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Case Study:
MADAR Network

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The Maghreb Action on Displacement and Rights (MADAR)[1] is an interdisciplinary network of academics and civil society members that are working to improve the "humanitarian protection of vulnerable, displaced people in contexts of conflict in the central Maghreb region of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia."[2] The significance of this work lies in the fact since the 2011 political uprisings, wars, and conflicts, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria have faced an influx of refugees, migrants, and displaced people. The countries have become both host and transit countries, meaning that they are either the end destination for refugees or a stop on the way to Europe. The influx of people comes primarily from Middle Eastern countries (most notably Syria and Libya) as well as sub-Saharan and other African countries, particularly the Horn of Africa.[3]

MADAR network was established in 2019, but a lot of their work was put on hold in 2020 because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 the UK Official Development Assistance announced cuts in international research, further halting their work.[4] This is significant because MADAR has a budget of almost 2 million British pounds,[5] making these cuts a substantial obstacle. As such, most of their response to the World Humanities Report survey revolves around the ways they dealt with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and continued with their work.

In the survey, they described their work in detail:

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[1] See https://madar-network.org/en/.

[2] MADAR responses to the Humanities Initiative online survey by the Arab Council for the Social Sciences / World Humanities Report, 2020.

[3] "Morocco: September 2020 Fact Sheet," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, accessed March 9, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20Morocco%20Factsheet%20September%202020%20ENG.pdf; "Algeria: September 2020 Fact Sheet," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, accessed March 9, 2021, https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Algeria%20-%20Factsheet%20September%202020.pdf; and "Tunisia: September 2020 Fact Sheet," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, accessed March 9, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20Tunisia%20Factsheet%20-%20January%202020.pdf.

[4] "MADAR Network + Statement on ODA Cuts," MADAR Network, March 19, 2021, https://madar-network.org/en/news/madar-network-statement-on-oda-cuts/.

[5] "Maghreb Action on Displacement and Rights (MADAR) Network Plus," UK Research and Innovation, accessed April 5, 2021, https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FT008008%2F1.

MADAR will facilitate research collaborations and commission research projects drawing on the regional expertise of UK- and Maghreb-based scholars from across the arts and humanities and the social and political sciences. MADAR combines an interdisciplinary approach with participatory and collaborative methods, deploying artistic and creative engagement to mobilise global voices, to improve access to marginal and underrepresented groups, and provide a more active role for displaced people to shape the research process and outcomes.[6]

MADAR's approach of "deploying artistic and creative engagement" with displaced people is one of the two core branches of their work, the other being facilitating research networks and publications between the United Kingdom and Maghreb region. Artistic and creative expression is used to deal with long-term effects of displacement and migration, such as mental health issues and psychological trauma.[7] As Helen J. Chatterjee and colleagues point out, "a growing body of research offers evidence of the beneficial effects of arts and creative activities—including dancing, singing, theatre, museum and heritage activities—on health and well-being."[8] This is especially significant given the range of traumatic experiences and stressors that migrants and displaced persons face during their journey and in the host country.[9] Other groups in the region that use the arts with migrants and refugees include the Arab Resource Center for Popular Arts in Lebanon, commonly referred to as Al-Jana.[10]

Stephan Milich and Lamia Moghnieh provide a significant critique regarding this approach to trauma in the Mashreq region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), explaining that

The high rates of external and internal conflicts in the MENA drive experts and journalists to assume the existence of a high level of traumatization . . . this has led

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[6] MADAR responses to the ACSS/WHR survey.

[7] Helen J. Chatterjee, Celia Clini, Beverley Butler, Fatima Al-Nammari, Rula Al-Asir, and Cornelius Katona, "Exploring the Psychosocial Impact of Cultural Interventions with Displaced People," in *Refuge in a Moving World: Tracing Refugee and Migrant Journeys across Disciplines*, ed. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh Elena (London: UCL Press, 2020), 323–46.

[8] Chatterjee et al., "Exploring the Psychosocial," 327.

[9] For an in-depth analysis of refugees and refugee camps, see Sarah Kenyon Lischer, "The Global Refugee Crisis: Regional Destabilization and Humanitarian Protection," *Daedalus* 146, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 85–97; see also Lamia Moghnieh, "Migration: Refugee Regimes: Arab States/Mashreq," in *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures Online*, ed. Suad Joseph (Brill Online, 2017).

[10] See https://www.janacenter.org/.

to a mobilization of humanitarian aid for psychiatric and psychological treatments in the region. Yet, it has been difficult to translate this shared observation into a politics of social or global justice.[11]

It remains to be seen whether MADAR's initiatives to support "artistic and creative engagements . . . to tackle the social and political challenges associated with migration and displacement" will precipitate sustainable and lasting social and political justice, as Milich and Moghnieh call for.[12]

Another point of note is that their work "critiques how we understand 'displacement' in the Maghreb." They also state that although they have frequent meetings with their partners to translate the work from French to English and Arabic, they face the challenge of "making sure that the nuance explicit in each cultural context is not lost in translation and that we do not inadvertently minimise/restrict meaning in any way . . . one example is the term 'displaced'—this has different meanings depending on the political, cultural and geographical context."[13] MADAR shares this challenge with other groups in the region who participate in related research and cite the complexities and nuances of translation as a challenge when ensuring that meaning and cultural context do not get lost. It remains to be seen how exactly MADAR aims to critique the definition of displacement, but it would be a significant contribution, particularly in translation.

In regard to their relationships with regional and international organizations, MADAR has a participatory approach. In the WHR survey, they emphasized their "ongoing commitment to co-design and co-delivery of research." In this sense, MADAR's work is collaborative on two fronts—with other organizations in the Maghreb region and with the migrants and displaced people. They reiterate in the survey that "the projects that are developed are all done jointly."[14] Their partners in the Maghreb region include Caritas, Racines, and Notre Culture d'Abord, as well as a host of universities in the UK, such as Manchester, Keele, and Edinburgh. Ultimately, the refugee crisis in the MENA region is of crucial importance for the humanities and social science disciplines because its impact resonates across the political, social, economic, and geographic spheres. MADAR's approach indicates a commitment to knowledge production through a North–South network that aims to ensure that local partners and the communities are equal stakeholders that can determine priorities and agendas.

[11] Stephan Milich and Lamia Moghnieh, "Trauma: Social Realities and Cultural Texts," *Middle East – Topics & Arguments* 11 (Fall 2018): 5–15, https://doi.org/10.17192/meta.2018.11.7941.

[12] "MADAR," MADAR Network, accessed March 9, 2021, https://madar-network.org/en/.

[13] MADAR, responses to the ACSS/WHR survey.

[14] MADAR, responses to the ACSS/WHR survey.

Hana Shaltout graduated from the American University in Cairo in 2014 with a BA from the Political Science Honours Programme with a specialization in international relations. She completed her MSc in gender, media, and culture at the London School of Economics in 2015. After being a researcher at the Arab Council for Social Sciences working on the World Humanities Report, she is currently doing her PhD in cultural Sstudies at the University of Sussex, on feminist artivism in Egypt post-2011. Her research interests include alternative knowledge production, gender studies, cultural studies, and women's participation in the political arena.