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# Analyzing Alternative Spaces: Queer Social Networks and Notions of Belonging in Morocco

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# Analyzing Alternative Spaces: Queer Social Networks and Notions of Belonging in Morocco

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## **Abstract**

Because of the presence of both legal and cultural discrimination in Morocco, the Moroccan queer community operates largely in secret and is unable to occupy public space. Additionally, the patriarchal structure of Moroccan society creates a culture of toxic masculinity that limits queer expression. This paper examines how queer Moroccans operate in the face of this discrimination. It also explores the extent to which alternative spaces, or spaces that subvert the norms and practices of mainstream society, contribute to the creation of LGBTQ+ social networks. Alternative spaces can be physical spaces—such as bars, cafes, and live music venues—or virtual spaces—such as websites and social media applications. This scholarly work examines whether these alternative spaces allow for a relatively greater level of queer expression, whether through nonconventional aesthetic presentation or the facilitation of queer discourse. Finally, it seeks to discover the importance of LGBTQ+ social networks in providing queer Moroccans with a sense of belonging in Morocco.

Key Terms: Cultural Anthropology, Gender Studies, Queer Studies, Sociology, Peace and Social Justice

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## **I. Introduction**

In many ways, to be queer in Morocco is to be invisible. With a complete lack of legal protection and minimal social acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities, it can be extremely difficult to express one's sexual identity in public spaces. Gay bars, organizations that advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, and any other queer spaces cannot operate publicly. From an institutional perspective, overtly gay spaces do not exist in Morocco. Moreover, Moroccan society, like all patriarchal societies where heterosexuality is the norm, is one that is highly gendered. Strict gender roles affect all aspects of life, from what career prospects one can pursue to what clothing is deemed acceptable for one to wear. In such a gendered society, expressing one's identity through alternative modes of aesthetic presentation—such as piercings, dyed hair, or androgynous clothing—can, understandably, be daunting. Additionally, unlike in many Western societies, “coming out” is extremely rare. With many families not accepting LGBTQ+ identities, the home is far from a universally safe space for queer individuals. How, then, do LGBTQ+ Moroccans occupy space? How do they cultivate social connections with other queer individuals—connections that can be vital to one's mental and emotional well-being, particularly if their identity is not affirmed by their family?

While there are no institutionalized safe spaces for queer Moroccans, to say that there is no semblance of queer community in Morocco is inaccurate and minimizes the efforts of many LGBTQ+ Moroccans who have worked to promote queer acceptance. While it is difficult for the queer community to exist publicly, more secretive spaces, both physical and digital, could provide arenas for discourse of queer issues and the creation of queer social networks—networks that could prove powerful in making queer individuals feel that they truly belong in Morocco. In this paper, I will explore the relationship between these alternative spaces and the Moroccan

queer community, and will seek to understand to what extent these spaces contribute to the creation of meaningful social connections among LGBTQ+ individuals.

### *Purpose of Study*

While much literature exists on concepts such as alternative space and the public sphere, few if any scholars have focused specifically on the way alternative spaces function in a Moroccan context. Similarly, much literature exists on the LGBTQ+ communities in a variety of countries, but much of this scholarship centers Western societies rather than the Middle East / North Africa (MENA) region. Certainly, some Moroccan scholars have studied Moroccan queer communities and dynamics of masculinity, Abdessamad Dialmy being among the most prominent. However, because the topic of queerness remains so taboo in Morocco and across much of the Arab world, scholars focusing on this subject are few and far between. I hope that through my research, I can contribute to a growing body of literature about queer individuals, spaces, and experiences in Morocco, and give voice to a community of people that is often silenced.

The overarching question that this paper seeks to answer is: *To what extent do alternative spaces contribute to the creation of queer social networks, and how does this contribute to a sense of belonging for LGBTQ Moroccans?* However, in order to answer this question, I must also reflect on multiple other sub-questions. These include:

- I. What is the current situation regarding LGBTQ+ discrimination in Morocco?
- II. What queer-friendly spaces exist for LGBTQ+ Moroccans, if any?
- III. How do gender roles and notions of masculinity impact queer Moroccans' abilities to express their identities?

- IV. How important is digital space in the creation of queer social networks?
- V. Are alternative spaces truly accessible?

Clearly, a variety of factors, such as gender roles and the use of technology/digital space, are embedded within my overall research question.

I will begin this paper by describing the necessary background information to contextualize the problematic of the Moroccan queer social experience. This will include highlighting the legal and cultural discrimination that LGBTQ+ Moroccans face, explaining that the Moroccan LGBTQ+ community cannot directly occupy public space, and exploring the way that gender norms—particularly norms of toxic masculinity—limit the ability of queer Moroccans to openly express their identities. As part of this background information, I will also explain the Nayda movement, a youth-led Moroccan counter-cultural movement that began in the late 1990s, in order to provide some historical context for modern alternative spaces and subcultures. Following this, I will outline the theoretical framework that I will use to contextualize my research in the existing literature, focusing primarily on the writings of Michel Foucault, Nancy Fraser, Angela Jones, and Robert Putnam. I will then outline my research methodology, including the limitations, assumptions, and ethical considerations of the project. Finally, I will present and analyze my findings. I will argue that while alternative spaces in Morocco are not objectively queer spaces, they are relatively accepting. They are certainly areas in which normative expressions of gender and sexuality are subverted and are thus spaces in which it is more accepted for queer individuals to express their identities. Additionally, I will argue that LGBTQ+ social relationships are vital for queer people's sense of belonging, and that both digital and physical spaces contribute to the creation of queer social networks in Morocco, albeit to varying degrees.



## *Keywords*

- I. Heterotopia:** As defined by Michel Foucault in the 1984 publication “Des Espaces Autres” and translated by Jay Miskowiec, heterotopias are physical spaces in which “all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault, 1984, p. 3). In other words, heterotopias are arenas that exist within a given society but fundamentally subvert aspects of that mainstream society’s culture.
  
- II. (Subaltern) Counterpublic:** The term “counterpublic” was coined by Nancy Fraser in a publication titled “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” She defines counterpublics as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). The use of the term “subaltern” denotes that although these spaces are public, they are created and operated by historically marginalized people, such as women, peoples of color, workers, and queer individuals.
  
- III. Alternative/Counter-cultural Space:** In this paper, I will use the term “alternative space” or “counter-cultural space” to refer to any space in which the mainstream values or norms of a society are subverted. I will use the concepts of both heterotopias and subaltern counterpublics to attempt to describe these spaces.
  
