Between 'Central' and 'Marginal': Three Syrian Women's Journals of the 1920s, Beirut and Damascus

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Between 'Central' and 'Marginal': Three Syrian Women's Journals of the 1920s, Beirut and Damascus

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ABSTRACT

In the 1920s, around a dozen women's journals were published in Beirut, Damascus, and other more peripheral cities of Greater Syria (*Bilād al-Shām*). Arabic women-edited journals addressing a primarily female readership had been on the market for some time, since 1892 in Egypt and 1910 in Syria. Nevertheless, they often expressed the need to promote or even justify the very existence of women's journals and the active role of women in the press. This article discusses how far it makes sense to use the concepts 'centre' vs. 'periphery', or 'mainstream' vs. 'marginal', with regard to Syrian women's magazines during this period of profound political and social transformation. While women's journals are usually perceived as marginal, compared to 'mainstream' or 'general interest' journals speaking to a mainly male audience, the three journals discussed in this article partly addressed a broader readership of both genders, and some of the most prominent intellectuals of the time regularly contributed to them. Examining a broad range of criteria that could define a journal's position in society and the periodical market, I argue that these periodicals cannot be clearly defined by these binary terms but are more adequately described as situated between the two poles. Women's journals are thus discussed as a form of social and cultural collective practice, used by editors and authors to work against their marginalized position and assert their agency, stance, and right to participation.

KEYWORDS

women's journals, Syria, *al-ʿArūs*, *Mīnarvā*, *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, Mārī ʿAjamī, Mārī Yannī, Jūliyā Tuʿma Dimashqiyya, Beirut, Damascus

اليك العروس سيدتي فرحبي بها غير مأمورة ليذهب عنها شيء من حيائها فتسر اليك بمكنونات قلبها وشعائر موقفها

عروسة لا عريس لها سوى الشعب الجاثي على اقدام حريته يطلب بركة الوطنية تحت سماء العلم والعلم مسجلًا عقد قرانه عليها بمداد الفكر والقلب؛ مكللا رأسيهما ببراعم الامال وازهار الحب

عروسة نالت تنشيط الكاتبات وكثيرين من ابناء النهضة الادبية وبناتها وسترين بعضهن يحملن امامها باقات افكارهن السامية وشموعها المضيئة ويسرن معها الى خدر الشعب […]. عروسة سوف تنال من هدايا اشهر كتاب الشرق ما يعزيها على خلو جيبها وسترين عما قريب (نقوطهم) الثمينة تلمع على صدرها فتفتخر بصداقتك وتعجبين باحاديثها […]

الى الذين يؤمنون ان في نفس المرأة قوة تميت جراثيم الفساد وان في يدها سلاحًا يمزق غياهب الاستبداد وان في فمها عزاء يخفف وطأة الشقاء البشري […] اقدم مجلتي […][1]

> Here is *The Bride*, my lady, so welcome her, without coercion, that she might lose some of her timidity, then confide to you what is concealed in her heart and the rites of her standpoint. A bride who has no bridegroom but the people kneeling at the feet of their freedom, asking for the blessing of patriotism under the sky of knowledge and the flag, recording their marriage contract on her with the ink of thought and heart, crowning their heads with buds of hopes and flowers of love. A bride who has earned the encouragement of women writers and of many sons and daughters of the literary awakening. You will see some of them [fem.] marching in front of her, carrying bouquets of their lofty ideas and luminous candles, towards the boudoir of the people […]. A bride who will receive gifts from the most famous writers of the East, which will comfort her empty pocket, and you will soon see their precious 'bride gift', coins shining on her chest; she will be proud of your friendship, and you will admire her conversations […].
> To those [masc.] who believe that in a woman's soul is a power that kills the germs of corruption, that in her hand is a weapon that tears the darkness of tyranny, and that in her mouth is a consolation that eases the burden of human misery […] I present my journal […].

