply rooted patriarchal system, marriage for queer women creates controversy concerning freedom. In Moroccan culture women are expected to live at home with their parents until they marry. Some queer women in Morocco continue to remain at home because they are avoiding marrying a man. This results in a multitude of assumptions about the women by society. For both Maha and Hanae, there families are concerned about societal judgment because they will not marry in Morocco because it is illegal (Hanae, 2017; Maha, 2017). Both hope to move away and marry without Moroccan society knowing, however with that choice comes the assumption that the reason both women are leaving is because they lack purity or that men do not want to marry them. Both of these women struggle with Moroccan marriage social norms and how the patriarchy enforces the idea that they are not free agents without a man.

Language's Influence on Queer Women:

In Morocco, Arabic greatly influences and guides the social norms in society. For queer

women, Arabic plays an influential role in shaping societies views on homosexuality. To begin,

many of the women explained to me that they do not use Arabic to explain their sexuality

because there simply is not positive words or any word at all to explain. Jamila explained that

she uses French and English to describe her sexual orientation because it has a positive

connotation to it (Jamila, 2017). Using French or English to describe her sexual orientation to

her friends allows for her to avoid society's negative attitudes and beliefs about queer females.

Explaining her sexuality in French or English also allows the friends that she comes out to, to not

automatically have a negative image in their mind because her friends think of her sexuality with

a western perception and attitudes towards homosexuality, which she stressed was a more

accepting view in comparison to Moroccan views (Jamila, 2017). Contrary to Jamila's

experience of finding it easier to explain her sexuality by using French or English to avoid

negative societal attitudes towards her, Hajar Moutaouakil was in the minority of the women I

interviewed stating that she only uses Darija to explain her sexuality. Hajar explained that she

identifies using Darija in order to help change the social norms in Morocco. She feels that by

using Darija it will help her connect to Moroccan individuals who have negative attitudes about

homosexuality and allow them to see that they are both Moroccans and bond over their

Moroccan identities rather than judge her sexual orientation (Moutaouakil, 2017). Identifying in

Darija also acts as a form of activism for her because she is spreading knowledge about sexuality

in a language that Moroccan people can understand. A reason that homosexuality has such a

negative connotation is because there is no information regarding sexuality in Darija. Creating

words in Darija to describe sexuality will allow for negative social norms regarding

homosexuality to diminish. Words like *Mithly* are gaining more recognition in Morocco because

it lacks a negative connotation concerning homosexuality. Not only are more official words

being used to transform the perceptions of homosexuality but also the LGBT community is

creating their own lingo to describe themselves. In Casablanca, the LGBT community there is

very underground. Hanae explained to me, that in Casablanca, queer people began using the

word "happy" to describe their identity and claim LGBT friendly cafés and bars (Hanae, 2017).

Creating a word with a specific connotation allowed for a bond within the LGBT community in

Casablanca as it unified everyone and also created a safe word that outsiders would not know the

meaning of. Constructing a new word allowed for queer women in Casablanca to avoid some

societal judgment and allowed them to speak more openly about their sexuality in public spaces.

Notably there are methods that queer women are using to combat Arabic's influence on social

norms and deconstruct the derogatory connotations attached to homosexuality like the invention

of new words.

Although there is movement to deconstruct the derogatory connotations attached to terms

revolving around sexuality, overall the negative connotation of homosexuality out weigh the

positive efforts. The Arabic language causes queer women to face societal judgment because of

the constant negativity surrounding the subject. Amira highlighted that Arabic is one of the most

detrimental aspects to her sexuality. She noted that Arabic caused her to not realize her sexual

orientation because she did not have knowledge or resources to provide her information

regarding her sexuality. Also she explained that the negative connotations revolving around

homosexuality in Arabic has greatly shaped her parents views and attitudes towards

homosexuality. Since her family lacks education she believes that it has caused them to only

understand what society and Islam tells them is the correct way to live and behave. Amira stated

"language represents social identities and background to a set of ideologies" thus Arabic

represents the Muslim MENA (Middle East and North Africa) culture, which fosters regressive

and homophobic views and rhetoric in Moroccan society (Amira, 2017). Arabic plays a vital role

in describing homosexuality as being a "disease", "sin", or "abomination", which controls

society's attitudes towards homosexuality. The constant negative connotation causes a lack of

recognition of queer women because they are often viewed as having an illness because they do

not abide to the heteronormative culture.

Sex Taboo:

In a female homosexual context, the discussion of sex influences queer women's lack of

recognition in Moroccan society. From my interviews I was able to conclude that the concept of

lesbianism is often viewed as a phase by society, when/if individuals recognized it. Rashida

explained that ideas like situational homosexuality are prominent in her life, especially in

relations to street harassment. She explained that when walking down the street, men often

would shout comments about wanting to "penetrate her with his penis" in order to fix her

sexuality (Rashida, 2017). Sexual comments Rashida faces on the streets emphasize the idea that

heterosexual sex is the correct form of sex because society has made it into a norm. Not only

does it highlight "correct" ways to have sex but it also emphasizes that lesbianism is considered a

phase. Queer women have difficulty operating within the concept of sex because of the taboo

topic of heterosexual sex. Amira also noted that Moroccan women in general struggle with the

exploration of sexuality and educating themselves about sex thus society in general cannot

understand the idea of female pleasure because it does not benefit males (Amira, 2017).

