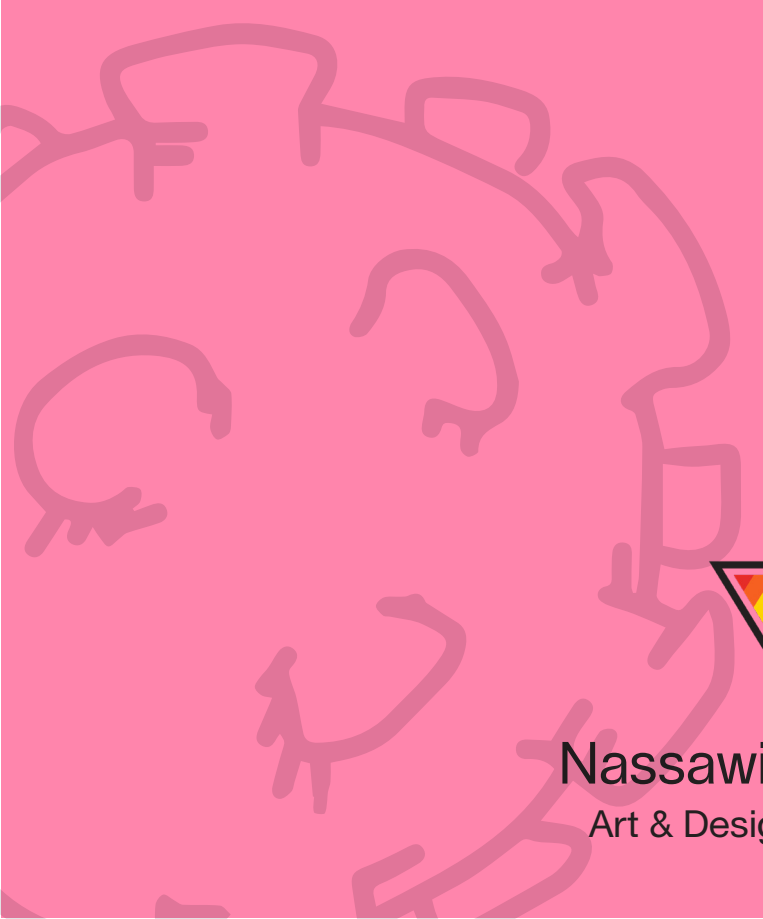


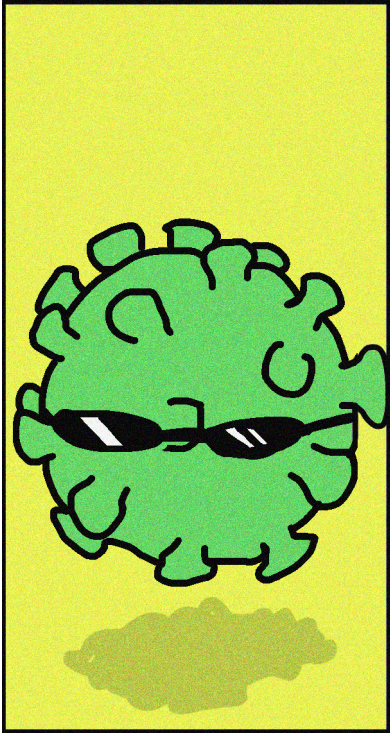
**LOUBYA IN THE
TIME OF CORONA**



A report on the situation of the LGBTQI+ community in Morocco in 2020



Nassawiyat - 2020
Art & Design by Fagouta



Art & Design by Fagouta

Acknowledgement

We want to express our gratitude to all the LGBTQI+ groups and organisations as well as the individuals who took from their time to participate in the creation of this report and enrich its content. We also want to express our gratitude to all the Moroccan LGBTQI+ community for their daily resilience and

visibility in a society where their existence is illegal. Our gratitude goes to the efforts that have been made and that are still made to advance the rights of Moroccan LGBTQI+ people, and to make sure that these rights are recognized, respected, and promoted.

- The Nassawiyat Team

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1. Terminology

Cis-het: is an abbreviation for cisgender heterosexual.

Cisgender or Cis: is a term for people whose gender identity is the same as the gender they were assigned at birth / by society (man or woman).

Transgender: is a term for people whose gender identity is not the same as the gender that was assigned to them at birth.

Lesbian: is a term used to refer to women who are sexually, emotionally and spiritually attracted to women.

Gay: is a term used to refer to men who are sexually, emotionally and spiritually attracted to men.

Bisexual: is a term for people who are sexually, emotionally and spiritually attracted to more than one gender.

Queer: is an umbrella term used to refer to the LGBTQI+ community. It was initially used as a slur but was reclaimed by the community.

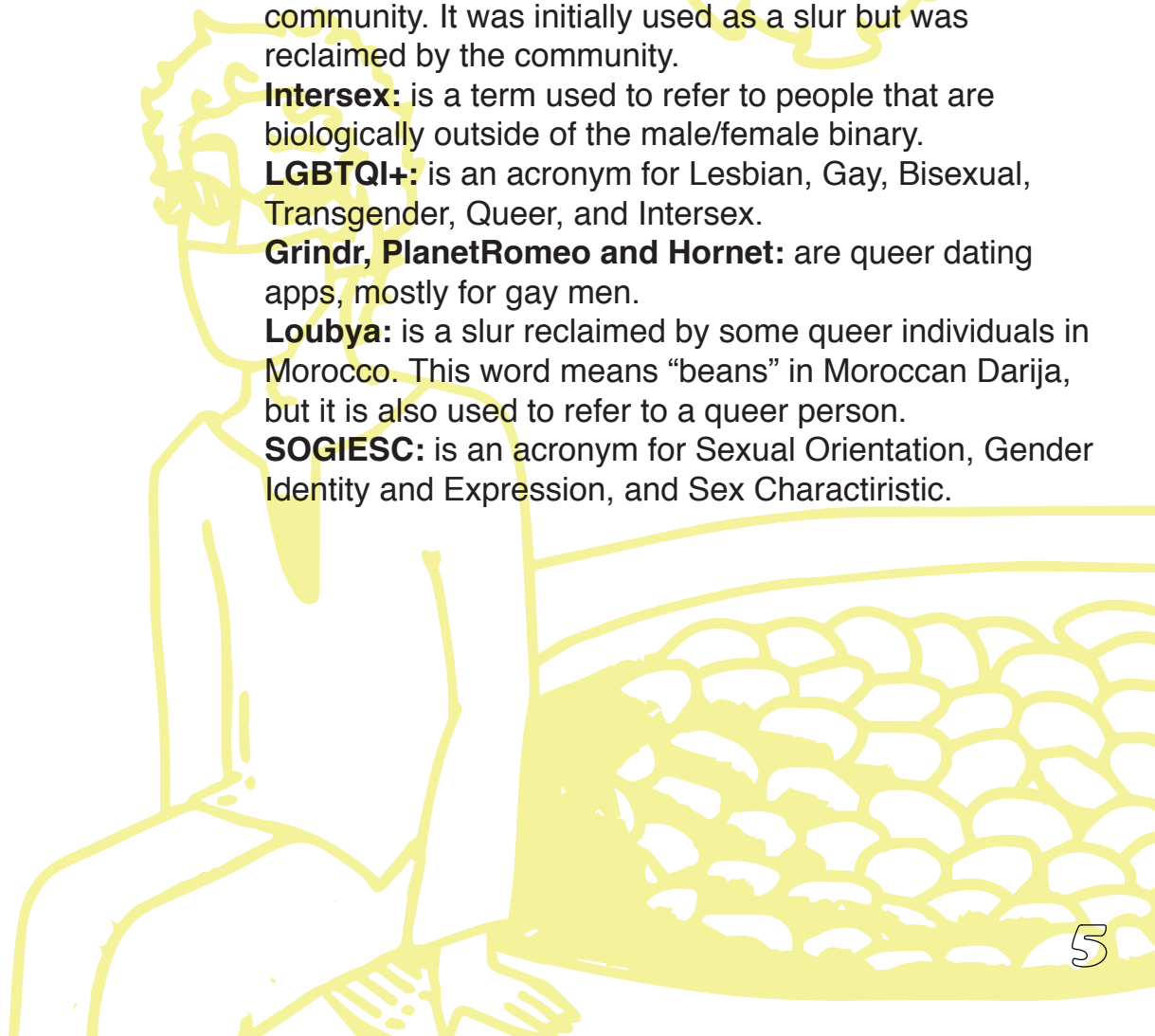
Intersex: is a term used to refer to people that are biologically outside of the male/female binary.