This is how Mārī ʿAjamī (1888–1965), editor of the first journal edited by a woman in Greater Syria, introduced her journal *al-ʿArūs* [The Bride] in its first issue, published in Damascus in December 1910. The introduction presents the journal as clearly targeting female readers (addressing them as 'my lady' and using the verb in the second person feminine), while explaining the metaphorical use of the title, 'the bride' who is being

1 'Muqaddima' ['Introduction'], *al-ʿArūs*, 1.1 (December 1910), 1–4 (pp. 1–2). Translations are mine.

wedded to the [Syrian] people in the hope of urging them for liberation from Ottoman oppression, with male and female writers and intellectuals 'of the East' contributing to this endeavour. In a turn of phrase typical of women's periodicals of the time, the editor then explicitly presents her journal to men who believe that women have the spiritual, mental, and physical abilities to contribute to the progress and advancement of society, by urging them to support women's education. A few pages later, Felix Fāris, also a periodical editor, makes a passionate plea, emphasizing the need for women-edited journals in Syria and praising Mārī ʿAjamī, her mental faculties, courage, and determination, which would allow her to cope with the challenges of this difficult task.[2]

Ten years later, in the 1920s, around a dozen women's journals were published in Damascus, Beirut, and other more peripheral cities of Greater Syria (*Bilād al-Shām*).[3] While the beginnings of the periodical press in the Arab world date back only to the nineteenth century, it developed quickly, with privately-run journals becoming the most important media of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first Arabic journal edited by a woman and addressing primarily female readers was published in Egypt in 1892, and in Syria several women's journals had followed the foundation of *al-ʿArūs*.[4] However, despite their rapid ascendency, many of these journals lasted only a few years or even months, and they often kept expressing the need to promote or even justify the very existence of women's journals and the active role of women in the press.

This article discusses how far it makes sense to use the concepts 'centre' vs. 'periphery', or 'mainstream' vs. 'marginal', with regard to Syrian women's journals during this period of profound political and social transformation. Using the first-mentioned pair, 'centre' vs. 'periphery', might seem to imply a focus on the journals' geopolitical position on a global, regional, or local level, as, in the (post)colonial age, Syria has usually been considered 'peripheral' in relation to Europe, while smaller cities in the region, and even capital cities like Damascus and Baghdad, have been perceived as 'peripheral' in comparison with Cairo and Beirut, at that time the main 'centres' of publishing in the Arab world. However, as the article looks at social and cultural rather than geopolitical aspects, discussing Syrian women's journals' position in society in relation to other periodicals of the time, the terms 'mainstream' vs. 'marginal', referring to dis/empowered social or cultural sections within society, might be more adequate. By examining a broad range of criteria that could define a journal's position in society and the periodical market, I argue that these periodicals cannot be clearly defined by these binary terms but are more adequately described as situated between the two poles, acknowledging the terms' dynamic and relational character, depending on the respective context and point of comparison. While women's journals are usually perceived as marginal, compared to 'mainstream' or 'general interest' journals speaking to a mainly male audience, the three periodicals discussed in this article partly addressed a broader readership of both genders, and some of the most prominent intellectuals of the time regularly contributed to them. Further indicators of a journal's success and prominence are its longevity and geographical distribution as well as its preservation in today's libraries or archives. Finally, a periodical's standing largely depended on its editor's reputation and social position, while, in return, journals offered women authors and editors, mainly from the upper and

2 'Ilā l-amām' ['Forward'], *al-ʿArūs*, 1.1 (December 1910), 9–13.

3 The region of 'Greater Syria' (*Bilād al-Shām*) roughly covers today's Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. In the following, the terms 'Syria' and 'Syrian' will be used in this broad sense.

4 For a brief overview of Syrian women's journals and activities in the periodical press by a contemporary male pioneer of the women's press, see Jurjī Bāz, 'al-Ṣiḥāfa al-nisāʾiyya fī Sūriyya' ['The Women's Press in Syria'], *Mīnarvā*, 1.1 (15 April 1923), 11–14. See also Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 293–95.

middle classes, the opportunity to distinguish themselves as intellectuals and activists, but also to build strategic coalitions and (often interconfessional) communities — locally, regionally, and transregionally. Journal editors worked towards achieving these two aims — establishing their position in society and networking — for instance, through their chosen topics and discourses, and the ways in which they presented them, the mutual referencing among journals and authors, and the interplay between periodicals and their performative counterparts, salons, and cultural associations. Women's journals will thus be discussed as a form of social and cultural collective practice, used by editors and authors to work against their marginalized position and claim their agency, stances, and right to participation.[5]

After giving a brief overview of the emergence and development of the Arabic periodical press and introducing the three journals that will be examined, the main part of the article will address seven factors that could help to define their place within the Syrian intellectual, political, and social fields of the time. Summarizing the findings, the conclusion will explain why these periodicals cannot be clearly categorized as either occupying a 'central' (or 'mainstream') or a 'marginal' position but are, rather, situated between these poles, tending to be 'marginal' in relation to some of the examined factors, while being close to the opposite pole in relation to others. Finally, the conclusion will emphasize that more research, drawing on additional archival material, is necessary to further test these results.

