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### Khookha McQueer: Advocacy for Non-Binary Queerness and LGBTQI+ Representation in Tunisia

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**Khookha McQueer: Advocacy for Non-Binary Queerness  
and LGBTQI+ Representation in Tunisia**

By: Jake Gomez

Independent Study Project (ISP)

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8 December 2019

**Abstract**

In 2018, the Tunisian government arrested 127 Tunisians on the basis of suspicions regarding non-heterosexual and non-cisgendered acts. Tunisian civil society centralizes its core missions around advocating for the rights of LGBT individuals through attempts to target the measures that allow for such unlawful imprisonment: Articles 230 and 226 of the Tunisian Constitution. But within the undiscussed gaps between laws, cultures of homo and transphobia, and civil society lies alternative measures for non-linear forms of queer advocacy. This research engages with the work of Khookha McQueer-- a Tunisian LGBTQI+ rights activist-- and documents conversations had with Khookha regarding her own advocacy, the Tunisian queer landscape, identity politics, and civil society. Ultimately, this study project is a means to document a queer minority experience that is not thought of in the conventional fight for LGBTQI+ rights.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Mounir Khelifa for working with me to create this research endeavor. I also wish to acknowledge Rached Khalifa, Maroua Manaa, and Amina Brik for their unwavering support for all my academic efforts, and for creating a space conducive for students like myself to seek creative and innovative research initiatives safely. I additionally wish to thank Professor Shams for guiding me throughout this research, and for introducing me to Khookha Mcqueer. Thank you, Khookha, for agreeing to put yourself at the center of an intersectional, yet formally-academic research initiative.

\*Note: Although it is “proper” practice of the English language to refer to the single unknown entity in the masculine form, I choose to instead refer to individual persons in the hypothetical and the unknown by ‘they/them/their’ pronouns. I aim to de-gender my language.

\*Further, Khookha McQueer is referred to by ‘she,’ ‘her,’ and ‘her’s,’ which will be addressed later in this paper.

## **Methodology**

Although sparse, resources detailing LGBTQI+ advocacy in Tunisia were referenced heavily to inform my research. The majority of this piece relies on a total of three hours of face-to-face interviews with activist Khookha McQueer at Cultural Cafe LiberThe in downtown Tunis, Tunisia, and additional contact via telephone. Largely, Khookha’s voice is what drives the impact and scope of this research-- not my own.

## Background

As this piece aims to detail the nature of Khookha McQueer's advocacy in Tunisia, some necessary background information regarding histories of persecution through legal measures must be established.

Article 230 of the Tunisian Constitution is the most well-known and overt mandate for violence against gay individuals.<sup>1</sup> On several occasions, the law has been employed to initiate invasive sexual testing and warranted the arrest of men for upwards of 3 years.<sup>2</sup> Because article 230 describes sexual relations as “penetrative,” and orients itself around the man, lesbian women are outright excluded from the law--creating a different form of injustice.<sup>3</sup> As Article 230 pertains exclusively to relationships between two cis-gendered men, transgender people face legal persecution by Constitutional Article 226. This article warrants prosecution for “outrages against public decency.”<sup>4</sup> Broadly, these laws cultivate notable cultures of discrimination within the social fabric of Tunisia, as represented by the 127 arrests of LGBT persons by Tunisian officials in 2018.<sup>5</sup>

Some existing literature details the landscape of queer advocacy through the documentation of LGBT NGOs operating in Tunisia. Megan Burt, a former student of the School for International Training, documented the missions of the three primary LGBT rights organizations in Tunisia: Shams, Majoudin, and Without Restrictions. Within regards to activism on the individual level, Burt interviewed seven individuals who defined their activism based on

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<sup>1</sup> Le Code Pénal. (Tunis: L'Imprimerie Officielle de la République Tunisienne, 1913, republished 2012)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Shams Abdi, “LGBT Rights in Tunisia,” October 2019. Lecture