LGBTQI+: is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex.

Grindr, PlanetRomeo and Hornet: are queer dating apps, mostly for gay men.

Loubya: is a slur reclaimed by some queer individuals in Morocco. This word means “beans” in Moroccan Darija, but it is also used to refer to a queer person.

SOGIESC: is an acronym for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristic.



2. Summary

Nassawiyat (The Arabic word for feminists) is a collective of queer women and trans activists in Morocco that was established to peacefully combat all forms of violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression against marginalized communities such as sex workers, intersex, poor women and the queer/trans+ community in Morocco. Nassawiyat was established because of an acknowledgement of the lack of intersectional feminist spaces for queer women and trans communities in Morocco, and the necessity of creating such spaces. Nassawiyat recognizes that the LGBTQ community has specific needs, and decided to focus on this marginalized community.

This year, Nassawiyat has worked on multiple educational campaigns and projects that provide support and relief to the queer community. For example, Nassawiyat established a mental health support service line for the Moroccan queer community. Nassawiyat has also been providing financial relief to queer and trans individuals that were impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. Nassawiyat has launched an educational campaign about gender, sexuality, and the LGBTQI+ community (“Wach3rafti”), an activism campaign in which we spotlighted Moroccan artists who use art as a tool for social change to further human rights for the queer/trans+ community (“Nassawiy’Art”), and a campaign where we shared information on how non-Black Moroccans can stand against anti-Blackness and support Black communities in Morocco.

2020 was a particularly rough year for the Moroccan queer community as the LGBTQI+ community suffered from violence that was sparked by hate speech and outing campaigns which was heightened by the Covid-19 crisis. This report was written to document what this year brought to the queer community in Morocco in order to reflect on it in the future and move forward. Additionally, this report was written to raise awareness about the situation of the LGBTQ+ community to the broader Moroccan public. Finally, this report is a way to provide recommendations to the Moroccan society, government, and media on how to interact with and respect our community.

2. Summary

This report is a participative collaboration between Nassawiyat and other LGBTQI+ Moroccan collectives and organisations, including Atyaf, Akaliyat, Fek Tayri, SAQFE, Groupe d'Action Féministe, Kasbah Tal'fin, Liqaat, and Tanit. It aims to highlight the efforts of LGBTQI+ civil society organizations that have been in the frontline supporting both people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and queer people who were affected by hate speech and outing campaigns.

This report covers the general context in which the queer Moroccan community finds itself, the situation of the Moroccan queer community during the Covid-19 crisis, the efforts that were deployed by the civil society to support the community during the crisis, and recommendations to the media, the government, and the broader public. This report draws from multiple kinds of sources: it builds on interviews with activists and queer individuals who were affected by the 2020 outing and hate speech campaigns. These interviews were conducted by Nassawiyat members. It also draws from data that was previously collected by other queer Moroccan organizations such as Akaliyat, and on our analysis, experiences, and knowledge of the situation as a group. This report is available in the following languages: English, French, Arabic, and Amazigh.

The title of this report is Loubya in the Time of Corona. The term “loubya” as defined earlier refers to a member of the queer community. Before the 2020 outing campaign, this term was mostly used within the Moroccan queer community and was foreign to the broader Moroccan society. However, with the rise of hateful acts and hate speech targeting the Moroccan queer community in 2020, the broader Moroccan society started using the term “loubya” as an insult. Some members of the Moroccan queer community decided to reclaim this term, and started using it as a way to refer to their identity with pride, similarly to the trajectory of the word “queer” in the US.

3. General Context

Morocco is a North African constitutional monarchy and is a Muslim country with laws and social norms that follow an Islamic trend. The Human Rights context in Morocco is similar to the context in its neighbouring countries in North Africa, but Morocco also has its specific characteristics and challenges. The following part seeks to define the general legal and societal contexts in Morocco. It will also outline the position of the Moroccan state regarding violences that marginalized communities are facing, most particularly the Moroccan LGBTQI+ community.



3.1 Legal Context Same-sex relationships have been criminalized by Morocco law since the colonial period. This was officialized in 1962, when the Moroccan Penal Code criminalized same-sex consensual relationships under article 489. This article states the following:

“ Any person who commits lewd acts or acts against nature with an individual of the same sex is liable to a penalty of imprisonment ranging from six months to three years and a fine ranging from 200 to 1,000 Moroccan dirhams unless the circumstances of the offense do not constitute an aggravating factor. ¹ ”

In addition to article 489 that specifically criminalizes homosexuality, other articles in the Moroccan penal code use vague and unclear language which is used to arrest of many LGBTQI+ individuals. Specifically, article 490 condemns sexual conduct between two unmarried heterosexual individuals to imprisonment lasting from a month to a year. In addition to this, article 491 punishes adultery with one to two years of imprisonment. All of these laws are used by the Moroccan authorities to criminalize queer individuals.

Although trans-identity is not mentioned in Moroccan law, the trans and gender diverse communities in Morocco are also arrested and see their rights violated under articles 489, 490, and 491 of the penal code.

¹ Maroc, Direction de Législation. CODE PENAL Version Consolidée En Date Du 15 Septembre 2011, 2011. www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/SERIAL/69975/69182/F1186528577/MAR-69975.pdf, 180.

“Someday I’d love to just walk my dog, in full makeup, without having to change my gender expression or my mannerism and make it back home peacefully.”

- Adam Muhammad

3.2 Social Context

Moroccan society remains very conservative, especially regarding issues related to individual freedoms. In addition to the institutional and legal violence that the LGBTQI+ community faces due to the laws in place, the community also faces other forms of violence coming from society and families, in both the public and private spheres. This violence takes many forms: it can be psychological, physical, and societal. People’s multi-layered identities (class, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, nationality, ability status, etc) impact and multiply the kinds of violence that they might face.

Psychological and physical violence exist in numerous spheres and are carried out by a multitude of actors. This includes societal violence in the streets, familial violence in private spaces, and institutional violence when LGBTQI+ individuals are detained or arrested by the authorities. This violence can take the form of insults, emotional blackmail, verbal aggression, threats, intimidation, control, harassment, stalking, humiliation, and defamation.

When it comes to societal violence, the LGBTQI+ community is most of the time subjected to violence in public spaces. Trans, gender diverse people, and people whose gender expression does not match with societal norms are particularly vulnerable to this kind of violence. Many LGBTQI+ individuals are harassed, bullied, mistreated, and even fired from their jobs when their employer doubts or finds out about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.² People put in this situation often struggle to find a job afterward.

In addition to this, outed LGBTQI+ people, in particular lesbian women, can be forcibly married or abandoned by their families. This leads many queer Moroccans to homelessness. Here, class and financial situation are crucial factors as wealthy or financially independent queer Moroccans face different kinds of violence when outed.