The Emergence of the Arabic Periodical Press

Compared to its European counterpart, the Arabic periodical press developed at a considerably later point in history, during the so-called Nahda period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Commonly translated into English as 'Arab Renaissance' or, more literally, 'Arab Awakening', the Nahda can briefly be described as a movement of social, political, and cultural reforms promoted by both individuals and the state during the late Ottoman period, mainly in Egypt, Greater Syria, and Tunisia. The periodical press started off as government publications in the 1820s, eventually turning into official newspapers, before privately owned newspapers and journals appeared around the middle of the century, with Cairo and Beirut as the main centres. The development of the periodical press contributed to the emergence of a new kind of public sphere that included a broader cross-section of Arab society, transgressing the boundaries of social strata and religious denomination as well as geographical distance. In fact, some journals were distributed not only across the Arab world, but also in common regions of the Syrian diaspora, notably Europe and North and South America, and even in places perceived as more distant, like Malaysia and Australia.[6]

Dominated by text, with only a few images, early Arabic cultural-scientific journals had an overtly educational agenda, aiming to popularize all kinds of knowledge and spread certain values. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the wider accessibility of education, readers, and public debates, as well as novel technical innovations, had impact on the forms and functions of the periodical press. New features

5 This article is part of a larger research project that examines the early Arabic journal as a form and institution, analysing textual strategies and medial practices used by editors, contributors, and readers of various journals. It was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation (Dilthey Fellowship).

6 For comprehensive information about the history of the Arab Press and the cultural-scientific journal respectively, see Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Dagmar Glaß, *Der* Muqtaṭaf *und seine* Öffentlichkeit*: Aufklärung, Räsonnement und Meinungsstreit in der frühen arabischen Zeitschriftenkommunikation*, 2 vols (Würzburg: Ergon, 2004).

were introduced into Arabic journals, and the emergence of illustrated magazines, which incorporated many more pictures and different text genres appealing to a variety of interests, resulted in new audiences and reading practices. As Walter Armbrust argues in relation to an Egyptian illustrated magazine of the 1930s, 'readers of illustrated magazines are meant to *meander* and be entertained, not engage in the sober work of being educated or informed'.[7]

Women's periodicals of the 1920s differed in form, character, and intended readership from the late nineteenth-century cultural-scientific journals and early twentieth-century specialized literary journals, on the one hand, and the more popular illustrated magazines of the 1930s discussed by Armbrust, on the other. Although women's periodicals had changed in line with general developments in the field of periodical publishing since the first women-edited publications addressing a primarily female audience appeared on the market (1892 in Egypt, 1910 in Syria),[8] they fell somewhere between the two types: they aimed at 'educating and informing' their readers, while adopting forms and styles that spoke to broader audiences, which were varied in terms of age, social class, educational level, and gender.

Syrian Women's Journals in the 1920s — A 'Central' or 'Marginal' Position?

To explore whether Syrian women's journals could be considered to occupy a 'central' or 'marginal' position in the field of periodical publishing, or within society more generally, I will look at various factors that fall largely within the following three categories: the main actors involved in the publishing and reception process (editors, authors, and readers), including their networks and alliances; the topics that were tackled and the political and social views that were expressed; and distribution and archiving practices. These factors will be treated as indicators that help to define a journal's place within the contemporary intellectual, political, and social fields, including strategies deliberately employed by an editor to position herself as well as her periodical. The seven factors around which the article is structured are as follows: longevity and geographical distribution; the editor's position; contributors; intended audiences and actual readers; topics and political and social views; local, regional, and transregional networks; archival practices and material transmission.