- IV. LGBTQ+:** The term “LGBTQ+” is an acronym standing for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning” that came to popular usage in the 1990s. The “+” signifies the inclusion of various other identities, such as intersex or asexual (Iovannone, 2018). The term broadly refers to anyone who does not identify as heterosexual or cisgender. However, it is important to note that although it encapsulates many identities, this term is in English and has historically described notions of gender and sexuality in a

Western context. Sexuality and gender function differently in every society, and terms like “gay” or “lesbian” may not be fully applicable in non-Western societies.

**V. Queer:** To be queer means to claim identities or engage in social practices that “challenge the hegemonic discourses on sex, gender, and sexuality” (Jones, 2009, p. 2). Although it has historically been used in a derogatory way, the term was reclaimed in the 1990s as an identity that signified one’s difference from the norm regarding gender, sex, or sexuality. The broadness of the term means that it is more fluid and subjective than terms like gay, bisexual, or lesbian, which have finite colloquial meanings. While the term is not necessarily a synonym with “LGBTQ+” I will use both interchangeably in this paper to refer to individuals and communities that are not heterosexual and cisgender, as both terms signify non-normative sexual and gender identities.

**VI. Social Capital:** Robert Putnam, an American political scientist and one of the primary scholars of social capital, defines the concept as the “features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Claridge, 2021). The term essentially describes the value that social networks and social connections have, both for individuals and for communities.

## II. Literature Review

### *Background Information on the Moroccan LGBTQ+ Community*

Undoubtedly, mainstream Moroccan society is not accepting towards queer individuals. The reality for many queer Moroccans is a complete lack of public visibility and an equally distinct lack of protection in the case of discrimination. From a legal standpoint, homosexuality is completely outlawed per Article 489 in the Moroccan penal code. The article states that “any person who commits lewd or unnatural acts with an individual of the same sex shall be punished with a term of imprisonment of between six months and three years and a fine of 120 to 1,000 dirhams, unless the facts of the case constitute aggravating circumstances” (Moroccan Government, 1962, p. 136). There are also no laws of any kind in place that criminalize discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals (U.S. Department of State, 2021). Additionally, there is a cultural aspect to homophobia in Morocco—according to a recent national survey conducted by the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, 88% of Moroccans are distrustful of homosexual individuals, with only 4% trusting them fully (MIPA, 2022). Thus, homophobia in Morocco is a two-pronged issue—it is both legal and cultural, and is highly institutionalized.

Additionally, homophobic rhetoric is often spouted by members of the Moroccan government, highlighting that Article 489—and the homophobia embedded within it—are active aspects of Moroccan governmental practice. When asked about gay rights by a journalist in 2017, Mustapha Ramid, then Minister of Human Rights, famously called homosexuals “Awsakh,” an offensive Arabic term translating to “trash” or “scum.” In response to backlash, Ramid stated that his anti-LGBTQ+ opinions were based on a “national consensus” that “only perverts deviate from,” and that queer identities of any kind “disgust[ ] the public opinion”

(Lahsini, 2017, para. 1, 4, 7). Moreover, in response to the United Nations Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review, in which they recommended an expansion of rights for marginalized groups, Ramid stated that the Moroccan government “categorically and unequivocally refuses to decriminalize sexual perversion,” referring to homosexuality (Lahsini, 2017, para. 9). With opinions like these being held by officials with decision-making power, it is inarguable that at least from an institutional perspective, Morocco is intolerant of all queer identities and expressions.

This combination of legal and cultural discrimination has very real consequences for people living in Morocco. According to a report published by the Office of the Public Prosecutor, there were 170 charges and 147 “registered cases” of homosexuality in 2018 alone (Human Dignity Trust, 2022). However, it is likely that these numbers are actually much higher, as these numbers are based on the reports available to the media. Given the social repercussions of being accused of homosexuality, it is likely that many people who are accused do anything they can to limit the media attention their case receives. Ultimately, this combination of legal oppression and lack of social support creates a sense of “unconditional opposition” that many queer Moroccans find it difficult to escape (Grotti and Daif, 2005, p. 162).

Due to the prominence of homophobia in both Moroccan government and society, it is important to analyze the origins of this anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment. Considering legal homophobia, article 489 of the 1962 Penal Code originates from anti-sodomy laws created during the period of French colonialism in Morocco (Hirsch, 2016, p. 9). At this time, laws were written by the French government to establish authority over the colonized. Legacies of many of these laws—including the anti-sodomy laws—manifested themselves in the 1962 Penal Code despite the fact that the French Protectorate officially ended in 1956. So while it is important to be

critical of the harm the Moroccan government is causing its LGBTQ+ citizens, it is also vital to remember that a legacy of colonialism continues to affect Moroccan institutions.

Apart from colonial sodomy laws, however, much of the current justification for both legal and cultural discrimination is based on religion. With Islam being the state religion of Morocco, it is inarguable that religious values are deeply embedded in Moroccan society. A few years ago, Mohamed Asseban, a member of the Board of Ulema<sup>1</sup> of Rabat-Salé, publicly announced his belief that all gay people deserve the death penalty (Amar, 2011, para. 8). While this is certainly a highly extremist view not shared by all who practice Islam, the fact that Asseban was able to rise to a position of authority while holding this opinion demonstrates that there is an allowance for homophobia in the religious institutions of Morocco as they currently function. Religious texts such as the Quran can undoubtedly be interpreted in a variety of ways, and religion is something that is highly personal in terms of both belief and practice. However, it is generally understood in Morocco that at least culturally, Islam does not support homosexuality or any other type of gender or sexual difference—notably, queer Moroccans cite religion as a driving factor of homophobia in their personal lives (personal communication, 2022). For much of society, “heterosexuality is considered an Islamic principle” and thus cannot be questioned (Dialmy, 2004, p. 9).

Much of the discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Morocco is also rooted in the strict gender roles that exist in nearly every facet of society. As a patriarchy where heterosexuality is the unquestioned norm, notions of male dominance and toxic masculinity oppress women, queer men, and all sexual and gender minorities. Similarly to many, if not all, patriarchal societies, masculinity in Morocco is associated with dominance, whether social,

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<sup>1</sup> Doctors of Quranic Law

sexual, intellectual, or economic. According to a study by Abdessamad Dialmy in which he interviewed and surveyed working class men across Morocco, masculinity as it currently functions in Morocco signifies “unconditional power and privileges” over women (Dialmy, 2004, p. 2). This includes sole decision-making power over family affairs, economic control over wife and children, and the ability to exist safely in public spaces. It is important to note that all of these traits are solely attributed to men—women, by contrast, are expected to submit to men’s authority and are pressured to operate primarily within the domestic sphere.