<sup>4</sup> Le Code Pénal. (Tunis: L'Imprimerie Officielle de la République Tunisienne, 1913, republished 2012)

<sup>5</sup> Julia Dumont, “Openly gay lawyer seeks Tunisian presidency in first for Arab world,” 24 France, August 12, 2019.

membership in one of the three NGOs.<sup>6</sup> As such, the idea of creating a social space conducive to the rights of queer people was oriented around civil society--and even still, the organizations remained limited in their advocacy. Affirmed by this project was that the organizations are primarily dominated by gay men, with every organization focusing on repealing Article 230 as the primary goal of advocacy.<sup>7</sup>

Relevant terms that must be understood before reading this research include LGBTQI+, which is the general community of queer persons of non-heterosexual and non-cis-gendered natures, or others who do not identify within the conventional standards of gender and sexual expression. Transgender is a term that refers to individuals whose gender expression is different from their sex assigned at birth. Surgeries or transitionary procedures are not what makes trans people transgender. Non-binary is an identity under the term 'genderqueer,' referring to a person who does not fit exclusively into the conventionally-gendered binaries of 'male' and 'female.' In English, these individuals opt for the use of non-gendered pronouns, such as 'they,' 'them,' and 'their,' as well as 'ze,' 'sie,' 'hir,' 'co,' and 'ey.' Non-binary individuals may also be transgender or queer in addition to being non-binary. Labels are always changing, and perpetually working complementary to one another.

### **An Introduction to Khookha McQueer**

One may encounter Khookha virtually, through the wide-reaching social-media platform known by many as Instagram. With one of the most recent updates, users may post on their "stories"-- a facet of an individual's profile that is not permanently posted on their page, but

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<sup>6</sup> Meagan Burt, "'With My People': Tunisia's LGBT NGOs and Activists" (2016).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

instead, lasts for only 24 hours. Even more recently--as of July 2018-- a specific widget allows users to engage with their followers through an “Ask Me a Question” feature.<sup>8</sup> The user then receives questions and cataloged answers that they may subsequently post on the 24-hour story. For some individuals, this functions primarily as a means for procrastination and as a performance of egotism; for corporations, small businesses, social media influencers, and celebrities-- among other users-- it acts as a way to ask and receive input regarding products, user experience, and to generally engage with an audience. Following the addition of the feature via, users voiced their frustration with enduring endless feeds of questions, and some reported blocking their own friends and family for the annoying abuse of the function.<sup>9</sup> For Khookha, however, the application fits a purpose not foreign to Instagram’s original plans.

One question through this function, posed in the French language to Khookha, read as follows:

“Do you think you will change your sex?? Btw you rock the make upppppppppppp.”<sup>10</sup>

Khookha replied by posting the question to her story, supplying the answer:

“Thanks Honey. What sex? What is sex?”<sup>11</sup>

The dynamic of this exchange is not rooted in ego but extends from one individual’s curiosity regarding another’s identity. From this answer, one can derive a uniqueness to Khookha’s person. But who is Khookha McQueer? Asking this question relegates an individual to a status that limits their agency as a person-- their ability to occupy several spaces, and an ability to possess a plethora of titles. Khookha McQueer, to say the least, is a Tunisian artist,

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<sup>8</sup> Taylor Lorenz, “Why Instagram Questions Became So Annoying,” *The Atlantic*, July 17, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Khookha McQueer, Instagram profile story, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

activist, and writer who resides within the Greater Tunis governorate. She labels herself as queer, transgender, and non-binary. She speaks English, French, Tunisian (often described as a regional dialect of Arabic), and Arabic.

### **McQueer: Non-Binary Identity and the Politics of Language**

“What is sex?” Khookha’s identity is one that fits in between conventional modes of queerness and gender-identity, specifically in regards to the Tunisian case. Genderqueerness can be traced through a number of anthropologies globally, but the formal-identity labels for genderqueer identities like ‘non-binary’ are recently discovered labels.