The focus of this exploration will be three prominent periodicals edited by women in Damascus and Beirut in the 1920s. While two were founded during the first decade of the twentieth century, their publication was interrupted during the First World War and resumed only in 1918 and 1923 respectively; I will focus on the issues published during the 1920s. The three journals are *al-ʿArūs* [The Bride], Damascus, 1910–14 and 1918–26 (Fig. 1), edited by Mārī ʿAjamī (1888–1965); *Mīnarvā* [Minerva], Beirut, 1916–17 and 1923–29 (Fig. 2), edited by Mārī Yannī (1895–1975); and *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* [The New Woman], Beirut, 1921–27 (Fig. 3), edited by Jūliyā Ṭuʿma Dimashqiyya (1884–1954).[9]

7 Walter Armbrust, 'Meandering Through the Magazine: Print Culture(s) and Reading Practices in Interwar Egypt', *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 15.1–2 (2022), 56–91 (p. 57).

8 For a comprehensive study of the emergence of the women's press in Egypt, see Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

9 Information about the year in which the journal was discontinued is generally not certain, as this was usually not announced in advance. The information provided here is based on the issues I have consulted at the Saint Joseph University in Beirut or other sources cited in the respective footnote.

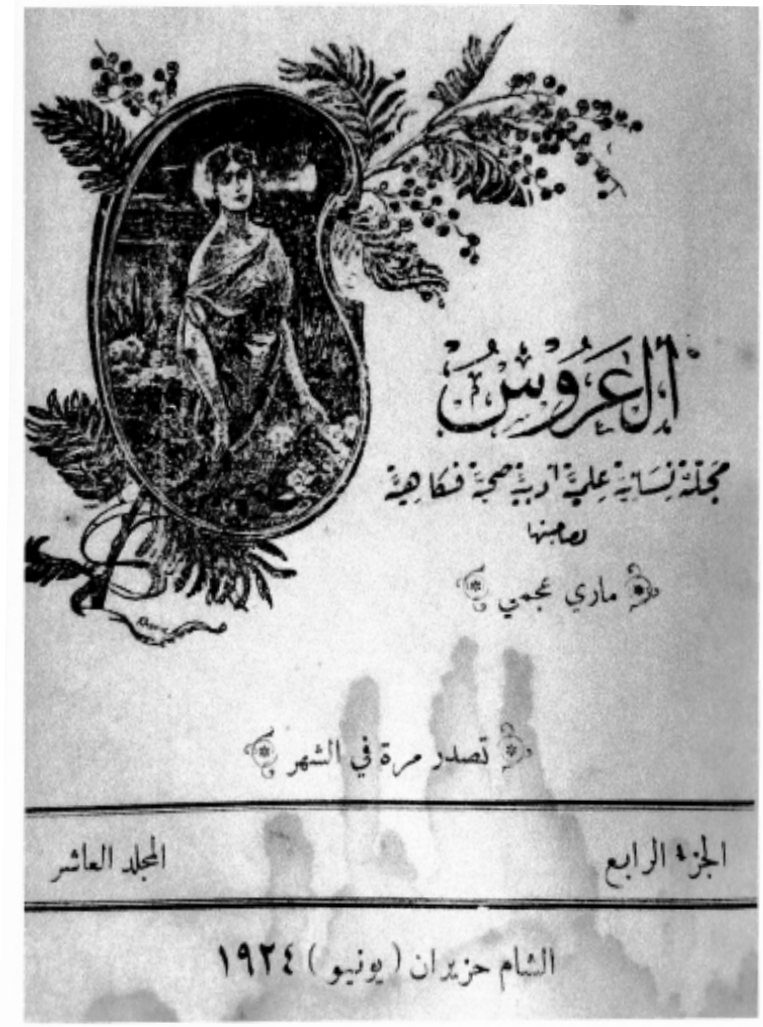

Fig. 1 Cover page of *al-ʿArūs*, 10.4 (June 1924). Reprinted from Zerouali, p. 67.

1 Longevity and Geographical Distribution

Longevity and geographical distribution can be taken as evidence of a journal's success and position in the publishing scene.[10] Covering, collectively, a timespan of almost two decades, each of the three periodicals published between seven and eleven volumes. This constitutes a medium longevity, given that many journals — both women's and 'general interest' publications — lasted for only one or two years, or even a few issues, while some of the most successful were published over many decades.[11] While *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* was published in Beirut between 1921 and 1927, on a more or less regular monthly (sometimes bi-monthly) basis,[12] the two other periodicals had a more intricate publishing history. As already mentioned, *al-ʿArūs*, the first journal edited by a woman

10 Reliable information about more concrete indicators of success and influence, such as the journals' print run and circulation, will need further archival research.