These patriarchal notions of masculinity heavily impact queer Moroccans’ abilities to express their sexualities. To many of the men surveyed in the aforementioned study, “being a man is being heterosexual” (Dialmy, 2004, p. 6). Men are expected to be as dominant sexually as they are in other facets of life, and one’s masculinity in many ways depends on one’s ability to be active and powerful during intercourse. When a man engages in sex with other men, it becomes conceivable that he plays a more passive role during intercourse—being penetrated rather than claiming the more virile role of penetrator. Thus, homosexuality, at least for males, is seen to be at odds with masculinity; for 61% of men surveyed, “a man who was submitted to sodomy is no longer a man” (Dialmy, 2004, p. 8). It is important to note that in this way, homophobia in Morocco is inherently misogynistic. Much of the reason that queer men are ostracized is because an acceptance of their queerness is seen as a rejection of their masculinity—something seen to be objectively more valuable than femininity. Queer men are seen to be sexual passives, and are forcibly lowered to “the secondary position of wom[e]n,” one that is defined by “inferiority” (Dialmy, 2005, p. 18). It follows that any sort of aesthetic presentation that is understood to be feminine—wearing makeup, for example—is seen as shameful, as it involves the wearer to purposefully engage with femininity. Truly, in order to avoid ostracization, there is only one way

to exist as a man in Morocco—a way that involves being heterosexual, engaging in normative gender presentation, and embracing dominance and virility as key aspects of one’s personality.

Meanwhile, for queer women, the fact that society so heavily glorifies masculinity is equally harmful. Since women are expected to exist under the authority of men, same-sex female relationships—in which men play no role—are completely invalidated. Additionally, queer women cannot express their identities even in women’s spaces, despite the fact that these spaces serve as an escape from the male-dominated mainstream culture. For example, even within Arab feminist movements, issues relating to lesbianism and queer womanhood are never discussed, and there is instead a “tendency towards silence” (Dialmy, 2005, p. 29).

Ultimately, the reality of discrimination and the lack of cultural support makes it nearly impossible for Moroccan queer individuals to express their identities in public spaces. Unlike in many Western countries, overtly gay spaces are completely nonexistent. It is true that some arenas, such as certain bars, cafes, and nightclubs in large cities, have historically functioned as meeting places for LGBTQ+ individuals, and thus constitute some semblance of semi-queer space (Grotti and Daif, 2005, p. 153). However, these areas are far from explicit about their semi-queer character, and despite their existence, the LGBTQ+ community functions completely underground.

Although overtly-gay physical spaces are nonexistent, the recent global technological expansion has provided some queer digital arenas that are accessible to LGBTQ+ Moroccans. Queer facebook groups, blog sites, and even dating apps can be accessed in Morocco and operate as ways for queer people to meet each other and express their identities. With a clear lack of safe public space for LGBTQ+ individuals, the internet is in many ways perceived as a “space of

freedom,” and its ever-increasing usage has improved visibility for queer people and issues (Home Office, 2017, p. 24-25). Yet despite their benefits, digital spaces are not entirely safe for queer Moroccans either. As of April 2020, at least 50 LGBTQ+-identifying Moroccans have been outed after using gay dating apps or expressing their identities on Instagram, a tragedy that subjected many of these individuals to homelessness, physical abuse, or suicide (U.S. Department of State, 2021). Evidently, even in the digital world, it is difficult for Moroccans to safely occupy gay spaces.

### *Background Information on Past Counter-cultural Events*

One of the most distinct cultural events of the past few decades is the emergence of the Nayda movement, a collective movement of young artists and musicians who established a strong youth-led live music scene. With the death of late King Hassan II in 1999, many young people felt that the new, younger King Mohammed VI would allow more space for non-traditional creative expression (Mekouar, 2010, para. 3). With the emergence of the Nayda movement, young musicians with more contemporary styles quickly gained popularity among the youth of Morocco, largely because they created music that touched on seldom-discussed topics such as sexuality, socioeconomic inequality, and government corruption. In short, the music subverted normative forms of artistic expression and brought up topics that were actually applicable to young Moroccans’ lives.

An important thing to note about this movement is that it had a distinctly Moroccan identity. Songs were sung in Darija, French, English, and various dialects of Amazigh, simultaneously reflecting Morocco’s rich cross-cultural identity and breaking free from



traditional mono-lingual forms of formal music. Even the name of “L’boulevard,” a contemporary urban music festival in Casablanca that emerged as part of the Nayda movement, is Moroccanized—the definite article is neither the “le” of French nor the “al-” of formal standard Arabic, but is the “l-” of Darija, Morocco’s unique colloquial dialect (Mkinsi, 2022, personal communication). Moreover, many music festivals involved with the Nayda movement used public venues. Because public spaces have historically been heavily controlled by the state in Morocco, the use of these spaces for youth-led music events constituted a reappropriation of public space, particularly because they were used as a launching point of state criticism (Mkinsi, 2022, personal communication). Given both the uniquely Moroccan identity of the Nayda movement and its use of public space, this cultural event clearly sent the message—both to the state and to the Moroccan people—that people can be Moroccan while still holding non-traditional values or identities.

Because it subverted normative forms of artistic expression and was critical of the state, the Nayda movement was also inherently political even though it was not directly activism-related. Discourse surrounding personal freedoms was common in Nayda spaces, and thus the movement constituted a subversion of cultural norms—prioritizing personal liberties over tradition. Even the name Nayda, meaning “on the move” suggests a desire of the youth to break free from traditional values and alter Morocco’s culture (Mkinsi, 2022, personal communication).

Certainly, the movement was not without its criticism. In 2003, fourteen musicians were arrested on account of satanism due to their non-traditional music and aesthetic presentation, which generated much public discourse about the morality of the movement. Meanwhile, the Party of Justice and Development, Morocco’s most powerful Islamic political party, frequently

and publicly accused Nayda-related music festivals of promoting values such as homosexuality and westernization (Mekouar, 2010, para. 3, 5). Even within the alternative scene, the movement has been accused of being co-opted by the Moroccan government. In response to the growing influence of conservative Islamist groups, the government began funding multi-million dollar music festivals in most major cities in order to appear progressive and maintain power, which many youth feel deauthenticated the Nayda movement. However, despite these criticisms, it is inarguable that the movement pushed nontraditional values into the cultural mainstream and created a lot of public discourse about the validity of traditional Moroccan values. The high profile of the Nayda movement demonstrates the power of cultural movements and spaces, and could provide insight on how modern counter-cultural spaces operate.