I found the non-binary identity itself describing my identity and feelings and my positioning when it comes to gender identity in a very effective way. In 2015, I was very thirsty to get knowledge related to my experience. At the time, that knowledge was only accessible in English. The issue in Tunisia: we are Francophone. Most people speak and do research and get access to knowledge here in French. Knowing English helped me to read about non-binary experiences from around the world-- which, are not necessarily western experiences. I read about native experiences in America and in Latin America, and in South Asia. This knowledge was accessible to me in English.<sup>12</sup>

But in modes of contemporary queerness, non-binary statuses are often self-proclaimed by the use of gender-neutral pronouns. In English, these pronouns exist as ‘they,’ ‘them,’ and ‘theirs,’ with a number of other terms emerging in popularity among the non-binary community. The English-speaking community, in this way, has easy-access to non-gendered terms. However, languages like French and Arabic (and the native Tunisian dialect) assign every object a feminine or masculine article. This proves a difficult thing to navigate for people who’s dominant languages are those that enforce the gender binary.

In English, you have pronouns like ‘it’ which can definitely be appropriate, as well as ‘they,’ although they have alternative [meanings]. But with Arabic and French,

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<sup>12</sup> Khookha Mcqueer, interview by author, Tunis, December 2, 2019.

everything is gendered in a binary way. Even speaking about the table; in English, you have ‘the table,’ but in French and Arabic, you have to gender ‘the table.’ So when describing myself in English, I am more comfortable speaking about my experience.<sup>13</sup>

Because of these inherent binaries within the most Khookha’s commonly-used languages, she chooses to use the feminine pronouns in Tunisian and Arabic. Khookha explained this as a means to make her language accessible to more people and to be more culturally appropriate when able.

In Tunisian and Arabic, I put the ‘she’ pronoun forward, I do not use non-binary pronouns or gender-neutral pronouns. Because also, the equivalent of ‘they’ in Arabic is synonymous with an inappropriate word that is attributed to power. It was attributed to Sultans, dictators, and God sometimes. I don’t use French a lot. Still, I use the feminine. The thing is-- with French and Arabic-- you have the [gendered] pronouns, but you also attribute other words to the nouns. Now they would have to put the ‘e’ with or without the accent and, it just becomes complicated. You have to match everything.<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly, Khookha’s use of the feminine pronoun does not stop when using the English language. Although it may become easier to conceptualize the non-binary identity through the non-gendered terms English provides, Khookha described the comfort she feels when using the feminine pronouns, explaining that she uses both ‘they’ and ‘she.’

I am very comfortable with feminine pronouns. My lifetime experience is very related to femininity. I struggle to find or trace masculinity through my narrative when I put my narrative to analysis. Except, when it comes to being masculinized by other people, family, and the whole culture. But me, as an individual navigating the world, it was always about femininity.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Khookha Mcqueer, interview by author, Tunis, December 2, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

But the idea of comfort and identity is inherently tied to politics and advocacy for Khookha.

Utilizing her identity and the feminine pronouns, she seeks to elicit reflectiveness and engage in battle with the conventions of Tunisian society.

I go towards the feminine because this part of me is oppressed, not the masculine. It is also because it may be offensive for some people, and more educating. They learn to accept femininity. From my experience, people get more offended when I use feminine pronouns than when I use the gender-neutral pronouns. They really get offended and triggered, and then they ask questions. ‘What about the beard, and your appearance? Do you have a vagina?’; These terms are political. Non-binary terms are not as triggering as identifying as a woman with a beard, and that is what people think.<sup>16</sup>

The foundation of identity politics at work within the context of Khookha McQueer’s existence reveals the nature of her activism. As she seeks to work within conventional frameworks of gender, she controversially employs her femininity to serve as a point for confrontation with greater Tunisian society. The next sections will delve into this activism that stems from Khookha’s relationship with labels, identity, and the current queer landscape.