² Younes, Rasha. “Where Is the Justice’ for Moroccan Transgender Women?” Human Rights Watch, 28 Oct. 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/22/where-justice-moroccan-transgender-women

3.2 Social Context

Institutional violence against the queer community is encouraged by the Moroccan Penal Code, specifically article 489, and by the absence of state protection. This institutional violence can become physical and psychological when the authorities deal with cases of people detained or arrested because of their gender identity/expression and/or sexual orientation. According to a study carried out by the organization Akaliyat in 2019/2020 to assess the needs of the LGBTQI+ community in Morocco:

“Over 63% [of] the survey participants who were arrested or detained claim being mistreated by local authorities. Cisgender lesbian women and trans women are most at risk of ill-treatment, [with] respective rates [of] 75% and 77.5%. Half of the mistreated individuals report psychological and moral violences.”³

LGBTQI+ organizations also face violence and discrimination from the state and society as they are accused of “promoting values that go against the vision of the state and Moroccan traditions.” Moroccan LGBTQI+ groups cannot be officially registered as LGBTQI+ organizations, and there has been many cases of LGBTQI+ groups facing many forms of violence when they try to officially register their organization.⁴

³ Association Akaliyat. Study of the Needs of Sexual and Gender Diversity Population in Morocco, 2019/2020, drive.google.com/file/d/1zX90zsG9trDCNmuJ3PKtd84XocKsjcP/view?fbclid=IwAR1RTUw8tYJk2jhwz-ve76k93aHWXXIZ7FXFx0FZJLiEtos7X6QRO2K2To4.

⁴ The Danish Immigration Service. Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2019, Morocco Situation of LGBT Persons Version 2.0, 5.

3.3 Lack of State Protection

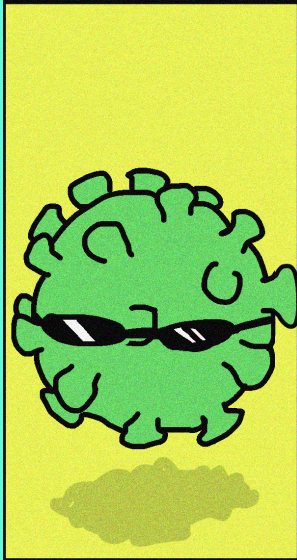
According to articles 20 and 21 of the Moroccan Constitution that was reformed in 2011, everyone has the right to life and the right to safety and security.⁵ However, the government is still failing to ensure the safety and security of all its citizens from violence regardless of their gender identity/expression and/or their sexuality, especially when it comes to the LGBTQI+ community, despite the international conventions that were signed and ratified by Morocco.

When it comes to legal protection regarding violence based on SOGIESC, the Moroccan state has no concrete laws that ensure the protection of LGBTQI+ communities from violence. When LGBTQI+ violence survivors report aggressions to the police, they find themselves obligated to hide their gender identity and sexual orientation. The survivors are most of the time subjected to violence from authorities when they disclose their identity to the police or when they have a non-normative gender expression or appearance. According to the same needs assessment report of Akaliyat:

“ A study has shown that only 14% of individuals having been victims of violence and grievances report [have] filed a complaint. Fear of retaliation, of being detained when filing the complaint, the awareness of the systemic inequities, fear of breach of confidentiality, distrust in local authorities, but also the connection with the assaulter (fear of vengeance, scandal, or impact to family reputation) are the main reasons of the lack of recourse to justice. ”

⁵ La Constitution, Edition 2011, Maroc: 2011.

⁶ Association Akaliyat. Study of the Needs of Sexual and Gender Diversity Population in Morocco, 2019/2020, drive.google.com/file/d/1zX90zsG9trDCNmuJ3PKtd84XocKsiJeP/view?fbclid=IwAR1RTI-Uw8tYJk2jhwzve76k93aHWXXIZ7FXFx0FZJLiEtos7X6QRO2K2To4.



4. Covid-19 in Morocco

On March 2nd, 2020, Morocco announced the first case of Covid-19 in its territory. Around mid-March and as the outbreak of Covid-19 arose, Morocco implemented many policies and restrictions to limit the spread of the virus. On March 20th, 2020, as Morocco detected its 63rd Covid-19 case, the government announced a state of emergency. This meant that many strict measures were put into place including a total lockdown and the issuance of a permit to only one member per household to shop for essentials. There were also strict limitations on movement and being in public spaces, all of which required permission from local authorities.

4.1 Being Queer in the Time of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has been particularly rough for the Moroccan queer community. It has been financially challenging as many queer Moroccans lost their jobs during this time, adding to the fact that it is already hard for queer people in Morocco to find employment in regular times given the latent homophobia and lack of legal protection. We conducted interviews with queer Moroccans and one of our interviewees noted that queer Moroccans that work in the entertainment, beauty, and sex industries were particularly impacted by the government imposed lockdown, as their activities were forced to a complete stop.⁷

Another one of our interviewees, A.M. from Atyaf noted that this period has been particularly challenging for the mental and physical health of queer Moroccans that had to be in lockdown with their families. Those who were not open about their identities with their families had to conceal it, and those who were out but not accepted by their families were subjected to considerable violence, discrimination, and abuse.

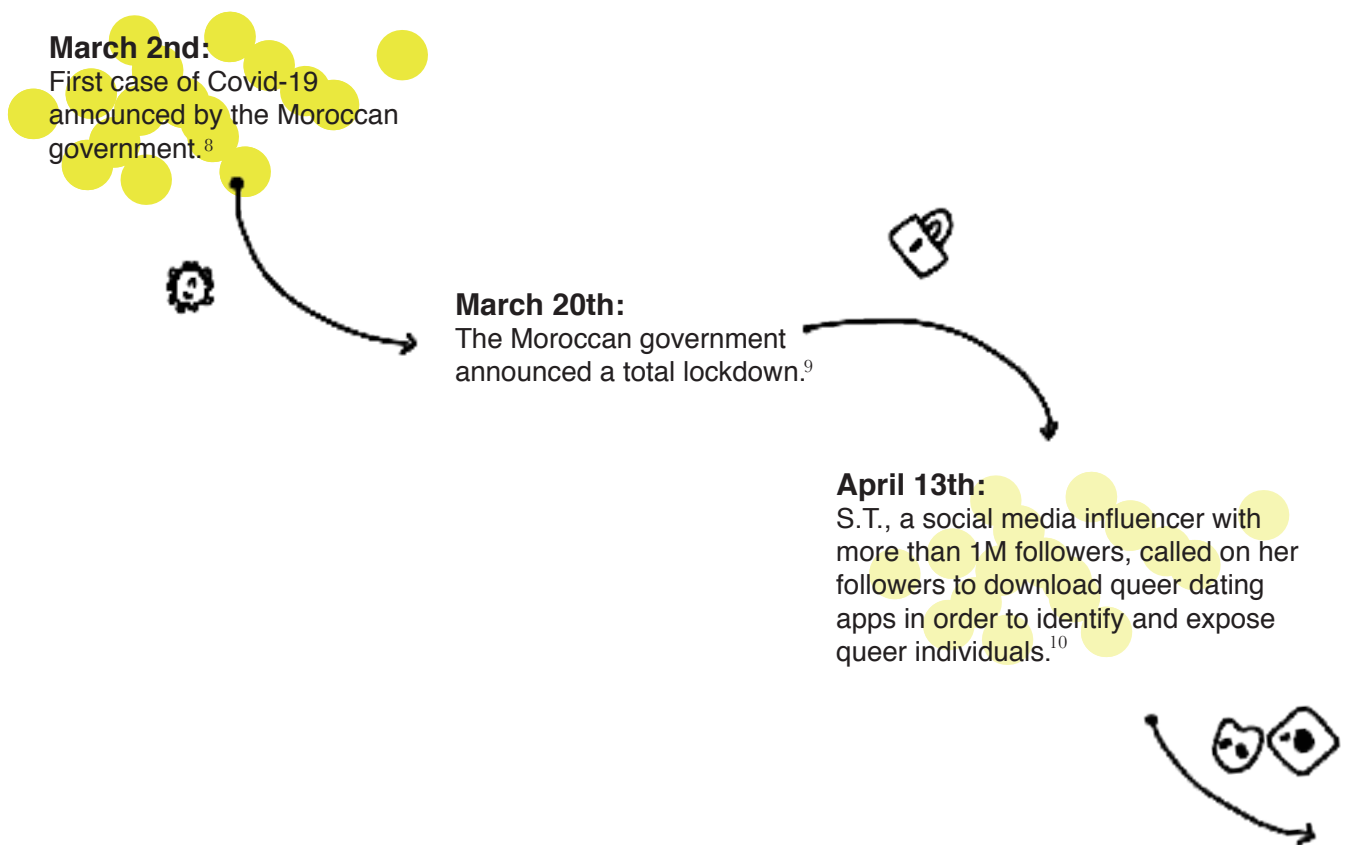
This was heightened by the fact that a hurtful outing campaign was ongoing during the pandemic in which cis-het folks download queer dating applications in order to discover queer people in their locality and, in most cases, asked for their pictures and sent it to others. Many of them then published the pictures on social media groups (especially on Facebook).