### *Theoretical Framework*

In order to contextualize my study of alternative spaces, I will be analyzing the work of a few different scholars who have studied similar topics. Through this, I will explore various definitions related to alternative spaces that could potentially be applied to the Moroccan context. One prominent scholar to theorize alternative space is Nancy Fraser, a American feminist philosopher. In her 1990 publication “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” Fraser critically analyzes a work by Jürgen Habermas entitled “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.” In this work, Habermas defines the public sphere as “an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction” and examines the ways that the public sphere operates in capitalist democracies (Fraser, 1990, p. 57). Essentially, according to Habermas, the public sphere is a collection of physical public spaces that allow for

discourse on topics or issues relevant to the people of that society. In his view, these spaces are accessible to all members of society, and because of this, only one form of public space is necessary to allow for all members of society to participate in universally-relatable public discourse.

However, according to Fraser, this definition of the public sphere is insufficient, as it idealizes mainstream public spaces and ignores the fact that societal inequalities impact who has access to these spaces as well as what public issues are discussed. Fundamentally, Fraser believes that the public sphere is not accessible to all members of society. In fact, in her view, the very conception of the modern public sphere is constituted by “a number of significant exclusions” (Fraser, 1990, p. 59). For example, public matters were historically seen to be men’s responsibility, while women were relegated to the domestic sphere. Thus, “masculinist gender constructs” are inherently built into the mainstream public sphere, and many public spaces are neither accessible to nor accepting of women (Fraser, 1990, p. 59). She also mentions that in stratified societies, groups who are afforded more privilege are able to develop “unequally valued cultural styles”—in other words, groups that have historically had more access to power and capital, such as men or the wealthy, have disproportionate influence over a society’s cultural values (Fraser, 1990, p. 64). It follows, then, that only issues that interest these powerful groups actually permeate mainstream public spaces, and marginalized groups cannot use these spaces to discuss their own needs and desires.

It is for this reason that Fraser theorizes the “subaltern counterpublic” as an alternative form of public space. She describes these spaces as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1990, p.

67). Since historically marginalized groups—such as women, workers, peoples of color, and queer people—don't have access to mainstream public spaces, creating alternative public spaces allows them to, with some degree of freedom and safety, express their identities. In many ways, since these spaces are created by and for marginalized people, they exist in contestation with traditional publics, which are dominated by hegemonic groups. Additionally, Fraser believes that counterpublics allow for regroupment, suggesting that they bring marginalized peoples together. Given the fact that mainstream Moroccan public spaces do not allow for any expression of queerness, using the concept of the counterpublic to explore Moroccan alternative spaces could prove meaningful.

Michel Foucault, a French philosopher, coined a different term to describe alternative space. In the 1984 publication “Des Espaces Autres” he describes heterotopias as physical spaces in which “all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault, 1984, p. 3). Essentially, heterotopias are spaces that, much like Fraser's counterpublics, subvert the norms of mainstream society. Foucault expands upon this definition by identifying two different types of heterotopias. The first type, crisis heterotopias, are reserved for individuals who are in crisis due to the way they exist in or relate to their societal context. These spaces can act as places of withdrawal for these crisis-stricken groups, and can serve as a way to escape mainstream culture. Certainly, due to the aforementioned homophobia present in Moroccan society, queer people in Morocco are in crisis, and crisis heterotopias may thus be helpful in describing Moroccan alternative space. However, the second type of heterotopias Foucault describes may be equally as applicable. Called “heterotopias of deviation,” these spaces facilitate behavior that is deviant to mainstream societal

norms or values (Foucault, 1984, p. 5). Undoubtedly, in Morocco, spaces that allow for any level of queer expression are subverting mainstream cultural norms.

However, while the concept of heterotopias may be helpful in conceptualizing Moroccan alternative spaces, aspects of Foucault's argument require critique. Namely, he is very clearly a Western scholar that writes primarily from a Western perspective. When describing his theory on heterotopias, he refers to European Jesuit colonies in South America as "marvelous, absolutely regulated" spaces in which "human perfection was effectively achieved" (Foucault, 1984, p. 8). Unequivocally, this statement ignores the violent history of colonialism and the extreme detriment it brought to indigenous American communities. Foucault seems to be writing for Western audiences with minimal regard for the well-being of peoples affected by Western imperialism. So while his theories are useful, a more nuanced perspective on heterotopias may be required to make them applicable to a Moroccan context.

Angela Jones is one such author that expands on Foucault's writings. She theorizes the "queer heterotopia," a space that—like regular heterotopias—subverts cultural norms and practices, but does so particularly in relation to gender, sex, and sexuality. However, she first explores the very concept of queerness. To Jones, to be queer means to act and present oneself in a way that challenges "hegemonic discourses" on sexuality and gender. This can be achieved both through actual sex acts or through aesthetic transformation of one's body—things like extensive piercings, androgynous clothing, or non-traditional hair length thus constitute a form of queerness, as they "defy the conventional gender/sex system" (Jones, 2009, p. 2).

Queer heterotopias then, are spaces that allow for these forms of queer behavior and presentation, including the expression of LGBTQ+ identities. They are spaces where people can

“dislocate the normative configurations of sex, gender, and sexuality” and are safe to explore and perform their identities without fear of marginalization or punishment (Jones, 2009, p. 1, 2).

More than simply being safe spaces, however, they are sites of empowerment, and actively celebrate the expression of queerness. In a society like Morocco, where queer bodies are policed and LGBTQ+ expression is minimized, sites like these are radical. Jones states:

“At this point, having spaces where bodies are free to live, literally breathe and walk down the street free from regulation and marginalization is a success. Queer heterotopias are these spaces ... [they] are spaces where individuals, of infinite genders, sexualities, and radically transformed bodies can, by living, interacting and creating their own spaces, take power and be empowered” (Jones, 2009, p. 6).

Evidently, spaces that encourage queer individuals to simply exist are extremely meaningful. This is particularly true in homophobic contexts such as Morocco. Queer heterotopias always exist in opposition to mainstream spaces, and even to mainstream heterotopias. Since queer individuals are not free to express their desires in any other spaces, queer heterotopias are—like Fraser’s counterpublics—alternative areas that allow for this form of individual expression.