Sex is closely related to the concepts of gender construction in Morocco. Since sex is

defined as male penetration, female homosexuality challenges the ideas of masculinity and

femininity. Queer women face a lack of recognition and are often attributed with their sexual

orientation being a phase because of their perceived femininity. When comparing the recognition of queer men to queer women, queer men are recognized significantly more in comparison to women. Hanae emphasized that males are recognized in society because they are perceived as stripping their masculinity and having more feminine characteristics and personalities, making them stereotypically more identifiable by society. Queer men are also thought to be stripping their masculinity because during sex they are submitting to their partner and submission is defined as the female's role during sexual intercourse. Even though society is disapproving of their sexual orientation, men are still recognized over women explaining the power of the patriarchy. Although queer men are recognized more than queer women, it is important to note that queer men do face greater societal judgment because they are deemed to be easily recognizable and societal norms place judgment on those who "actively choose" to strip their masculinity because males are the greatest social status one could obtain in society. Based off of the interviews I conducted, they stated that queer women are not easily recognized because of common Moroccan behaviors that occur between females. All of the women noted that in Moroccan society it is common to see two women walking down the street holding hands or displaying affection to one another. They said this contributed to the lack of recognition of queer women because society assumes they are friends and abiding by the social norms constructed in Morocco. The display of affection from one woman to another, they explained was detrimental to the recognition of women and will continue to be because it is aides in depicting lesbianism as a phase. The topic of heterosexual sex as a social norm in Morocco creates a lack of recognition of queer women, determining that acceptance of queer women is quite a long way away since recognition must occur before acceptance in Moroccan society.

Societal Acceptance/ Opinions of Homosexuality:

Queer women in Morocco face societal judgment because they are going against the social norms. Based off of the information that I have collected, I can conclude that Moroccan society has a range of opinions concerning queer females. During my interviews, all of the women shared their coming out experiences to me whether it was just to their friends or to both their family and friends. Each woman had a unique story to share about her experience and how social norms were influential in individual's responses to the woman's is sexuality. Within my interviews, three women were out to their families where as three of the women were not. However all of the women were open about their sexuality to their friends. Two of the interviews I conducted seemed to capture a well-rounded and plausible reaction by society that could be applied to other queer women's experiences in Morocco based off of the information I have gathered.

Maha shared her story of her coming out to her family and friends and their reactions. She explained that her mother is in denial about her being gay and chooses to not discuss the topic. Maha's mother often refers to her as the "black sheep" of the family and actively hides the fact that her daughter is gay because she is afraid of societal judgment of raising her daughter incorrectly. Maha elaborated saying her mother values society's perceptions of her even though her mother does not necessarily agree with the social norms and traditional religious values established in Morocco. Her mother's persistence in protecting herself from societal persecution because of her daughter's sexuality highlights the power of social norms on an individual and how they shape people's reactions. Maha is also very open about her sexuality to her friends. She said that her friends are very accepting of her sexuality. The acceptance of her friends

underscores the generational shift in social norms in Morocco and how slowly society is shying away from conservative and traditional social norms.

Amira experience as a queer woman emphasizes the more traditional and conservative interpretation of homosexuality and its relation to social norms. For her, she is very reserved about her sexuality due to her parent's harsh views on homosexuality. She stated that she attempts to test their reaction by pointing out LGBT issues when they appear on the news and often the discussion begins and ends with her mother and father saying "may Allah prevent us from this abomination" (Amira, 2017). She is very afraid that when she finally tells her family about her sexuality that they will physically abuse her and kick her out of the house. Amira's prediction of her family's reaction to her sexuality illustrates the traditional social norms that embody Morocco. Her family is extremely religious and believes in a strict interpretation of the Quran, which deems homosexuality as a sin and disease. Living in a society with conservative social norms causes queer women to simply not operate. In situations like Amira, queer women who come from conservative areas have no place in the public or private sphere, where as women like Maha are able to semi-operate in a private sphere amongst her family and friends. Overall, these two experiences demonstrate the range of perceptions on homosexuality in Morocco and how each individual chooses to interpret Moroccan social norms.

Conclusion

To conclude my research, it is essential to note that the social norms established in Morocco are detrimental to queer women. Morocco reflects a conservative and traditional society that is ruled by a government that deems homosexuality lewd and unnatural. From my findings, I have concluded that queer women struggle to operate within Moroccan social norms because they do not adhere to heteronormative family dynamics or sexual relations, and are impacted by Arabic's influence of society's perception of queer females. According to my interviewees perceptions of queer females remain negative and will continue to remain that way until a stance is taken and individuals begin to be more open minded.