11 Among the most prominent and long-lasting early Arabic journals are *al-Muqtaṭaf* (Beirut, then Cairo 1876–1952), *al-Hilāl* (Cairo, 1892–), and *al-Manār* (Cairo, 1898–1940).

12 As Beth Baron mentions in her study about the early women's press in Egypt, monthly periodicity was typical for women's journals, but also for other cultural-scientific journals, and most of them appeared in the form of six-by-nine inches, running from sixteen to forty-eight pages. Baron, p. 63.

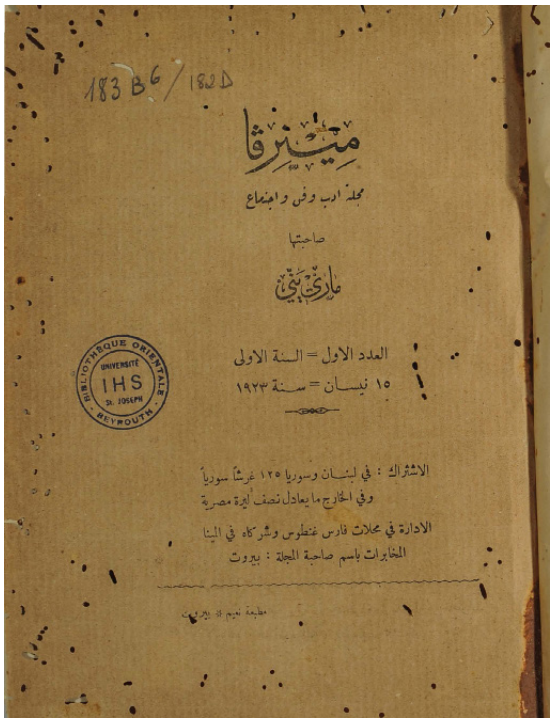

Fig. 2 Title page of *Mīnarvā*, 1.1 (15 April 1924). Copy of the Bibliothèque Orientale, Saint Joseph University of Beirut, Lebanon, call number: K/382.

Fig. 3 Cover page of *al-Mar'a al-Jadīda*, 3.9 (September 1923). Bibliothèque Orientale, Saint Joseph University of Beirut, Lebanon, call number: 184F4/183D2.

in Syria, was founded in 1910 in Damascus; its publication stopped during the First World War (1914–18), then resumed until 1926.[13] Beirut-based *Mīnervā* is said to have been published as a weekly in handwritten form, probably due to the conditions of war, for roughly six months (September 1916–March 1917),[14] then as a printed monthly from 1923 to 1929.[15] According to some sources, *al-ʿArūs* ceased publication for political reasons, because it was critical of the French occupation,[16] others mention financial problems.[17] For the other periodicals, personal reasons are foregrounded, such as marriage and migration (*Mīnarvā*) or health complications (*al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*).[18]

Although detailed information about sales and subscriptions is scarce, a variety of sources confirm that the journals were distributed over a wide geographical area. Women's memoirs, for instance, demonstrate that *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* and other women's periodicals were read by upper-class women in Jerusalem.[19] According to ʿĪsā Fattūḥ, *al-ʿArūs* was widely distributed across the Arab world and the Arab diaspora, and had agents in various cities in Greater Syria (including Beirut, Nablus, and Jerusalem), other Arab regions (including Baghdad, Alexandria, and Cairo), and South America (including Buenos Aires and São Paulo).[20] The same is true for *Mīnarvā*.[21] *Al-ʿArūs* and *Mīnarvā* regularly published a short section titled 'Ihdāʾ al-majalla' ['Donation of the Journal'], listing persons who had 'donated the journal', i.e. donated an annual subscription to a person or institution. This note usually mentions the name and place of residence of both the (mostly male) donor and the receiving person or institution. Sometimes a donor is identified as the editor's friend or the editor of some other journal, and the note often indicates the relation between donor and receiver, the latter most often being a married or unmarried woman (*al-sayyida* or *al-ānisa* ['Mrs.' or 'Miss']), who was often the donor's sister or fiancée. However, the journal was also donated by a woman to a male reader, and subscriptions were donated to girls' schools and women's associations.[22] These lists confirm that the periodicals were not limited to a local audience but had a regional and transatlantic distribution, being read not only in small Syrian towns (Mukhtāra, Jezzine), larger cities in the Syrian 'core region' (Beirut, Damascus, Homs), and further to the south, Jerusalem, but also in Iraq and Egypt, and in North and South America (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, New York, San Francisco, and Chicago),[23] where notable communities of Syrian immigrants had been established since the turn