It is important to note that Jones draws a connection between presentations of gender and presentations of sexuality. Although gender and sexuality are two different concepts, Jones feels that they are related in that they both follow a binary—masculine versus feminine, heterosexual versus non-heterosexual. To Jones, adherence to one binary requires adherence to the other. If one’s gender is deemed “normal,” it is expected that they perform sexualities that match this normalcy. Thus, any behaviors that subvert gender norms also subvert expectations of sexuality, and in doing so normalize the expression of LGBTQ+ identities. This concept is extremely important to this project, as

observing areas that allow for the subversion of gender norms could provide insight into what spaces in Morocco condone queer expression.

However, while extremely helpful and applicable to the Moroccan context, Jones' argument has one primary limitation—because she focuses so heavily on the importance of personal expression, she ignores the potential social benefit of queer spaces. Her argument would thus be well-supplemented by the work of Robert Putnam, an American political scientist best known for his theories on social capital. Put simply, social capital refers to the networks of connections between individuals, and can increase levels of trust and cooperation between people (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). To Putnam, social capital is an objectively good thing, and all social connections are mutually beneficial. In particular, he highlights a form of social capital called “bonding social capital” that refers to the connections made within homogenous or semi-homogenous groups. These connections can both “reinforce exclusive identities” and “mobiliz[e] solidarity” and often occur out of necessity when marginalized groups face adversity (Putnam, 2000, p. 31, 32). When applied to the Moroccan LGBTQ+ community, this means that simply meeting other queer people can make LGBTQ+ Moroccans feel safe, supported, and validated. Due to the discrimination that queer Moroccans face on a daily basis, encountering sameness in the form of shared identities may make individuals feel less alone, and thus bonding social capital may prove to be vital to their sense of belonging.

### III. Methodology

#### *Research Design*

I relied primarily on personal interviews to learn about the daily lives and social networks of queer Moroccans. I conducted two types of interviews—with LGBTQ+ Moroccans and with people associated with alternative spaces. For the LGBTQ+ interviews, rather than collecting a large amount of semi-impersonal interviews, I chose to collect a smaller number of narrative-based interviews to which I could devote more energy. Since it is taboo to discuss queer issues and identities, I wanted to adopt an informal, narrative interview structure that gave the interviewee more agency over what aspects of their stories they felt comfortable sharing. I found people to interview through existing social networks that I was a part of—all interviewees are either people that I had an existing friendship with or friends of friends. Ultimately, I interviewed three LGBTQ+ Moroccans between the ages of 19 and 21. In accordance with the desires of the interviewees, I will keep their identities anonymous throughout the rest of this paper. I also interviewed two people affiliated with counter-cultural spaces—one digital and one physical. One of these interviewees is a singer and musician affiliated with open mic night venues in Rabat, and the other is Soufiane Hennani, activist and founder of the platform *Machi Rojola* and a member of the intersectional LGBTQ+ collective “Elille.” Both of these interviews shed light on the nature of alternative spaces in Morocco and helped me better understand the goals of these spaces.

In addition to these interviews, I also collected data via participant observation. I frequented physical spaces, such as cafes and open mic night venues, that seemed to constitute counter-cultural spaces and have larger populations of queer people. In these spaces, I observed



people's aesthetic presentation as well as how people interacted with each other. Inspired by Jones' concept of queer heterotopias and Fraser's counterpublics, I took special note to observe how traditional notions of gender and sexuality were subverted in these spaces. For online spaces such as the podcast platform *Machi Rojola*, I visited the website and took note of its different features, including the website headers and recent blog posts.

Although other cities have historically larger LGBTQ+ populations, I chose to base my research primarily out of Rabat. Given the institutional opposition queer Moroccans face, the nature of the LGBTQ+ community in Morocco is one that is underground and semi-secretive. In order to fully connect with LGBTQ+ Moroccans and immerse myself in the community, it was imperative that I spent most of my time in one city, and having already lived in Rabat for two months, I had the strongest existing connection to the queer community there.

### *Assumptions*

One major assumption involved in this project is that Western labels of sexual identity are applicable in a Moroccan context. While they seem to be applicable in that all interviewees self-identified with one of these labels, it is important to note that sexuality is fluid and that notions of sexual identity are culturally-specific. Additionally, in a society impacted by such high levels of institutionalized homophobia, it is important not to assume that the LGBTQ+ community will function the same way that it does in the U.S. or in other Western countries.

Another assumption involved in this project is that my research potentially conflates LGBTQ+ identities with alternative aesthetic presentation. In other words, it is vital to remember that simply having facial piercings or a hair length that subverts gender norms does not define

one's sexual or gender identity. Certainly, these non-traditional modes of aesthetic presentation may be codes for showing queerness. Presenting in these ways, and thus making one's identity more visible, can actually be very empowering for queer people. By focusing on people's aesthetic presentation, I was able to analyze whether certain spaces allowed for the subversion of gender/sexual norms, and thus whether these spaces would allow for LGBTQ+ expression. Additionally, focusing on aesthetic presentation allowed me to pick up on codes that signified queerness without directly asking people how they identified. However, it is equally true that aesthetic presentation is not the entirety of one's identity. There is no one way to be queer, and one's queerness is not defined by the way that they present themselves.

### *Limitations*

One primary limitation is the short scope of this project—in total, we only had four weeks to collect data and organize our findings. Because of this, I was unable to fully immerse myself in the counter-cultural scene. Even towards the end of the research period, I learned about the existence of counter-cultural spaces that I had previously not known about. While I would have liked to expand my research to include these spaces, it simply was not practical given the time remaining in the research period.

Another limitation related to scope is the fact that I was not able to conduct many interviews, and thus my research may not be descriptive of the entire LGBTQ+ community in Morocco. For example, while not all of my interviewees were cisgender, none identified as transgender. In any context, but particularly in a country that has such high levels of intolerance towards queer people, the trans experience is unique, and trans people face different forms of

oppression and discrimination. While certain aspects of my research, such as the subversion of conventional gender presentation, may be applicable to the trans experience, this project alone does not contain the nuance to speak extensively on trans issues.

One final limitation is that the bulk of my background research relating to gender roles focused mostly on masculinity as opposed to femininity. This may make my research biased towards the male queer experience rather than towards queer womanhood. However, this was only partially my choice—it is worth noting that the majority of existing Moroccan scholarship on queerness centers the male experience and male anatomy. This goes to show that discussing any form of feminine sexuality, but particularly queer sexuality and feminine queerness, is still highly taboo.

### *Ethics and Positionality*

Due to the vulnerability of the Moroccan LGBTQ community, this project does carry with it some ethical concerns. While I believe that my research could be valuable, it is undoubtedly not worth putting queer Moroccans in danger in any way. Particularly because I rely on interviews, I would not want to make any interviewees relive potentially traumatic experiences that they have gone through. Put simply, it is important to remember that the comfort of the interviewees should always be prioritized over my research. I think these ethical concerns are particularly prominent when asking questions about alternative spaces, because I would not want to destroy the sense of safety that has been established in these places.