### **Advocacy for the Unspoken: LGBTQI+ Intracommunal Shortcomings to Queer Advocacy**

At the present moment, Khookha McQueer is one of a few individuals that make up an immerging queer landscape in a nation historically discriminatory towards LGBTQI+ individuals.

I would say that the idea of a Tunisian-queer community is a very recent idea because I think it was basically gay circles and lesbian circles and trans circles and every circle was kept away from each other--now, with social media and networking and advocacy--and also, I think it is due to the effort of many people who tried to establish bridges between those circles. Today, we are starting to see a queer landscape that is more diverse and visible than it was before.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Khookha Mcqueer, interview by author, Tunis, December 2, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

This new-age moment has thus resulted in a Tunisian queer landscape within the NGO sector.

When asked if a part of any organization within the Tunisian civil society sector, Khookha indicated no.

I was in Mawjoudin for a few years. I was there from day one, and last year, I resigned. I was in the management during the year of 2017, and all the queer NGOs at that time had no experience or role model. At some point, I had to learn to resign from all my positions because at one point it became very toxic and very tragic.<sup>18</sup>

As this interview series attempted to discuss the general public safety rating in Tunisia for Khookha, she again was more concerned about the violence that came within the community, as these spaces were marketed as the ‘safe space.’

The kind of violence that concerns me the most is transphobia and misogyny. These are the most prominent violence within the community. We are a product of this society. Just because we are queer does not mean we are less violent than all society. We have racism, we have colorism, we have transphobia, we have everything!<sup>19</sup>

Former SIT researcher Megan Burt-- through interviews with seven LGBTQI+ identifying individuals-- recorded that the only safe spaces for people of the community were said to be intracommunal.<sup>20</sup> While the prevalence of public LGBTQI+ violence is evident, little did the report concern itself with any exploration within the LGBTQI+ community in terms of physical, psychological, or linguistic violence propagated by the community and its members themselves. Khookha began discussing the destructive nature of not recognizing this violence coupled with expectations for acceptance.

You know, the issue with experiencing violence inside the community is that it is our expectation that we feel safe within the community. I think for most people, when they

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<sup>18</sup> Khookha Mcqueer, interview by author, Tunis, December 2, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Meagan Burt, ““With My People”: Tunisia’s LGBT NGOs and Activists” (2016).

join the community or when they get in touch with the community, it comes from the need to feel safe, and to feel valid and to belong, so when they face the reality of experiencing violence within the community, it is a violent impact. You cannot expect this expectation. We anticipate to feel valid and to belong, and that's why it is harder to swallow than other violence.<sup>21</sup>

With this, Khookha explained that her positionality was often validated at face level, with proper respect given to her pronouns.

I came with an identity, not only with pronouns. I came with a perspective as an agent. Some people respect your pronouns but they invalidate your agency and all the things that come with being a non-binary person. They put their interest as gay men and lesbians as a priority, so yeah, it has to do with my identity-- but not in a very direct way. It is not pronouns, it is not about accepting me as a non-binary person.<sup>22</sup>

Khookha expressed that within Mawjoudin, she attempted to put forward arguments to promote discussion of queer issues that were going undiscussed. What many perceived to be leftist and radical arguments and alternative agendas were simply instances in which Khookha was raising points regarding other issues. Her political ideologies subjected her to a harsh environment.

[The problem] was accepting my political agency when it comes to gender policies and things I wanted to achieve in Mawjoudin. I just tend to reflect about the very essential things that are related to my experience as a queer person or trans person, and I tried to conceptualize that experience in some words and in some things that I could communicate to other people, so people could take advantage of that. But, some people disagreed with that. And, I was treated as an Avant Gard person in a bad way. Like you know, we have something we say in Tunisia, in the civil society, 'mush waqtu.' It is not the time. It is not the time to discuss those issues, and that was the argument that I was told all the time. It is not the time to push that agenda because "we are still fighting against article 230."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Khookha Mcqueer, interview by author, Tunis, December 2, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Also indicated in previous studies regarding the queer-civil society community, trans issues were often nonexistent and not talked about. Mawjoudin was cited as being the most oriented around trans rights, specifically offering counseling services. Khookha was a counselor and a shoulder for many trans members of Mawjoudin during her time there. As such, transphobia was something that Khookha also took issue with in terms of intercommunal problems.