In addition to this, the police was persecuting victims of the outing campaign instead of helping them. On top of this, intercity travel was limited which severely hindered the ability of queer Moroccans to leave the abusive environments that they were forced into. All of this made the pandemic a particularly rough time for the queer community in Morocco.

⁷ All of these in text and direct citations from interviewees come from interviews that members of the collective Nassawiyat conducted in 2020. These interviews were conducted in person and online in November and December of 2020. They were mostly conducted in Darija Arabic and English, and were then transcribed and translated into English, French, Arabic, and Amazigh in order to accommodate the needs of the report.

Below is a timeline of events during the Covid-19 pandemic in Morocco, including some examples of acts of violence that were committed against the queer community. Not all acts of violence were as publicized and talked about as the ones mentioned here; this timeline represents examples of the types of violence that queer Moroccans were subjected to, not an exhaustive

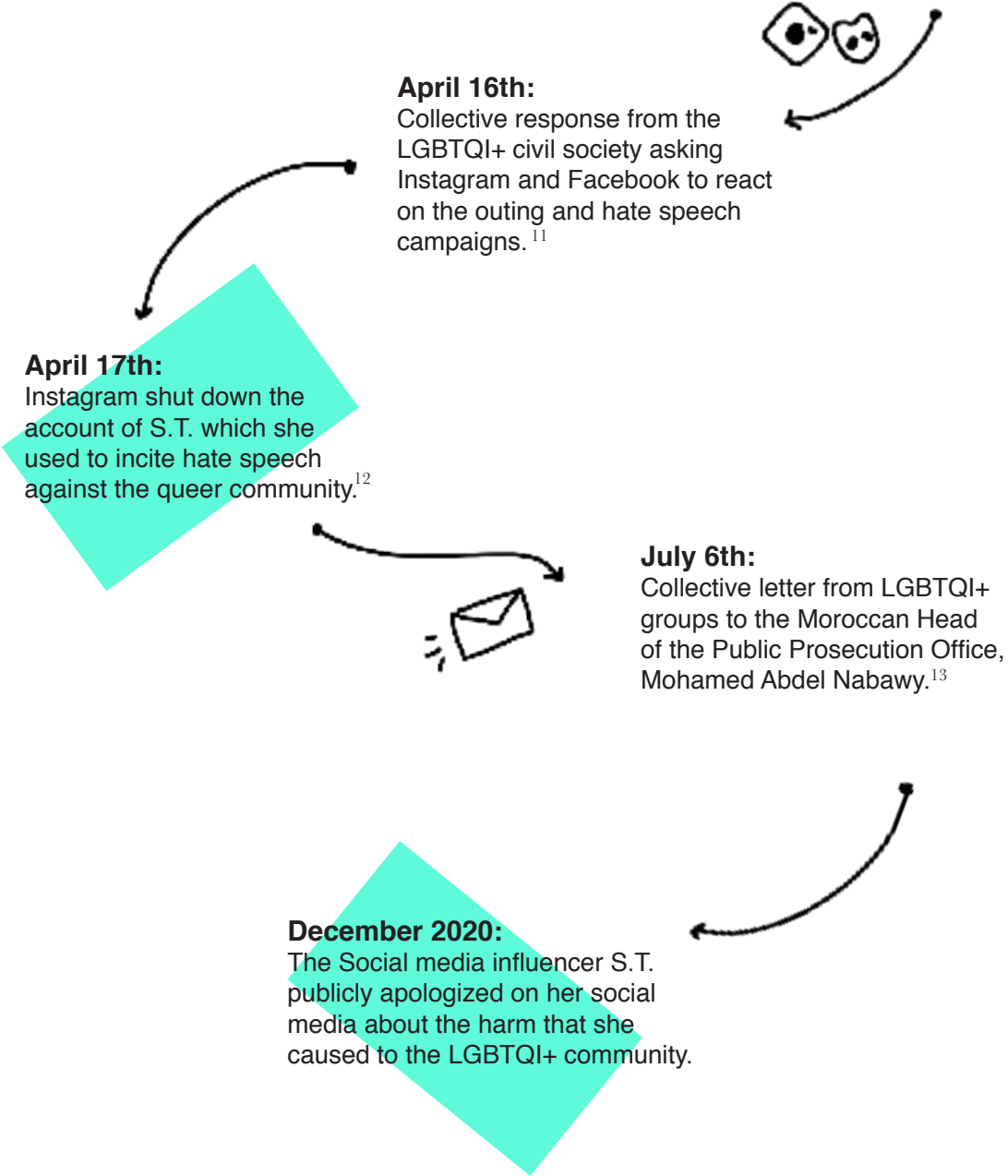
list. It is also important to note that people who hold multiple identities that are marginalized by the state and by society, such as Black Moroccans, Sub-Saharan African immigrants, poor individuals, and disabled people, among others, faced violence and discrimination that were multiplied because of their marginalized identities.



⁸ Coronavirus Au Maroc : Le Premier Cas Sous Observation à L'hôpital Moulay Youssef." EcoActu, 2 Mar. 2020, www.ecoactu.ma/coronavirus-au-maroc/.

⁹ Akisra, Mohamed. "Coronavirus : Vendredi 20 Mars à 18h, Le Maroc Se Barricade." Le Matin, 20 Mar. 2020, lematin.ma/express/2020/coronavirus-vendredi-20-mars-18h-maroc-se-barricade/334004.html.

¹⁰ Arab, The New. "Morocco's LGBT Community Lives in Fear after Gay Men Outed in Homophobic Online Campaign." Alaraby, The New Arab, 27 May 2020, english.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2020/5/27/moroccos-lgbt-community-is-living-in-fear.



¹¹ Nassawiyat, et al. Collective Response. 16 Apr. 2020, www.instagram.com/p/B_Dt5YBIthZ/.

¹² Ben Hamad, Fatma. "Gay Moroccans Outed in the Midst of Coronavirus Lockdown." The Observers - France 24, The Observers - France 24, 11 May 2020, observers.france24.com/en/20200511-gay-men-LGBTQ-morocco-outed-grindr-dating-sites-coronavirus-lockdown-homophobia.

¹³ Collective of Moroccan LGBTQI+ Organizations. Collective Letter to the Moroccan Head of the Public Prosecution Office. 6 July 2020, www.instagram.com/p/CCTvEKzFaY9/.

4.2 Cyber Violence

A lot of the violence that the queer Moroccan community experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic was initiated by an outing campaign that was started by S.T., a trans Moroccan woman who lives in Turkey. On April 13th, 2020, S. T. started inviting her audience of over 627,000 Instagram followers (mostly Moroccan cisgender straight women) through Instagram lives to download queer hookup and dating apps like Planet Romeo, Hornet, and Grindr to create fake profiles where they would pretend to be Moroccan gay men. She said: “If you would like to know and expose gay people around you, install Planet Romeo, Grindr, and Hornet and create fake profiles to know who are the nearby gay people around you.”¹⁴ She also attacked Moroccan queer and AIDS organizations in her lives, saying: “For me, an organization needs to be responsible. An organization that stops the spread of homosexuality in Morocco, instead of contributing to the spread of queerness.”¹³

Her call was widely circulated and many Moroccan cis-het women started creating fake profiles on queer dating apps and took screenshots of the profiles of queer Moroccans which they spread on Facebook pages. This way, many queer Moroccans were outed on these heinous pages, and their sexual/gender identities were discovered by neighbors, friends, family members...