Due to my positionality as a researcher, another ethical concern is that of overgeneralization. While Morocco does struggle with homophobia on an institutional and

cultural level, I do not want to create a picture of Moroccan people as entirely homophobic, as that would strip them of their agency to disagree with their government or their mainstream culture. As defined by Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said, orientalism is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,” including the MENA region (Elif Notes, 2022). Orientalism was perpetuated by research conducted by Western academics that depicted non-Western peoples and societies as backwards or under-developed. Certainly, it is important to be critical of Moroccan society in relation to how it treats its queer citizens. However, it is important not to fall back into rhetoric that is demeaning towards Moroccan individuals in any way, particularly given that origins of homophobia in Morocco are partially rooted in colonialism.

## IV. Findings and Analysis

### *Physical Spaces Available to the LGBTQ+ Community*

Through participant observation, conducting interviews, and simply becoming more connected to the local LGBTQ+ community in Rabat, I was able to learn about several different types of physical alternative spaces. Certain cafes, for example, seem to constitute alternative spaces and be relatively welcoming towards LGBTQ+ people. In addition, aspects of the Moroccan nightlife, such as bars and underground parties, seem to allow for queer expression. Live music venues are also certainly counter-cultural spaces. Even private residences can be alternative spaces, as long as they allow for the safe expression of unconventional sexual and gender identities.

One aspect of these spaces that makes them relatively queer-friendly is that they subvert normative expressions of gender and sexuality, therefore constituting (at least to some extent) Jones' queer heterotopias. Namely, nontraditional aesthetic presentation seems to be highly normalized in these spaces. In my observation of live music venues, for example, I noticed that many people had dyed hair and piercings, which is relatively rare in mainstream Moroccan culture. Moreover, both musicians and audience members engaged in aesthetics that are more popular on the other side of the gender binary—many femme-presenting people had short hair, while many male-presenting people had hair long enough to be tied back. Many male-presenting people also had facial piercings, and some wore make-up. Clearly, the normalization of these aesthetics makes these spaces more welcoming to the queer community, as they free LGBTQ+ people from restrictive gender/sexual norms and allow them to engage in aesthetic presentation that uplifts their identities. One interviewee, a 21-year old from Salé who identifies as gay,

highlights this—outside of these spaces, he frequently receives negative reactions to his nonconventional clothes and use of makeup, particularly from his family. However, the same is not true within these spaces (personal communication, 2022). Furthermore, this subversion of norms may give people who do not identify with their sex assigned at birth, such as trans and non-binary individuals, a chance to safely express their gender identities.

These spaces also allow some degree of openness around queer discourse—individuals seem to be able to discuss their identities and interests with minimal backlash. At a local open mic night, for example, one musician casually mentioned that the song she was singing was written for her ex-girlfriend, and audience members were unfazed. These spaces even condone some level of queer desire, even sexual desire. When describing a techno party he attended, one interviewee said that he kissed a man in front of several other people, and no one had a negative reaction (personal communication, 2022). Comparing this to the 2015 incident in which two men were arrested for kissing in front of Rabat’s Hassan Tower, this non-reaction proves that mainstream cultural norms were not valued at this party, making it an alternative space (News24, 2015). Additionally, this allowance for queer discourse and desire aligns closely with Fraser’s description of counterpublics, which she calls “parallel discursive arenas” that encourage unconventional discourse and expression (Fraser, 1990, p. 67).

It is also important to note that although these spaces are physical, it is often the people rather than the space itself that encourage the visibility of queer identities. When asked where she feels comfortable expressing her identity, one interviewee, a 19-year old from Rabat, mentioned that she feels the most comfortable expressing her sexuality when around queer friends, as they provide her with a sense of safety (personal communication, 2022). Similarly, a different interviewee stated that when he is with his friends, particularly in their homes, he can

wear whatever he wants and dance however he wants—put simply, he “can be comfortable” (personal communication, 22). Certainly, this demonstrates that social connections with other queer people or trusted heterosexual friends can encourage LGBTQ+ people to be their holistic selves. This also suggests that in order to understand alternative spaces in Morocco, we may have to abstract our definition of “space.” Alternative spaces can be somewhat intangible—even if they also exist physically—simply because they only become alternative because of the people within them.

However, it is important to note that while these alternative spaces do allow for some expression of queerness, are not explicitly queer spaces, as overtly gay establishments cannot legally exist in Morocco. Rather, these spaces are queer-safe—they allow for some degree of LGBTQ+ expression, but do not necessarily have the goal of supporting the Moroccan queer community. According to a musician from Rabat who has been involved with the local music scene for the past two years, the primary goal of many of these spaces is commercial (personal communication, 2022). Places like bars, music venues, and cafes are ultimately institutions that are meant to make money. Certainly, they can have secondary goals—local music events, for example, have the goal of bringing people together through the medium of music and sharing positive energy with the community. However, these institutions are still ultimately driven by profit. Creating safe spaces for queer people is therefore a byproduct of physical alternative spaces rather than the driving force behind them. This in no way invalidates the benefits of these spaces—they are still incredibly meaningful in their acceptance of queer Moroccans. However, it is important to remember that due to the persistence of institutionalized homophobia in Morocco, these spaces are imperfect, and are limited in that they cannot outright support the LGBTQ+ community without facing repercussions.

### *Digital Spaces Available to the LGBTQ+ Community*

Because of the limitations of these physical spaces, digital spaces are very important in their allowance of queer expression. It is important to note that these spaces are also not entirely able to escape the homophobia present in mainstream society—one interviewee said that while he does engage in unconventional, queer-coded aesthetics in the pictures he posts on Instagram, he does not feel comfortable being explicit about his identity online because he still “live[s] in Morocco” (personal communication, 2022). However, virtual spaces are still vital because they allow for a greater amount of LGBTQ+ expression than physical spaces. According to Soufiane Hennani, activist and founder of *Machi Rojola*, digital spaces can be explicit in their discussion of gender and sexual minorities while physical spaces cannot. These spaces become “a refuge” where queer people can express their identities (Hennani, personal communication, 2022).

