

The World Humanities Report

# Case Study: Transat

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# Case Study: Transat

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Transat is a collective by and for the trans community in the Arab region.<sup>1</sup> Founded in 2017, they produce work in English, Arabic, and Amazigh. They describe themselves as a “platform dedicated to gender identity issues in the Arabic language” that has “published over 70 articles focusing on trans experiences and gender transition, ranging from scientific articles to personal insights to news and opinions.”<sup>2</sup> In the World Humanities Report survey they further describe themselves as “a group of transgender people, from different nationalities, beliefs, ideologies and cultures,” who established Transat to “promote scientific and cultural awareness of gender issues through our content” and “help those people understand and strengthen themselves, and to be a platform for them to express themselves to the world, freely and with no fear.”<sup>3</sup> Although the primary language of the platform is Arabic, they also offer content and translations in English and Amazigh.

Like many of the organizations surveyed, Transat is particularly concerned with questions of representation. They describe their website as “one of the first of its kind in the MENA region, in Arabic. It is by and for trans people. *We are expressing our own narrative, rather than being described by others.*”<sup>4</sup> Their response to the survey emphasizes the “lack of visibility and harmful media representation” for trans people in the region, a reality that Transat seeks to change.<sup>5</sup> Their website includes pages on the history of trans communities, topical essays and reports from other sources, debates and news, and scientific articles, among other things.

One page, “Transat Dictionary,”<sup>6</sup> offers Arabic definitions for terms that are

<sup>1</sup> See <https://transatsite.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Transat Launches Two New Sections, in English and Amazigh,” Transat, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://transatsite.com/2020/01/24/transat-launches-two-new-sections-in-english-and-amazigh/>.

<sup>3</sup> Transat, responses to the Humanities Initiative online survey by the Arab Council for the Social Sciences / World Humanities Report, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Transat, responses to the ACSS/WHR survey (*emphasis added*).

<sup>5</sup> For more about the trans communities in the Arab region, specifically Egypt, see Ahmad El Hady, “The Crisis of LGBTQ Communities in Egypt: Questions for Ahmed El Hady,” Century Foundation, May 2, 2019, <https://tcf.org/content/report/crisis-lgbtq-communities-egypt-questions-ahmed-el-hady/>.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://transatsite.com/%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%85%d9%88%d8%b3-%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%86%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%aa/>.

essential for the trans community. Among these terms are “gender dysphoria,” “trans,” “biological gender,” “gender identity,” and “transphobia.” The initiative to define (not just translate) terms builds on other projects (such as WikiGender<sup>7</sup>) that aim to make the Arabic language more gender-sensitive and inclusive and to rid it of pejorative connotations for the LGBTQI+ community. The purpose of these projects is summarized by WikiGender (the Arabic one), which states, “we discuss and boldly experiment with Arabic language terms and grammar in order to create and promote a more gender inclusive and accessible modern Arabic.”<sup>8</sup>

Transat outlines two major challenges of translating critical concepts into other languages: the “lack of equivalent terminology” and the fact that “phrases may lose power/meaning/symbolism in translation.”<sup>9</sup> In part, this can be attributed to the histories and contexts of the trans communities in the region, which create different referents than those of their Anglophone counterparts. It is worth quoting Hala Kamal at length here to clarify this point further:

Translation is not merely an act of transferring knowledge from one language and culture to another; it involves processes of cultural mediation and political agency. Although it might be too early to evaluate the power of translation in transforming knowledge, it manifests itself as a significant player in producing feminist knowledge and generating an Arab feminist discourse.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, Transat is more than a collective and website by and for the trans community. It is also an outlet for representation, narrative, knowledge production, translation, and the creation of new meanings and definitions that are useful to its community and the Arabic language. Transat attests to a long and rich genealogy highlighting the relationships between feminism, power, and knowledge.

<sup>7</sup> See [https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9](https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9).

<sup>8</sup> “About Gender Wiki,” GenderWiki, accessed March 2, 2021, [https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/Project:About\\_Gender\\_Wiki](https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/Project:About_Gender_Wiki).

<sup>9</sup> Transat, responses to the ACSS/WHR survey.

<sup>10</sup> Hala Kamal, *Travelling Theory in Translation: An Arab “Travelogue” of Feminism and Gender* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023), 8.

**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 studies at the University of Sussex, on feminist activism in Egypt post-2011. Her research interests include alternative knowledge production, gender studies, cultural studies, and women's participation in the political arena.