Throughout this campaign, queer Moroccan organizations tried to support the victims of the outing campaigns. Finally, they brought this campaign to an end by being in contact with Facebook, Instagram, Planet Romeo, Hornet, and Grindr. We will give more details about the efforts that were deployed to stop this campaign and support its victims in the next section of this report. Thanks to the sustained efforts of queer Moroccan organizations and to the support of the international community, S.T.’s Instagram accounts were eventually suspended, although she kept on creating new ones. Planet Romeo also reacted to queer organizations’ demands and suspended the creation of new accounts in Morocco in an attempt to stop the growth of the hateful campaign.

Queer Moroccans were heavily impacted by this outing campaign, especially seeing that it was taking place amid a pandemic, economic crisis, and state of emergency. Many victims of this campaign were blackmailed, fired from their jobs, threatened and kicked out of their houses, and at least one queer Moroccan died by suicide following their outing. Below is the story of a young Moroccan that was targeted by this campaign.

¹⁴ @casabasas. “Tweet of S.T.’s Instagram Video 1.” Twitter, Twitter, 16 Apr. 2020, twitter.com/casabasas/status/1250806564367335431.

¹⁵ @casabasas. “Tweet of S.T.’s Instagram Video 2.” Twitter, Twitter, 16 Apr. 2020, twitter.com/casabasas/status/1250806564367335431.

¹⁶ Darwish, Riham. “Moroccan Trans Influencer Attacked Gay Men and Urged Her Followers to Identify and ‘Expose’ Them.” Al Bawaba, www.albawaba.com/node/moroccan-trans-influencer-attacked-gay-men-and-urged-her-followers-identify-and-expose-them.

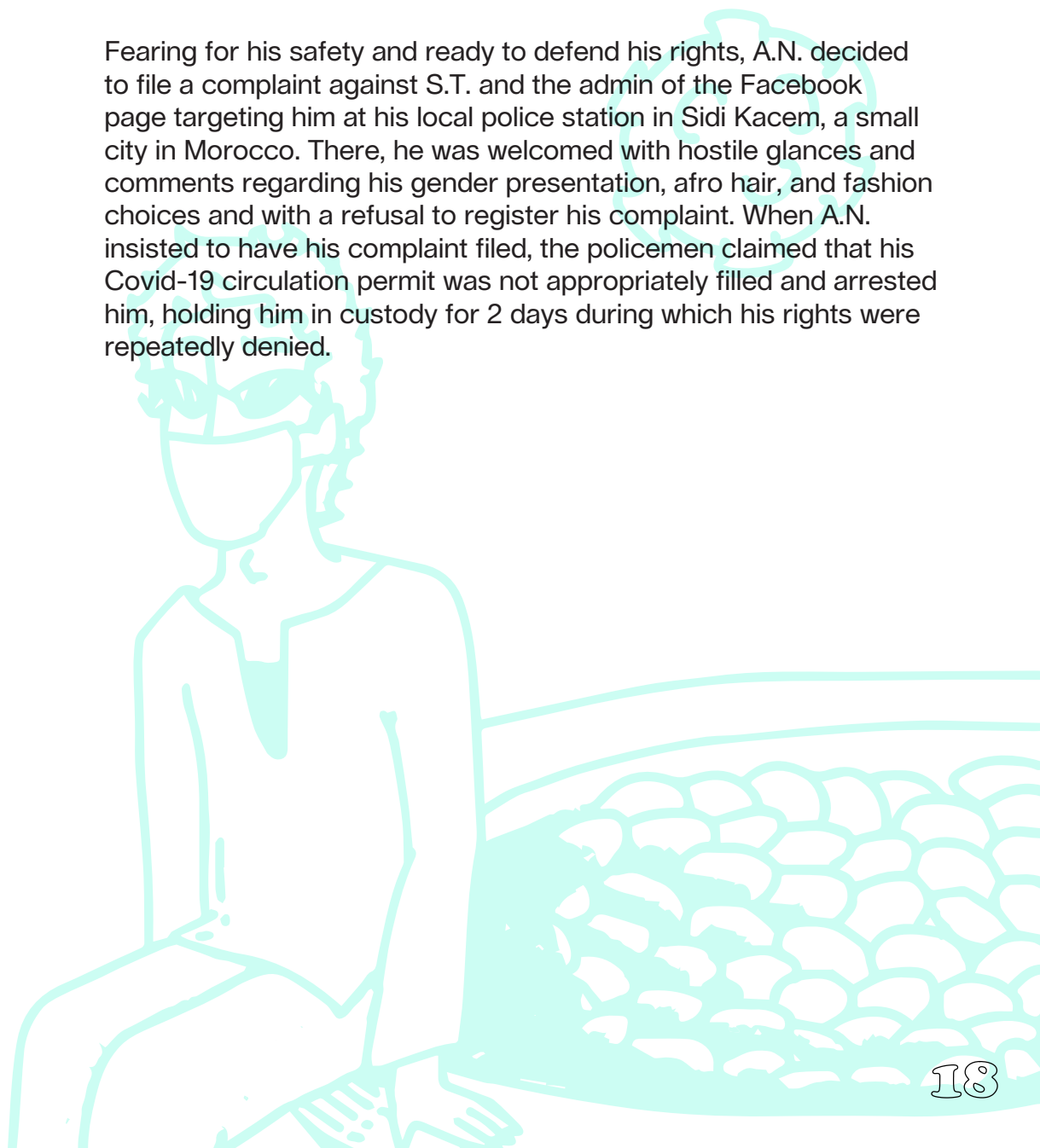
“Article 489 needs to be abolished and replaced with protective laws.”

- S.

4.3 Institutional Violence from the Authorities

On April 6th, 2020, A.N., an innovative and engaged young Moroccan artist was on an Instagram live with the Moroccan influencer S.T. where she speculated about his sexual orientation, made abusive comments about his style, attitude, and gender presentation, and called on her followers to attack him. After this live, A.N. was harassed, received an onslaught of insults as well as death and rape threats, including from a Facebook page that targetted him, posting his pictures and extracts from the live with S.T. and defaming his character.

Fearing for his safety and ready to defend his rights, A.N. decided to file a complaint against S.T. and the admin of the Facebook page targeting him at his local police station in Sidi Kacem, a small city in Morocco. There, he was welcomed with hostile glances and comments regarding his gender presentation, afro hair, and fashion choices and with a refusal to register his complaint. When A.N. insisted to have his complaint filed, the policemen claimed that his Covid-19 circulation permit was not appropriately filled and arrested him, holding him in custody for 2 days during which his rights were repeatedly denied.



4.3 Institutional Violence from the Authorities

He explained what happened to him in further details in an interview we conducted with him for the purpose of this report:

“ In 2020 I went on an Instagram live chat where I expressed my queerness to some extent. Excerpts were recorded and shared on multiple Facebook pages in my hometown alongside hateful comments and death threats. I messaged the pages asking for them to take it down and most did, but one particular moderator refused to remove the video saying I deserved to be publicly shamed for my queerness. So I went to my local police department to file a complaint. The police officer refused to help me because according to him he had more important things to do and my case was not worthy of a report while he made fun of me, cursed at me and even at one point told me he would’ve burned me if I were his son. When I proclaimed that I was entitled to reporting the defamation and death threats under the law and that it was my civic right, he proceeded to file a report against me for “contempt of cop” / ”disrespect offense.” I was held for observation without the right of making a phone call, getting a legal representative or paying my bail. My health condition was ignored and I was denied my life saving medication so much so that I fell terribly ill and had to be transported to the hospital. My mom was not called until past the imposed curfew which meant she couldn’t do anything to help me until the next morning. My bail was set at an exorbitant 15000 dhs. I was given a court date for the charge and my initial complaint was swept under the rug.¹⁷ ”

On October 6th, 2020, he was found guilty by a lower court in Sidi Kacem with “disrespecting a policemen while his duty” and “violating the sanitary state of emergency,” and sentenced to a four-month suspended prison term and 1000 dirhams fine. His case shows how the police is a source of additional violence and discriminations for queer communities in Morocco.