*Machi Rojola* is one such site of refuge. Hennani describes the site as a platform with the goal of “promoting positive masculinities and fighting against toxic masculinity” (Hennani, personal communication, 2022). The use of plural “masculinities” here is intentional—the platform aims to break down the notion that there is only one way to be masculine, and believes that current norms of toxic masculinity are only one iteration of masculinity. Through podcasts, public blog posts, and art, the site aims to create a safe space for the queer community in which people can escape the strict heteronormative and patriarchal structure of society. *Machi Rojola* is also highly intersectional, with podcasts focusing on topics like the trans-masculine experience and the experiences of men living in the south of Morocco (Machi Rojola, 2022).



One key aspect of this space is that it directly facilitates discourse that is nearly impossible to talk about in mainstream society, such as discussions on gender diversity and sexual plurality. By doing so, the site works to break the silence on these topics and send the message to the broader Moroccan community that discussing queer issues should not be taboo (Hennani, personal communication, 2022). This firmly establishes *Machi Rojola* as an alternative space, as both heterotopias and counterpublics involve the facilitation of unconventional discourse. Counterpublics even involve pushing this discourse into the cultural mainstream and serve as bases for “agitational activities directed towards wider publics” (Fraser, 1990, p. 68). *Machi Rojola* is certainly doing this by publicly discussing taboo subjects—part of the project even involves hosting in-person workshops about positive masculinities in schools and cultural centers, which directly forces this alternative discourse to become public.

Through a section titled “Contribuez,” the site also allows for LGBTQ+ people to share their personal stories. The submissions are currently in the process of being compiled, with the goal of having them eventually be published. Encouraging queer people to engage with the site and with queer expression helps to build community, as LGBTQ+ individuals are led to feel like they have a place and a voice in spaces like *Machi Rojola*. This follows with what Hennani describes as the horizontal approach to education on the platform—while learning is a goal of the space, the learning occurs collectively, with listeners and podcast founders alike exploring concepts of gender, sex, and sexuality. *Machi Rojola* is therefore a place of exchange at least as much as it is a place of learning—overall, “it’s about sharing” (Hennani, personal communication, 2022).

Finally, all LGBTQ+ interviewees cited Instagram and other social media platforms as digital spaces that they frequently use. As previously stated, there are limitations to what one can

post, as there is still social stigma surrounding overt queer presentation. However, the sites do allow for some degree of LGBTQ+ expression and, being virtual, are not confined by Moroccan norms. Through these spaces, queer Moroccans can gain access to queer media and pop culture coming from other areas of the world.

### *Accessibility of Alternative Spaces*

While both physical and digital counter-cultural spaces try to be welcoming, they are not entirely accessible. This is largely due to the presence of structural inequalities in Moroccan society. Regarding physical spaces, one primary limitation is the fact that many of them require money for entry. For many local live music events, tickets are 30 dirhams at the door, even for performers. Similarly, many underground parties require a payment at the entrance in order to cover the cost of alcohol, housing, and other amenities. This limits accessibility along class lines, as those who cannot pay simply cannot enter these spaces. According to one interviewee who recently went to a techno party, he only attended with one other friend because all his other friends could not afford it. Because of economic inequality, “not everyone has the possibility to attend” (personal communication, 2022). Apparently, for live music venues in particular, organizers strive to make their spaces accessible despite the imperative of making a profit. Often, if people cannot pay the full amount, organizers have them pay what they can and still allow entry (personal communication, 2022). However, the fact remains that any institutions that require a payment to enter are not entirely accessible, as those with less access to capital encounter economic barriers when trying to engage with the space.

Similarly, digital spaces require an implicit cost even if the sites are free. In order to access these spaces, one must have a smartphone or computer as well as internet access, both of which cost money. According to Soufiane Hennani, this disparity in internet access is also regional, as areas far from cities tend to be less wealthy and have less access to technology. As described by a member of the Moroccan LGBTQ+ collective *Aswat*, the queer experience in Morocco is heavily influenced by social class, and those with more money are more protected against violence and discrimination (Home Office, 2017, p. 24). It would seem that access to alternative spaces, even digital spaces, runs along class lines in a similar way, despite organizers' efforts to make their spaces welcoming.

One other limitation to accessibility is that of awareness—because these counter-cultural spaces are constructed in secret, some people, even queer people, simply do not know how to access them. One interviewee, for example, stated that while they believe that there are probably some bars or clubs more accepting of the queer community, they doesn't know of any, and therefore can't access any sort of queer-friendly night life. Even in my personal experience with LGBTQ+ spaces, such as underground private parties, I was only invited into these spaces because of my existing social connections. If people don't have these connections, these spaces become very difficult to access. Additionally, many physical alternative spaces—such as parties or spontaneous informal music events—are only advertised through word of mouth. Posting addresses or other details on social media risks police involvement with the event, and can therefore be dangerous (personal communication, 2022). Again, this means that one needs to have prior involvement in these social networks to attend these events. This creates an interesting catch twenty-two—in a way, queer-friendly spaces are only accessible if one already knows queer people, but it is difficult to meet queer people without having access to these spaces. In the

next section, I will describe the ways in which queer people meet each other and become initially involved with these social networks.

### *Formation of Queer Social Networks*

Through my interviews, it quickly became clear that social media is hugely important in building LGBTQ+ social networks in Morocco. Every LGBTQ+ individual I interviewed relies heavily on social media sites to meet other queer people. One interviewee, a 19-year old from Salé, says that he met the majority of his queer friends through Instagram and Facebook (personal communication, 2022). Another interviewee mentioned that they use both Instagram and Twitter, and both platforms have been vital in connecting them with queer friends. Many of their friends don't even live in Morocco, highlighting the power of virtual spaces in building social capital across geographic boundaries. The fact that each of these sites involves sharing media or posting pictures of oneself is also important. One interviewee noted that by presenting as queer on social media and engaging with unconventional or gender-bending aesthetics, it is possible to signal one's identity to other members of the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, the structure of an app like Instagram is incredibly key in creating social capital among queer Moroccans. On the app, it is possible to see everyone that your friends are following, and the app also lists mutual followers that you share with people you do not yet know. Because of this, if you meet someone already involved in queer social networks, you will have the opportunity to become connected to all of the LGBTQ+ people they already follow, and thus become a part of the network yourself. A similar phenomenon can occur in real life—meeting a single LGBTQ+ person can often lead to meeting a whole community of queer people, and this single social

connection can snowball into one's involvement with the entire local LGBTQ+ community. The benefit of digital spaces is that they seem to streamline this process.