All the time, there were priorities that make you invisible and that manage to erase you; that make your voice less valuable. I tried so hard, and I think I did a lot of improvement when it comes to being vocal about trans issues and gender-related issues, but after three years, it was very heavy for me to handle and to carry on with the fight alone.<sup>24</sup>

Overall, in combination with instances of transphobia, Khookha felt as though that both her intellectual initiative to introduce new words into the community's language coupled with the want to address other issues, she was unsupported.

During the three years in Mawjoudin, I was the one person in the activist field to democratize new words, and those new words are very adapted today. If there are no new words, we cannot learn. Also, every time I offer a point of intersectionality or speaking about white feminism or white supremacy, I got ridiculed every time, and made fun of. After a few years, I said enough, cus I struggled in those three years a lot. I was strong enough to resist. I had a lot of breakdowns, but every time I stood up again.<sup>25</sup>

When asked if she would rejoin civil society, Khookha cited that existing trauma from fighting within the LGBTQI+ civil society system, revealing that she is “traumatized from that experience. 3 years in the same NGO and many friendships with many people in that NGO left [her] with a broken heart. It is emotionally draining to put [herself] back in that situation.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Khookha Mcqueer, interview by author, Tunis, December 2, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

## **Khookha McQueer as An Activist**

First, when asked about activism in general and whether she labels herself as an activist, Khookha stated that her status as an activist is defined for her from the perspectives of others.

I think the idea of me as an ‘activist’ only comes from the perception of other people. Their idea. The projection of my image that they made themselves. For me? I don’t know. It is very confusing. At the same time, my identity and myself are the product of other people’s comments and perceptions because I am within a very socialized space. I am the product of “the other.” But at the same time, this idea is not very present in my mind. Obviously, I am an activist because I am acting according to my responsibility to my identity, but I am not making restrictions for saying what an activist should do, for example, or how an activist should speak. If we follow a conventional path of “the activist,” then maybe some would label me as a non-activist. Maybe. My discourse can be controversial.<sup>27</sup>

Khookha furthers this distinction by referencing distinguishing terms in French and expanding on the idea of the “responsibility” that comes with her identity.

When I answered this question in French, we have two words. ‘Activiste’ and ‘militant’. I label myself as a militant in French, which is the equivalent of maybe a fighter, or defender. My whole life was about fighting on a daily basis. My existence is closely related to fighting and being in a fight all the time. That is what drives me. But also, these are labels. For me, I am very concerned about the things I am doing or the things I want to do, and even if people disqualify my status as an activist or not, I am still doing things whether I am labeled as an activist or not.<sup>28</sup>

The constant struggles that non-heterosexual and non-cis-gendered individuals must face are ever-present in Tunisia. When asked about the general safety of Tunisia for queer persons-- and the violence they face-- Khookha made a distinction between public violence and a more concerning violence.

I am very very focused on the violence that is intra-communal. We-- as activists--we agree on the institutional violence and the violence that comes through applying the law

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<sup>27</sup>Khookha McQueer, interview by author, Tunis, December 2, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

and all the institutional aspects of homophobia. But, not everyone is aware of the violence that is within the community. It is the hidden violence. The unspoken violence. This is what I chose to focus on in my 3 years in civil society.<sup>29</sup>

When asked to elaborate on this violence, Khookha put the NGO sector in the context of existing cultures of aggression.