13 ʿĪsā Fattūḥ, *Adībāt ʿarabiyyāt: Siyar wa-dirāsāt* (Damascus: al-Nadwa al-Thaqāfiyya al-Nisāʾiyya, 1994), pp. 129–30. Mīshāl Jiḥā, *Mārī ʿAjamī* (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes, 2001), pp. 291–92. ʿĪsā Fattūḥ erroneously mentions 1925 as the year when publication ultimately stopped.

14 Fattūḥ, p. 142. I couldn't find evidence of the first publishing period being conserved in any public library. The Bibliothèque Orientale (Saint Joseph University', Beirut) has in its collection volumes 1 to 6 (April 1923–January 1929), with no indication about a previous series.

15 Slim and Dupont erroneously give 1927 as the last year of publication. Souad Slim and Anne-Laure Dupont, 'La vie intellectuelle des femmes à Beyrouth dans les années 1920 à travers la revue *Minerva*', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 95–98 (2002), 381–406 (p. 381).

16 Fattūḥ, p. 130; Jiḥā, *Mārī ʿAjamī*, p. 292.

17 Thompson, p. 215.

18 Ibid. On a broader level, however, Elizabeth Thompson argues that, beyond individual circumstances, the general demise of the Syrian women's press in the late 1920s and early 1930s was due to political and economic factors. She stresses 'the irony that just as the women's movement gained momentum […], the magazines that had underpinned the interurban linkages of women's groups faded away', while women authors (and former journal editors) continued contributing to the 'general' press. Ibid., pp. 215–16, quotation p. 216.

19 Caroline Kahlenberg, 'New Arab Maids: Female Domestic Work, "New Arab Women," and National Memory in British Mandate Palestine', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 52 (2020), 449–67 (p. 456).

20 Fattūḥ, pp. 131–32.

21 Slim and Dupont, pp. 390–91.

22 See, for instance, *Mīnervā* 1.6 (15 September 1923), p. 285.

23 See, for instance, *Mīnervā*, 1.5 (15 August 1923), 239–40; 1.6 (15 September 1923), 285; 1.8 (15 November 1923), 374; and 1.12 (15 March 1924), 568.

of the twentieth century. Information about agents and subscribers in the journal's pages demonstrates, as was probably intended, that the periodical was able to compete with prominent 'general interest' publications, in terms of its broad distribution, on a local, regional, and global level.

2 The Editor's Position

The prestige of a periodical and the reputation of its editor are usually closely linked. A publication edited by a renowned public figure is more likely to raise interest than one edited by an unknown person, while, in return, a successful journal can increase its editor's status. The three periodicals discussed here are considered among the most influential women's journals of their time, and their editors were all middle-class women and esteemed intellectuals. They were known for their sound education and commitment to women's emancipation and the national cause, although their positions within society and some of their social and political views differed.

The editor of *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* was Jūliyā Ṭuʿma Dimashqiyya (1882–1954) (Fig. 4). Originally from a small town in Mount Lebanon, she graduated with a teaching diploma and worked as a teacher and school director in her early adult years.[24] When she founded her journal, Jūliyā Dimashqiyya had been hosting a salon in Beirut and acting as the head of several women's associations, including Jāmiʿat al-Sayyidāt [The Women's League]. These activities were closely related: *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* was declared on the back cover of each issue to be 'lisān ḥāl Jāmiʿat al-Sayyidāt' ['the organ of The Women's League'], several speeches or lectures published in the journal were originally presented to the association, and some of the authors regularly attended Dimashqiyya's salon in the denominationally mixed neighbourhood of Raʾs Bayrūt. Jūliyā Dimashqiyya, who was married to Badr Dimashqiyya, a renowned Sunni deputy of Beirut's municipality, played an active part in the city's social life and was committed not only to women's rights and education, but also to various other social, political, and cultural causes. In addition to her editorial work and contributions to her own journal, she wrote for several other renowned periodicals (both women's and 'general interest' journals). She was also a delegate to several international women's conferences that were held during the early 1930s. In 1947, she was honored with the prestigious Lebanese Order of Merit.