Physical alternative spaces can also prove meaningful in building queer social networks. According to the local musician involved with counter-cultural spaces, places like live music venues are welcoming to people regardless of their prior involvement with the space, and new people show up to every jam session (personal communication, 2022). He himself met many of his friends in these spaces, and was able to be connected to a whole community of like-minded progressive people despite initially only attending the events spontaneously. According to Hennani, the same is true for the physical workshops hosted by Machi Rojola. Many students who engage with these spaces make social connections through them, both with him and with each other (Hennani, personal communication, 2022). However, the fact that these places are still rare and somewhat difficult to access means that for the most part, digital spaces play a larger role in the actual creation of LGBTQ+ social networks. Many physical spaces, such as cafes and bars, then function simply as spaces where queer people can spend time with one another once they already know each other.

### *Notions of Belonging*

Most of the interviewees I talked to felt strongly that they do not belong in Morocco, and feel that it is hard to connect to mainstream Moroccan society while holding an identity that differs from the norm. One interviewee talked about how he felt that he had a different mentality and value system from many people that he knew, even his direct family. He feels otherized by his desire for Morocco to become more progressive, as his family holds much more conservative

values than he does. Additionally, he mentioned that the way his sexual identity is perceived differentiates him from the rest of his family and make him feel like he doesn't entirely fit in (personal communication, 2022). For reasons like these, many of the interviewees I talked to are actually trying to leave Morocco. One is hoping to move to the U.S. and live in New York, and another has tried multiple times to visit Europe—even temporarily—but has had complications with visas. Clearly, the feeling of not belonging in Morocco, while not necessarily universal among LGBTQ+ people, is powerful. Even in the interviewees' social lives, it seems difficult to escape the homophobia present in Moroccan society. Due to past experiences where friends did not accept her, one interviewee said simply, "I don't feel comfortable around straight people" (personal communication, 2022). It is evident that not all social connections are beneficial in helping queer Moroccans feel safe and supported.

However, social connections specifically with other LGBTQ+ people appear to drastically improve queer Moroccans' sense of belonging. Everyone I interviewed unanimously reflected on how important their friendships with queer people are. One interviewee mentioned that growing up, he was convinced that he was the only queer person in the world, and his sexuality was somehow wrong. Evidently, this was very isolating for him. However, now that he is older and has built relationships with other LGBTQ+ individuals, he feels more connected to other people and feels much less alone (personal communication, 2022). Undoubtedly, his friendships with other queer people improved his quality of life and his sense of belonging. It would appear that Putnam's claims about bonding social capital hold true in this context—building relationships with those similar to you certainly does reinforce one's identity, and can make people feel validated. For queer Moroccans, connecting with people who share similar experiences, emotions, and identities is invaluable. It is also notable that simply being

around other queer people can affirm LGBTQ+ people in their identities. One interviewee mentioned that “wherever there are more gay people,” he feels a greater sense of peace and safety, and he feels that he belongs in spaces that are occupied by other queer people (personal communication, 2022). Ultimately, it is inarguable that encountering sameness is hugely powerful in helping queer Moroccans feel that they belong in a space.

## V. Conclusion

Both legally and culturally, Moroccan society is intolerant of LGBTQ+ expression, and homophobia is highly institutionalized. Because of this, the queer community is forced to occupy alternative spaces rather than public ones, and these spaces can be physical or digital. Examples of physical spaces include cafes, live music venues, bars, and underground parties. However, due to the persistence of legal homophobia in Morocco, overtly queer establishments cannot exist. These spaces are thus queer-safe rather than explicitly queer—they allow for some degree of LGBTQ+ expression and facilitate some queer discourse, but supporting the LGBTQ+ community is not one of the primary goals of the space. Digital alternative spaces, such as Instagram or other social media apps, are also hugely important in their allowance for queer expression. The digital realm is more free from legal restrictions, so platforms such as *Machi Rojola* can explicitly engage in queer discourse and create visibility for the Moroccan LGBTQ+ community. Alternative spaces can even be completely intangible, consisting only of abstract queer social networks. The alternative space in this case doesn't exist in any one area, but rather exists whenever and wherever these people decide to meet.

Regardless of the type of alternative space, however, these arenas all allow for the expression of queer identities. And while digital spaces are particularly meaningful in facilitating social connections between LGBTQ+ people, all of these spaces help to create queer social networks to some degree. Ultimately, the spaces and social connections that queer Moroccans share with each other are vital for their sense of belonging. And while a lot of institutional change still has to occur regarding Moroccan LGBTQ+ rights, alternative spaces and social networks that allow queer Moroccans to live as their authentic selves are a sign of hope for a better, more queer-inclusive future.



## Appendix A: Interview Questions for LGBTQ+ Individuals

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you from?
4. If you feel comfortable telling me, how do you identify?
  - a. If you would rather not label it, that is completely alright. Do you consider yourself a part of the LGBTQ community? Do you feel like you are connected to the LGBT community in any way?
5. Can you talk a little bit about your experience being queer in Morocco?
6. What spaces do you feel most comfortable expressing your sexual/gender identity? Are there any places where you feel like you can express your sexual identity fully?
  - a. Do you have any places in your life where you feel safe being queer? (These can include private residences, public places, etc.)
  - b. Do you feel that these spaces are accessible to people of different genders, races, classes, etc.?
7. Do you feel restricted by gender roles in Morocco?
8. Are you familiar with any counter-cultural spaces? Do you feel like you belong in these spaces?
9. Do you have many friends who identify as part of the LGBTQ community?
  - a. Where/how did you meet these friends?
  - b. Do you know of any places where LGBTQ people go to meet other LGBTQ people? Do lots of people know about these places?
  - c. How important are these friends to your sense of belonging and identity?
10. Does the internet play a role in your life? If so, what sort of role?
11. Are you part of any queer spaces online (dating apps, facebook groups, blogs)? Do you feel more connected to other LGBTQ people because you are on the internet?
12. Do you feel like you belong in Morocco? Why or why not?
13. Is there anything else you want to bring up about your experience? This is a safe and welcoming space.

## **Appendix B: Interview Questions for Organizers of Alternative Spaces**

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you from?
4. What is your role in this space? How long have you been involved with this space/project? Describe your experience.
5. Do you consider yourself to be connected to the LGBTQ community in any way?
6. Do you have a lot of interaction with the queer community?
7. In your opinion, what are the goals of this space?
  - a. Do you feel that these goals are reached?
8. Does this space allow people to make social connections with each other? If so, how? Does it create visibility for certain groups of people?
9. Do you feel that these spaces are welcoming to everybody, regardless of sexual or gender identity?
  - a. Do you feel that these spaces are accessible to people? (Particularly in regards to pricing, language use, gender demographics, etc.)
10. Are spaces like this common?

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