I have to say that navigating the bigger society is as tough as navigating the queer community, which was very shocking. People are very familiar with the idea that the government is very violent with us, and minorities, and women, but no one was speaking about the violence that was happening inside the community. People in the community were adopting the same standards and the same aggressiveness and hostility and projecting on the side of the community.<sup>30</sup>

### **Social Media and Operations of Khookha's Activism**

With this idea of intracommunal violence in mind, Khookha seeks to go about activism on her own terms. As many scholars place the issues surrounding LGBT rights in Tunisia in the context of the civil society sector, Khookha McQueer is by no means hindered in her ability to make an impact in establishing a visible queer landscape. Upon a glance, Khookha's Instagram pleasantly supplies the eye with carefully designed aesthetics that create a layout reflective of an artist's portfolio. Her profile-- with a format consistent with fashionable demonstrations of androgyny, mixed with the vibrancy and creative excitement elicited by her use of makeup, wigs, and costuming-- is perhaps similar to the conventional accounts of entertainers, graphic designers, drag queens, and other visual-oriented individuals in American social media. Thousands follow her accounts, through both Instagram and Facebook.

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<sup>29</sup>Khookha Mcqueer, interview by author, Tunis, December 2, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

But what is unique about Khookha's enactment of social media is Khookha's positionality in both her non-binary identity as well as her detachment from civil society-- all in the Tunisian context. Khookha conveyed her particularly strong beliefs when it came to her advocacy and existence, stating that:

Language is very important, and it is what makes things exist. Things that we can name exist. I cannot hide behind a nickname or pseudonym. For the sake of safety, some people have to hide for when making interviews. Every time researchers or journalists say "Would you like your name to be hidden," I say "no." I cannot let anyone erase me. It is a risk taken, yeah. But it is the way I exist. If you erase my name, I do not exist. Also, when you find it very difficult to address my pronouns, you reject my right to exist within language. Visibility is the essential thing when it comes to my identity and activism.<sup>31</sup>

Through Facebook and Instagram, Khookha is accessible by her real name: Khookha McQueer. As such, Khookha's contribution to the LGBTQI+ movement is a clear source of visibility in a country where such visible queer icons and role models are lacking. "My Instagram and Facebook are all about visibility and being vocal about my existence and my identity."

This visibility via social media is demonstrated through her androgynous style, as well as amazing self-portrait. Khookha explain that showing herself in wigs and makeup, and taking pictures, have always been an outlet that has since given rise to visual activism:

Before coming out, before being vocal through language and through writings, I did not have the tools to express myself other than taking autoportraits and posting them. I had a tradition and habit to express myself through images; through selfies, or what I call a "self" or "autoportrait." It was not strategic when I first started taking selfies and posting them. People started to notice something different--the androgyny. I was not aware of it at first. I got aware of it through the comments of people when I was still a student, and people were commenting saying, 'We are confused, there is some femininity, there is some masculinity,' and both coexisted together in an artistic way. In 2015, I started to make pictures intentionally. Taking into consideration the amount of interest people gave to my pictures, I was saying to myself, "Okay, let's play and have fun."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Khookha Mcqueer, interview by author, Tunis, December 2, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Images have demonstrated to be the most effective means to reach a wide audience in Khookha's case. Although she also writes for publications such as *Jeem* as well as on Facebook and her own blog, pictures are often the first step.

Unfortunately, people just do not read. There are of course a lot of people who read what I post on Facebook or on my blog, but the amount of interest that people give to my pictures is double or triple. It is an effective way. I think a lot of people are starting to read my reflections or my blogs because of my pictures.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond image creation, Khookha has amassed an audience that she engages with often. One facet of this is her utilization of the "Ask Me a Question" Instagram function, or through Facebook messaging.

When I first opened my space for questions, it was spontaneous, and I was determined to answer every question, because I felt I was capable to answer them in a way that provided answers to the next generation. I witnessed a lot of queer youth struggling to get the answers that are very essential. Like, rather than saying "it is not your business to ask about my gender" or making statements when answering those questions, I veered the idea of being a queer person not as a victim or different, but being strong and having agency and striving for equal treatment with cis, heterosexual people. When queer youth try to find answers to those questions, they adopt a vulnerable position, like they are trying to seek validation when seeking my answers to the questions, like 'please please accept me.' I wanted to break that tradition, and not be someone in a vulnerable position trying to convince the others to finally accept who I am.<sup>34</sup>

In setting this model of not playing the role of a victim, Khookha does not beg for the acceptance of cisgendered and heterosexual persons. Instead, her engagements utilize a playful, yet thoughtful and direct spirit, such as thanking an individual for a makeup compliment while also asking a counterquestion: "What is sex?"