¹⁷ Oulmakki, Zineb. “‘If You Were My Son, I Would Burn You’: Morocco’s Outing Campaigns.”²⁴,²² رصيف Oct. 2020, raseef22.net/article/1080138-if-you-were-my-son-i-would-burn-you-moroccos-outing-campaigns.



“No organizations and governmental change is complete without internal change, we need to educate queer individuals about their rights and charge with the spirit of resistance and activism.”

-Adil LeLoup Maman LIQAAT

4.4 Societal Violence from Family

Nassawiyat also interviewed A.A., a young Moroccan who was targeted by an outing campaign and suffered from emotional and psychological violences from their family and community as a result of that. In the interview conducted with them, they explained that:

“ I was the victim of an outing campaign as my picture, my sexual orientation and my personal information were circulated in social media. Everyone in my neighborhood saw the posts and my brother did as well. I had to leave my house because I was scared of my family and entourage’s reaction. I spent two nights sleeping next to a car keeper/security guard on the street. Regardless of how hard it was, I received an overwhelming amount of support from the queer community and queer activists that offered me a place to stay and emotional support. Finally I contacted a person close to my brother who managed to convince him that the defamatory posts were false, telling him that people in the same situation have committed suicide during the past few days after which he called me to come back home. I was feeling very unsafe the whole time. I was scared of someone recognizing me and of being assaulted again, and the curfews and travel restrictions made it impossible to leave or go somewhere where I am safer. I felt trapped physically and mentally. I believe the reason I was able to get through it is all the love and support and kindness I received from the queer community. ”

A.A.’s case shows how cyberviolence during the time of Covid-19 was compounded by domestic violence and exacerbated by the state of emergency and the lockdown. It also shows how support from activists and the broader community was particularly crucial during this period.

4.5 Societal Violence from the Media

Another example of how the Moroccan queer community was targeted during the pandemic can be seen in the story of A.M, a queer Moroccan person who reported a case of sexual assault against a journalist and became the target of defamation campaigns. In May 2020, A. reported a sexual assault that dated back to 2018 in the hands of S.R. a renowned journalist. Following their report, A. faced an enormous backlash: media outlets shared their picture and personal Facebook account, and their full legal name, address, and pictures were shared on numerous social media platforms.

This backlash came from both the general public who spread homophobic comments about them, but also from activist spaces who supported the accused journalist given his notoriety as a journalist and as an activist, despite A.'s statements. These hateful reactions included death threats and hateful comments, which pushed A. into "significant psychological distress" and "affected [their] mental health tremendously."

4.5 Societal Violence from the Media

They gave more details about the harassment they suffered from the media in an interview we conducted with them:

“ Not long ago I reported a sexual assault. Lots of media outlets shared my pictures and personal Facebook account, some human right activists questioned the legitimacy of my assault and slandered me publicly since my assailant is a prominent activist. The defendant’s lawyer even posted that I’m not allowed to report sexual assault, that I should be the one in jail and called me deviant because I openly express my sexuality. My full legal name, address, and pictures have been shared and publicized on many platforms by not only regular folks but also so called activists. A lot of the comments were death threats and hate comments. All of this pushed me into significant psychological distress and affected my mental health tremendously. The fact that there are still laws in place that criminalize homosexuality and deem any non normative behavior “deviant” encourages hate and makes that people of the community have nowhere to turn to when they are subjected to violence. [Article] 489 is a law that was put in place during occupation and is still in place, which made for a discriminatory culture in Morocco. This culture took a religious aspect as time went on and all of this made for a very violent patriarchal culture. So when a person presents themselves in a non cisheteronormative way some people feel justified [to] verbally or even physically abuse them.” ”

These three cases are examples of how the Moroccan queer community faced violence during the Covid-19 pandemic. Nassawiyat acknowledges that there are many and many other cases that Nassawiyat is not aware of, especially for LGBTQI+ members living in rural areas and who are not connected to us directly. The wave of violence was initiated from S.T.’s outing campaign, heightened by the pandemic and the further marginalization from the police, and intensified by hateful comments on social media. Moreover, many queer Moroccans had to stay in lockdown with family during the pandemic, which made them vulnerable to domestic violence and cut them from support networks and medical help. Moroccan queer organizations tried to support the queer community during this particularly hard moment. The next section outlines ways in which queer groups organized and provided support to the community.

5. Civil Society's Efforts:

2020 has been a very hard year for marginalized communities in general and for the LGBTQI+ community in particular. The pandemic affected the ways in which queer groups were able to mobilize and organize. Most of civil society's advocacy strategies were modified because of the sanitary measures that have been put in place by the government because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many LGBTQI+ civil society groups have been in the frontlines to respond not only to cases of queer individuals who have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, but also to survivors of violence of outing and hate speech campaigns.

Nassawiyat has interviewed 9 LGBTQI+ organizations and groups to assess and shed a light on the efforts that were made in 2020 to support queer communities and individuals. These efforts include both individual actions and collective movements.



“It is time to decolonize and reclaim our identity and history as Moroccan queers and trans people. They may have erased most part of our history, but the present and the future are ours.”

- Ayoub

5.1 Advocacy through Collective Responses

The first public and official response of LGBTQI+ groups was published on the 16 of April, during the anti-LGBTQI+ campaign. It was a collective statement from LGBTQI+ groups and organizations and other ally organizations to call on Instagram and Facebook to immediately respond to the anti-LGBTQI+ campaigns. First, Facebook and Instagram considered the case of S.T. as a matter of freedom of speech. A few days later, on the 17th and thanks to the continued efforts of civil society, Instagram responded to the collective statement by shutting down the account that S.T. was using to incite hate speech against the LGBTQI+ community.

LGBTQI+ civil society immediately initiated discussions with Grindr (represented by Grindr for Equality) to talk about how to improve the safety of Grindr users in Morocco during this period, and what possible actions were to be taken in response to the campaigns. Simultaneously, there were also discussions taking place between Nassawiyat and many other LGBTQI+ organisations from the Middle East and North Africa regions with Facebook representatives. These discussions centered around Facebook’s Community Standard regarding hate speech on the basis of SOGIESC.

5.1 Advocacy through Collective Responses

On the 6th of July, LGBTQI+ groups including Akaliyat, Nassawiyat, Atyaf, SAQF, Dynamique Trans, Kasbat Tal'Fin, Groupe d'Action Féministe, Liqaat and Shelter for Medical and Mental Healthcare sent an official collective letter to the Moroccan Head of the Public Prosecution Office, Mohamed Abdel Nabawy, to call on a reaction about the outing and hate speech campaigns and the incitement of hate against Moroccan citizen. This letter also pointed to the fact that these acts are inconsistent with the contents of the Moroccan constitution, penal code, and international human rights conventions signed by Morocco. Specifically, Article 2 and Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹⁸ which address prejudice to public order and security, as well as threats to the physical integrity of citizens, incitements to hatred, discrimination, and defamation of persons. These acts are punishable by Moroccan criminal law under Articles 425, 429, 5-431, 1-447, 2-447.¹⁹ There was no follow up from the Public Prosecution Office, even though they said that they would open an investigation in this regard.

During the outing campaign, and after continued discussions between LGBTQI+ civil society and Grindr and PlanetRomeo, the platforms noticed that the number of new profile created during the time of the outing campaigns had quickly increased. This was explained by that fact that heterosexual users were creating new profiles in order to out queer users in their area. Planet Romeo stated in an email to Nassawiyat, that they decided to stop accepting the creation of new profiles to avoid more attacks against users of their platform.

