

ASMA ABIDI

Tunisia

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»Since religion and related taboos are strong, people cannot tackle homosexuality in a pragmatic way. It is a very emotional issue, and the media often contributes to the misconception.«

Asma, you've been working in the media field for some years now, how would you evaluate the media coverage about gender diversity in Tunisia?

I have the feeling that the intensive media coverage on homosexuality and the fight for their rights actually produces the opposite effect. People see it as a direct threat. I can imagine different, more useful strategies for media coverage. In Tunisia, the media makes no difference between bisexuals, gays, lesbians or asexual people, probably because journalists themselves do not have enough background information. Since religion and related taboos are strong, people cannot tackle these topics in a pragmatic way. It is a very emotional issue, and the media often contributes to the misconceptions of homosexuality.

What is the situation for LGBTIQ activists in Tunisia like?*

In the past years, LGBTIQ activists and associations have become more visible. There are a lot of activists who are coming out online or people who are considered allies — people advocating and defending LGBTIQ. Many people are speaking up against harassment in the context of #MeToo, so it is not such a prevalent taboo anymore.

How do you think a more balanced media coverage about gender and sexual minorities can be achieved?

We shouldn't have specific media coverage that shows LGBTIQ people as extraordinary, but speak about them as normal members of society. They are our doctors, friends or neighbours. We need more extensive stories, analysis and expert inputs. We should look for niche media such as

podcasts that target specific communities and people. We now have the first homosexual web radio in Tunisia.

How do you address the topic of inclusive language in your work?

I belong to a collective of women and people who identify themselves as women called »Shaml«. We speak about the language the media uses to label persons and we monitor the Tunisian media regarding hate speech or labelling terms. We communicate a lot about the conception of gender. It is important that we work on our own language in our own region and dialects. For example, in Arabic there are different ways to say »transwoman« or »transman«. The question is, should we adapt certain terms or concepts, or should we decolonise these and create our own narratives.

* LGBTIQ = Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, intersexual, queer

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