Mārī ʿAjamī (1888–1965; Fig. 5), who edited *al-ʿArūs*, was born and raised in a Greek-Orthodox family in Damascus. After studying at the local Irish and Russian schools, she worked as a teacher and director of various schools in Damascus, Alexandria, and Baghdad.[25] She also founded a number of women's clubs and associations, as well as a girls' school; she hosted a salon, and was the only female elected member of the jury of the literary association al-Rābiṭa al-Adabiyya. When, aged twenty-two, she started publishing *al-ʿArūs*, she was the first woman to edit a journal in Syria; she also contributed to several local, regional, and transregional periodicals. She translated from

24 For bio-bibliographical information, see Mishāl Jiḥā, *Jūliyā Ṭuʿma Dimashqiyya* (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes, 2003), pp. 11–35; Nāzik Sābā Yārid and Nuhā Bayūmī, *al-Kātibāt al-lubnāniyyāt: Bībliyūghrāfiyā 1850–1950* (Beirut and London: Dar Al Saqi, 2000), pp. 51–53. For a brief biographical summary in English, see Barbara Winckler, 'Seriality, Journal-Specific Communication and Archival Practices in Two Late 19th- and Early 20th-Century Arabic Periodicals: How Writing and Publishing Strategies Potentially Affect Reading Practices', in *Journale lesen: Lektüreabbruch — Anschlusslektüren / Reading Journals: Coherence and Interruption*, ed. by Volker Mergenthaler, Nora Ramtke, and Monika Schmitz-Emans (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2022), pp. 233–57 (p. 247).

25 For bio-bibliographical information, see Fattūḥ, pp. 125–38; Jiḥā, *Mārī ʿAjamī*, pp. 11–26 and 291–93. For biographical information in French as well as numerous photos, see Sabine Mohasseb Saliba, 'Une figure saillante du journalisme syro-libanais: Marie Ajami (1888–1965)', *Chronos: Revue d'Histoire de l'Université de Balamand*, 27 (2013), 141–65; and Basma Zerouali, *Le Quatuor de Beyrouth* (Paris: Geuthner, 2016), pp. 57–77.

Fig. 4 Jūliyā Ṭuʿma Dimashqiyya (1882–1954). Reprinted from Jiḥā, *Jūliyā Ṭuʿma Dimashqiyya*, p. 88.

English, and was a renowned orator and writer of both poetry and prose. During the first decades of the twentieth century, she was known for her social and political activism. In particular, she campaigned for women's rights, and against Ottoman and later, French rule in Greater Syria. Having lost her fiancé, Petro Pauli, who was among the 'martyrs' executed by the Ottoman authorities for their activism against Ottoman military rule in 1916, she remained unmarried. She continued her social and political activism, but spent the last years of her life in seclusion, living with one of her sisters in their family's home in Bāb Tūmā, a Christian neighbourhood in the old city of Damascus.

Mārī Yannī (1895–1975; Fig. 6), editor of *Mīnarvā* , was born into a middle-class family of Greek descent in Beirut.[26] She studied first at a British school, then at the renowned girls' school Zahrat al-Iḥsān, and later worked as a teacher and school director in Homs and Beirut. Yannī also wrote for several journals and contributed to the editorial work of *Dalīl Ḥimṣ*, a newspaper edited by her brother Qusṭanṭīn Yannī, before founding *Mīnarvā*. She was a distinguished orator and hosted a salon at her house. In addition to Arabic and Greek, she also knew English, French, and Russian. When, in 1926, she married Ibrāhīm ʿĀṭāllāh, originally from Homs, and went to live with him in Santiago de Chile, her brother Qusṭanṭīn Yannī took over the task of editing the journal.[27] The journal's masthead, however, kept mentioning her name as

26 For bio-bio-bibliographical information, see Fattūḥ, pp. 139–44; Yārid and Bayūmī, pp. 157–59; Slim and Dupont; Zerouali, pp. 78–97.

27 Qusṭanṭīn Yannī is mentioned as 'executive director' (al-mudīr al-mas) in the journal's masthead from issue 4.4 (July 1926).

Fig. 5 Mārī ʿAjamī (1888–1965). Reprinted from Jiḥā, *Mārī ʿAjamī*, p. 294.