Queer women lack simple recognition in Moroccan society because of their social status as women and the belief that their sexuality is a phase. Recognition of queer women in Morocco will continue as long as the patriarchal system continues to play a vital role in society. Moroccan societal norms have not yet begun the process of accepting queer men whom can be defined as being recognized. Thus before change can be made in furthering queer rights in Morocco and eliminating Article 489, society must first recognize that queer women simply exist. Recognizing a marginalized group within a marginalized group is a simple human right that should be observed. Queer women in Morocco are being left behind, as queer men are the forefront of activism and visibility. Breaking down the barrier between sexes and deconstructing gender will allow for queer women to gain recognition and acceptance as it will also allow for queer men to face less societal judgment.

For future researchers I suggest exploring more social norms that greatly impact queer women. I would also suggest evaluating the impact of social norms on queer women in various regions. I imagine there are distinct norms throughout the various regions in Morocco and it

would be interesting to see the correlation between region and social norms impact on queer women. It is also important to note that this topic is not explored in any shape or form in all societies. Evaluating any aspect of queer women in Moroccan society will be a new exploration and research being conducted. I urge people to research this topic more because it will allow those with a lack of education and resources about sexuality the opportunity to learn and understand themselves.

To conclude I would like to highlight this quote by Hajar Moutaouakil, the first official out lesbian in Morocco, that demonstrates the frustration and oxymoron of Moroccan society and the norms established. Hajar stated " why are we treated the same in jail, but not the same in society?"(Moutaouakil, 2017). This quote perfectly sums up my findings as it embodies the complex norms of Moroccan society.

Appendix A:

Pseudonym Chart

Name:	Sexual Identity
Jamila	Queer- attracted to men and women
Amira	Lesbian
Rashida	Lesbian
Maha	Gay
Hanae	Bisexual
Hajar Moutaouakil	Lesbian

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Queer Women

1. What is your sexual orientation/ How do you identify?
2. To describe your sexual identity what language do you identify in? Do you prefer to describe your sexual orientation in English, French, or Arabic?
3. What are some words that society uses to describe female homosexuality or lesbianism in Morocco?
4. Are there any words that have a positive connotation to describe female homosexual acts, lesbians, etc.?
5. What difficulties have you experienced with being a queer woman in Morocco?
6. Have you shared your sexual orientation with your family, friends, etc.? If so, what were there reactions (positive, negative, neutral)? If not, why haven't you?
7. Would you like to get married? What do you expect to happen to you in terms of marriage (move away, suppress your feelings, face societal judgment, etc.)?
8. What are your family's views on homosexuality?
9. How important is procreation/childbearing, Islam, and family honor to your family? [in the context of homosexuality]
10. How important is family honor to you?
11. What do you perceive as society's views on homosexuality?
12. Is your marriage an important thing for your family? Would you sacrifice marrying a man to keep peace within your family if homosexuality is not accepted?
13. What do you hope will change for queer women? Elimination of article 489, societal acceptance, familial acceptance, etc.?
14. Do you think there is greater acceptance of queer men than queer women in Morocco? Why do you think so?

Participant Consent Form

School forInternational Training
Multiculturalism and Human Rights – Rabat

Consent Form
Project Title: Queer and Sheer: Moroccan Societal Norms Impact on Queer Women
Researcher: Catherine Pendry

Purpose: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Catherine Pendry from Elon University.   The purpose of this study is to examine the ways Moroccan societal norms, values, and the Arabic language, hinder the recognition of queer women in Morocco. This study will contribute to my completion of my Independent Study Project.

Research Procedures

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of an interview that will be administered to individual participants in Rabat, Morocco. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to the recognition of queer women in Morocco. *(With your permission you will be audio or-and video taped).*

Time Required

Participation in this study will require __TBD__ minutes/hours of your time. (If the time involved in the study sans over multiple sessions, please be sure to describe each session's required time and try to give an overall estimate for the time expected for participation

Risks

I do not perceive any risks or more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study
Or (if there are risks involved)
The investigator perceives the following are possible risks arising from your involvement with this study in order to combat risks the investigator will use pseudonyms for individuals and will not ask personal identifiable information. The investigator will not publish any personal information in the project.

Benefits

Potential benefits from participation in this study include acting as an activist for queer women in Morocco because it will highlight how women are repressed in queer communities in Morocco.

Confidentiality

Participation in the investigator research project will remain anonymous in order to protect participants.

The results of this research will be documented as an ISP paper and presented orally to the SIT MOR students and staff. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential,

aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers (including audio – video tapes, if applicable) will be destroyed. (If the data will not be destroyed, please state what will happen to the data upon completion of the study.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any individual question without consequences.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact me at :

Researcher's Name: Catherine Pendry

Email address: cpendry@elon.edu

Giving of Consent

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

☐ I give consent to be (*video/audio*) taped during my interview. _____ (initials)
(If applicable, please include this consent box and statement.)

_____
Name of Participant

_____   _____
Name of Participant (Signed)   Date

_____   _____
Name of Researcher (Signed)   Date

<div align="center">**Reference List**</div>

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