¹⁸ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” United Nations, United Nations, 10 Dec. 1948, www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/.

¹⁹ Maroc, Direction de Législation. CODE PENAL Version Consolidée En Date Du 15 Septembre 2011, 2011. www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/SERIAL/69975/69182/F1186528577/MAR-69975.pdf.

5.2 Direct Services

The anti-LGBTQI+ campaigns were very challenging for the queer community in Morocco, especially financially and mentally. The local civil society provided online mental health counseling for people who were affected by the campaign. For instance, Atiyaf, Akaliyat and Kasbat Tal'fin each collaborated with their organizations' psychologists to provide free online sessions and psychological assistance for survivors of the outing and hate speech campaigns. Similarly, Nassawiyat collaborated with Grindr for Equality (G4E) to announce on the Grindr Application a call for people who were affected by the campaign to reach out for free online counseling sessions with psychologists. There were also other ways in which queer organizations supported the community during the outing campaigns, which are documented below. A representative of Liqaat explained in an interview:

“ We organized an alternative family structure, where people of the community opened their houses to individuals who need to feel safe, share meals, live with them good times all through solidarity of the community. Since the needs exceeded the offers greatly we called for donations through [which] we've been able to provide grants to 4 small groups covering their rent and some of their expenses. We also enlisted the help of allies that provided us access to a complexe where about 10 people were staying. ”

Nassawiyat also interviewed Atiyaf, another group that helped the community financially. A.M, executive director of Atiyaf stated:

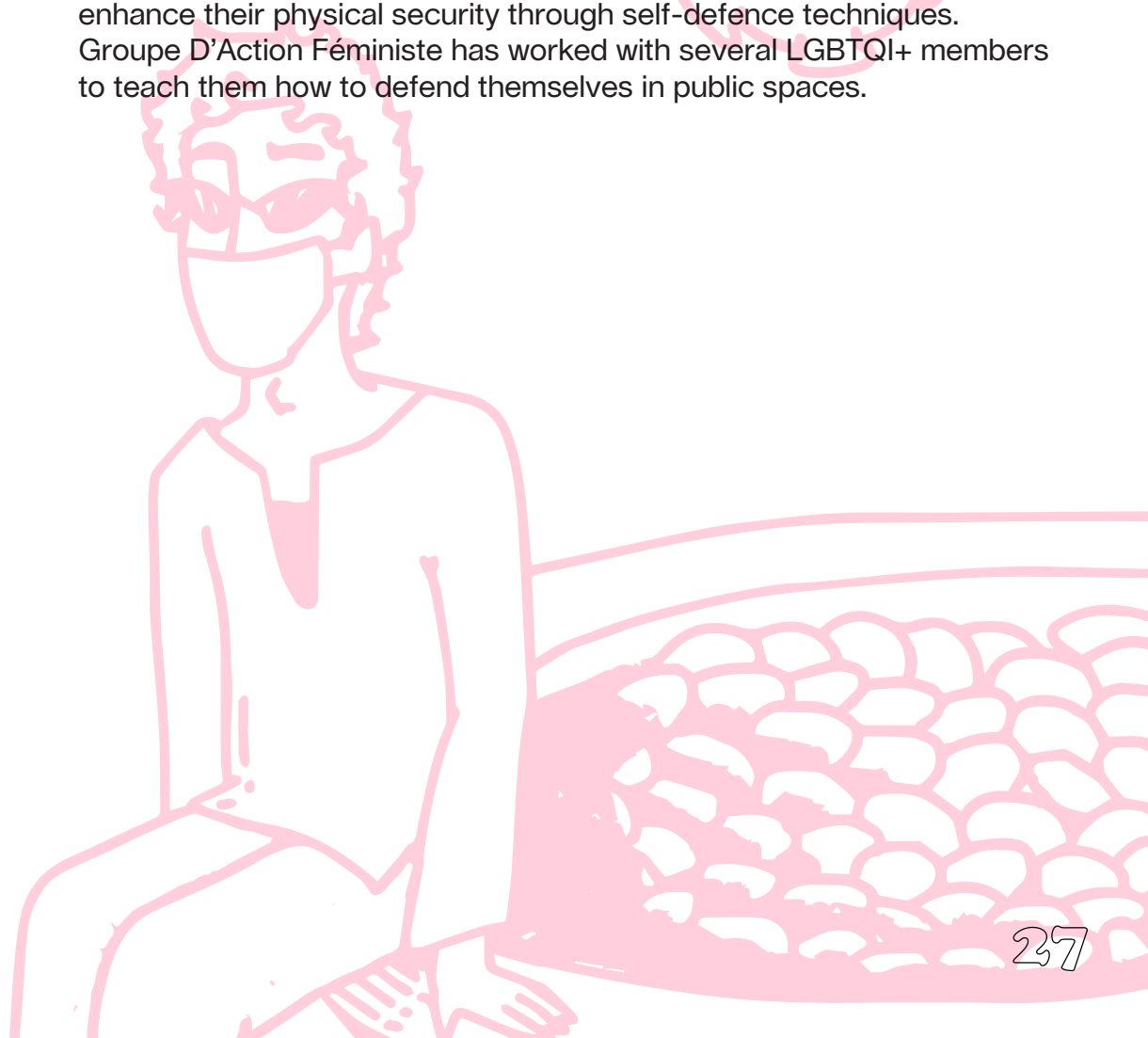
“ We were providing financial aid to community members who lost their incomes with the help of our donors since Atiyaf is an independently funded organization. We have been able to aid 18 people. We also organized gender identity and sexuality workshops in collaboration with other international organizations. ”

5.2 Direct Services

In collaboration with Outright International, Nassawiyat was able to provide shelter, food, and medication as well as other basic needs to 20 different LGBTQI+ people and sex workers during two months. This support reached individuals from the South, North, and Center of Morocco who were affected the most by the outing campaign as well as people who were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

A. K., a representative from Fek Tayri was interviewed by Nassawiyat to speak about an initiative that they are developing which is a cooperative for the queer community and women that aims to work on empowering the community and providing mental health services through psychologist sessions as well as energy treatment.

Nassawiyat also interviewed I., founder of Groupe D'action Féministe, a group that aims to empower the LGBTQI+ community on how to enhance their physical security through self-defence techniques. Groupe D'Action Féministe has worked with several LGBTQI+ members to teach them how to defend themselves in public spaces.



5.3 Campaigning and Media Advocacy

In the first three days of the anti-LGBTQI+ campaign, there was no media coverage of the affair. Thanks to LGBTQI+ civil society's efforts, several media outlets were mobilized to speak up about the affair, especially international media. As for Moroccan media, most of the outlets stayed silent about the issue.

In light of the outing and hate speech campaigns, numerous media outlets and social media figures, including S.T. who sparked the witch-hunt, perpetuated misconceptions and harmful stereotypes about the Moroccan queer community using discriminatory and derogatory language. To respond to that, Moroccan LGBTQI+ groups organized various online campaigns to raise awareness about feminist and queer-inclusive language. These campaigns aimed to bridge the gap between the inclusive language used by the queer community and the derogatory language used by broader society.

Similarly, Akaliyat launched different social media campaigns about online privacy and information protection and on how to file a complaint in cases of outings and defamation. Nassawiyat also launched an online campaign "Wach 3rafti" to shed a light on Moroccan Darija terms used to describe genders and sexualities. Another online campaign launched by Nassawiyat was the campaign "Moroccan Queers for Black Lives," in which Nassawiyat provided different materials and resources about racism in the Moroccan context.

Nassawiyat also have interviewed Tanit, which is a feminist and queer platform that was established to document, research, and product knowledge in the feminist and queer fields. Tanit also works on archiving the history of queer and feminist organizing. Another project that Tanit is working on this year is a podcast called Daba Podcast which contains a series of episodes covering different stories from LGBTQI+ individuals who live their lives outside of heteronormative behaviors and lifestyles. Daba Podcast speaks about a variety of topics such as family, queer love, outing and its impacts, amongst others. During the outing campaigns in Morocco, Tanit has been engaged with other organisations to help in the public debate about what was happening in Morocco.