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<sup>33</sup> Khookha Mcqueer, interview by author. Tunis, December 2, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Coupling Khooka's vibrant and unconventional Instagram and Facebook profiles with the curiosity of the Tunisian public, Khookha describes that her interactions with the more conservative, not-accepting group of Tunisians is exactly the audience she seeks to interact with. Her visibility as 'different' leads to exposure that hooks in an alternative, non-queer audience-- which Khookha believes to be largely beneficial for creating a more accepting culture.

I get a lot of unfollows and adds at the same time on Facebook and Instagram. Some people are curious and do add me on Instagram and Facebook. Then they notice the most anti-conservative things in Tunisia. They rush to unfollow. But, I think it is a good thing for them. Some people even keep following me and complaining. I have this one follower on Instagram that is always complaining about anything anti-oppression, anti-conservative. Then, he sees every story I make, and every post. It is very interesting. I say that this is good, it keeps you attached to everything. It is interesting, but also funny. What is keeping these people who are complaining all the time so attached? It is masochistic. You suffer from something in a way, but you cannot keep yourself away from it.<sup>35</sup>

A side-effect of interacting with a more conservative audience while also rebelling against self-victimization has led Khookha to be perceived as radical, and sometimes even aggressive, through her social media.

In person, I am very kind. On social media, I have vehicled the image of being very radical and fierce. I used to public shame my bullies. Not in a bad way? Calling out my bullies and my aggressors, and the people trying to come for me over social media. It was very effective, and I was very known for that. I was using my name and power and my exposure, to be honest, to intimidate those people, but it intimidated everyone. I thought it was legitimate of me to not only be the queer victim of violence and cyberbullying. I wanted to be the opposite of defenseless. It came to be very effective, I was gaining a lot of support, and those bullies got backlash. Over the years, I think some people were getting the idea that I was the person that you would not mess around with. You can be a kind person and creative person, but also tough with your bullies. But that is what made the situation different from the very beginning. Perhaps some are respecting me out of fear. It is sad, but still, a good thing.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Khookha Mcqueer, interview by author. Tunis, December 2, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Despite this perception of a “radical” Khookha, thousands of followers continue to interact with all of content-- both written and visual-- on Khookha’s different social medias.

## Conclusions

These conversations with Khookha McQueer were proposed to document the advocacy experience of someone whose identity is hardly discussed within contemporary LGBTQI+ and human rights discourse in the Tunisian context. While Khookha made clear that this is “[her] side of the story,” Khookha’s experiences are reflective of possibly systemic issues within contemporary frameworks and systems for advocacy. As Khookha valiantly advocates for the rights of all LGBTQI+ people, she does so parallel to discussing critical topics of intersectionality-- all the while acting independently from contemporary LGBTQI+ NGOs. Khookha’s use of visibility tactics in being a publicly-present force in the face of LGBTQI+ violence has proven an effective means to reach an audience of both knowledge-seeking, queer youth, and a more conservative base. Through social media, Khookha not only enacts LGBTQI+ activism but is additionally building on a decade-long tradition of self-portrait creation and graphic design.

This piece presented an outline of a framework and method to advocacy wholly omitted from the conservation of LGBTQI+ rights in Tunisia. Further work will be done to complete a full, comprehensive profile of Khookha McQueer and a parallel study to the efficiency and effectiveness of LGBTQI+ civil society in Tunisia. Essentially, there is more work to be done.

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## **Interviews**

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*\*Other interviews were conducted via telephone throughout November and December\**