As for Kasbah Tal'fin, a youth feminist LGBTQI+ organisation based in the South of Morocco, they have worked on several projects over the

“We will not hide in order to declare our strength , our pride, our rage and our revolution. Rather than violence and dicrimmanation that should disappears, and our revolution will take good care of that “

- Mala Badi

5.3 Campaigning and Media Advocacy

course of 2020. Interviewed by Nassawiyat, M.G. Executive Director of Kasbah Tal’fin stated:

“

We have worked on campaign called “You are not alone” that supported victims of defamation with messages, correct[ing] misconceptions about gender and sexual orientation, and shar[ing] information about security protection for members of the LGBTQI+ community. Another campaign that Kasbah Tal’fin has launched is [the] “Queer Morocco” campaign [which] speak[s] about changining the bad narratives about queer/trans youth from [the] Southern Moroccan perspective. ”

SAQFE collective is one of the LGBTQI+ groups that has been in the frontline to help the queer community during the outing and hate speech campaigns. A representative from SAQFE stated:

“

The anti-queer campaign was at the same time as the quarantine period, and the campaign led many queer people to homelessness, and also to the spread of psychological [struggle] for many [in] our queer community, including our members. SAGFE Group has been involved with all its energy and capabilities in the campaigns against queerphobia and defamation by sharing support and love with queer individuals through our social media pages and providing our pages for listening and communication. We also helped queers who were affected by the campaign to find shelters. ”

5.3 Campaigning and Media Advocacy

Following the 2020 outing campaigns, the Moroccan LGBTQI+ civil society deployed very important actions of solidarity, and deployed more campaigns than anytime before. On April 2020, many LGBTQI+ individuals and LGBTQI+ organisations in Morocco as well as in the diaspora organized in order to launch the movement “Queer Revolution” through a collective statement. Following the statement, the campaign “Queer Revolution” which called on various participation from writers, performers, photographers, ect, to express their art and existence on what it means for them to be queer in Morocco grew. In addition to that, “Queer Revolution” collaborated with ALL OUT to launch a petition that demanded the elimination of the articles of the Penal Code criminalizing the LGBTQI+ community; an effective response to violence and discrimination faced by the queer community; and an easier access to health care and services for the LGBTQI+ community in Morocco. So far (December 2020), the petition has been signed by 451 individuals.²⁰

²⁰ Campaign started by Mala Badi. “Time for the Trans-Queer Revolution in Morocco.” All Out, action.allout.org/en/m/22223c3/.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The LGBTQI+ community in Morocco has been and still is facing many kinds of violence due to their identity, especially in 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic arose. The pandemic affected different communities and made marginalized communities even more vulnerable. Nevertheless, 2020 also brought with it numerous lessons- both positive and negative, especially when it comes to solidarity within the LGBTQI+ community. It is worth noting that LGBTQI+ organizations are in need of solidarity now more than ever before.

This report stands by and for the LGBTQI+ community in order to highlight the lives and challenges of the community, but also our dreams. It also acts as a call to action and for solidarity. It stands by LGBTQI+ groups and organisations who build the path to a better future for everyone, a future free from violence and discrimination.

As for the media, it is very important to maintain collaborations with LGBTQI+ groups and civil society in order to ensure better representations of the LGBTQI+ community. We also call for civil society to document the history of the LGBTQI+ community, and to monitor cases of violence and discrimination against the community. This will create a fully recorded archive that civil society will be able to use to advocate for queer Moroccans, locally as well as internationally.

In addition to that, we continue to advocate for the depenalization of queer identities and for the discontinuation of discriminatory laws that have been applied since the colonial period. Queer individuals and activists must have access the resources that will allow them to thrive in both public and private spheres.

It is also worth mentioning that we still lack direct services for the LGBTQI+ community when it comes to mental and physical health, as well as resources for digital safety, especially for survivors of hate speech and violence. There is also very limited awareness of such violence. As such, much work is necessary in order to expand our efforts for the benefit of the queer community, its peoples, and society at large.

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8. Quotes

“Someday I’d love to just walk my dog, in full makeup, without having to change my gender expression or my mannerism and make it back home peacefully.”

Adam Muhammad

“No organizations and governmental change is complete without internal change, we need to educate queer individuals about their rights and charge with the spirit of resistance and activism.”

-

Adil LeLoup Maman LIQAAT

“Article 489 needs to be abolished and replaced with protective laws.”

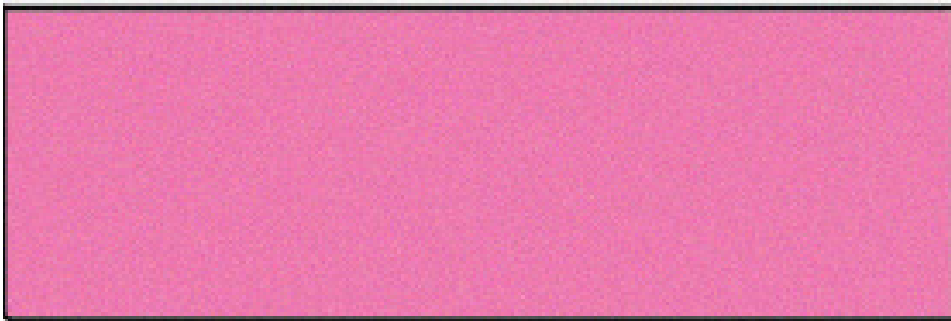
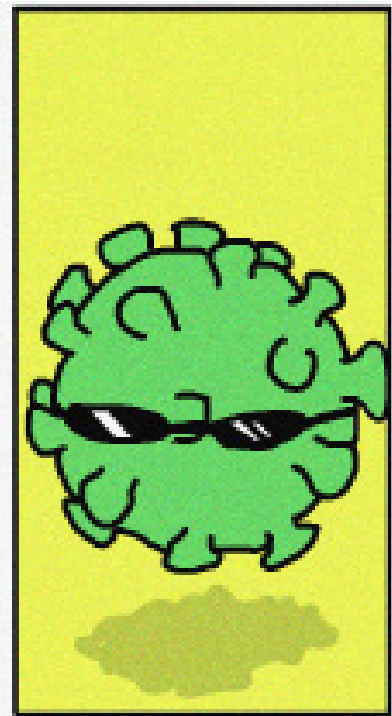
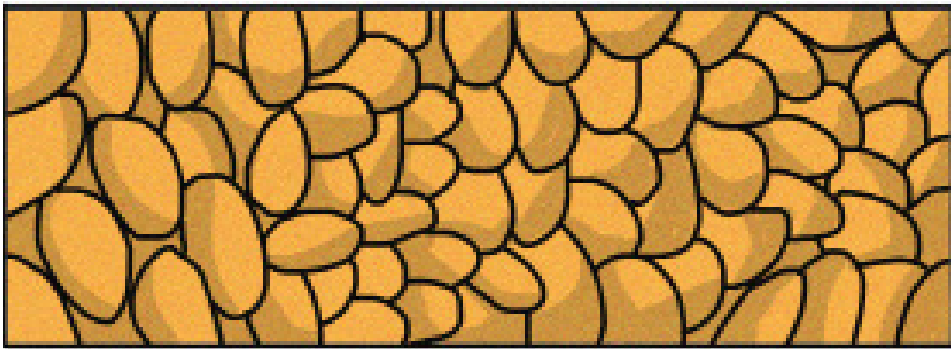
- S.

“It is time to decolonize and reclaim our identity and history as Moroccan queers and trans people. They may have erased most part of our history, but the present and the future are ours”

- Ayouba

“We will not hide in order to declare our strength , our pride, our rage and our revolution. Rather than violence and dicrimmanation that should disappears, and our revolution will take good care of that “

- Mala Badi



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