'owner' (*ṣāḥibatuhā* — the term typically used for the journal editor), as she continued to contribute substantially to *Mīnarvā*. Overseas, she wrote for the Arabic press in Chile and Brazil and pursued cultural activities promoting Arabic literature and culture in the Southern *mahjar*, the Syrian diaspora in South America.

All three editors can thus be considered prominent figures in the social and cultural life of their societies as well as the field of publishing. Compared to that of their male counterparts, the scope of their activities in the public sphere remained limited, however, as they did not occupy, for instance, political offices or administrational positions.

3 Contributors

Besides the reputation of its editor, the prestige of a journal derives from the reputation of the authors who contributed to its contents. Several of the most renowned authors and intellectuals of the time, both male and female, regularly figure in the periodicals under discussion. In *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, for instance, there are contributions by prominent poets and prose writers, journalists, and activists. These include eminent author and political activist Amīn al-Rīḥānī (1876–1940), known in English as Ameen Rihani, who spent much of his youth and adulthood in New York but returned to Lebanon in 1905; Lebanese-American author Mīkhāʾīl Nuʿayma (1889–1988), known in English as Mikhail Naimy, a central figure within al-Rābiṭa al-Qalamiyya [The Pen League] in New York; famous Egyptian poet Aḥmad Shawqī (1868–1932), nicknamed 'amīr al-shuʿarāʾ' ['the Prince of Poets']; Cairo-based Lebanese writer and journalist Salīm

Fig. 6 Mārī Yannī (1895–1975). Reprinted from Zerouali, p. 92.

Sarkīs (1867–1926), who was known for his political criticism and support for women's emancipation; Lebanese-Egyptian poet and journalist Khalīl Muṭrān (1872–1949); Cairo-based Lebanese author and salonnière Mayy Ziyāda (1886–1941); and Egyptian political activist Hudā Shaʿrāwī (1879–1947), first president of al-Ittiḥād al-Nisāʾī al-Miṣrī [the Egyptian Feminist Union].

Likewise, a number of prominent male and female intellectuals who were active in publishing and politics contributed to *Mīnarvā*. Among them were Jurjī Niqūlā Bāz (1881–1959), the editor of *al-Ḥasnāʾ*, the first Syrian journal to address a female audience; Salmā Sāʾigh (1889–1953), a prominent figure in the intellectual life of Beirut, who, like Mārī Yannī, had studied at Zahrat al-Iḥsān; Jibrān Tuwaynī (1890–1947), Gebran Tueni in English, who had worked in the Arabic press in Paris and Egypt and would soon occupy important positions in politics and journalism; and Ibrāhīm Mundhir (1875–1950), author and member of the Lebanese parliament, who had been Mārī Yannī's teacher at Zahrat al-Iḥsān. Besides these figures were prominent poets and prose writers, such as Amīn al-Rīḥānī, mentioned above, and Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān (1883–1931), who is known in English as Kahlil Gibran.

Al-ʿArūs also featured poems and articles by prominent women authors and activists, including Nāzik al-ʿĀbid (1887–1959), an activist for independence and women's rights; as well as Syrian authors and poets, such as Bishāra Khūrī (1885–1968),

who was nicknamed 'al-Akhṭal al-ṣaghīr' ['the small Akhṭal'] with reference to the Umayyad poet al-Akhṭal; Īlyā Abū Māḍī (1890–1957), a famous Lebanese-born poet of the North-American diaspora; and Iraqi poet Jamīl Ṣidqī al-Zahāwī (1863–1936), whose poems were also published in *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* and *Mīnarvā*.

In all three publications, the number of male authors exceeded by far that of female contributors.[28] While one might expect a higher number of women writing for women's journals, this proportion is not surprising, since, in the 1920s, the number of educated women who were able to contribute to periodicals — and who dared to express themselves in public — was still small. A number of texts were published under pseudonyms or initials, some of them were known to conceal the name of a female writer.[29]

Just as the editors, along with most Syrian authors, contributed to a wide range of periodicals and newspapers, both local and transregional, authors from Beirut, Damascus, and other parts of Syria wrote for the Syrian press, with additional contributions from Egypt, Iraq, and the Arab diaspora in North and South America. Besides the prominent figures mentioned above, a number of local and lesser-known authors, schoolteachers, politicians, and activists contributed to the journals, some on a regular basis, others only once or twice. All three periodicals seem to have relied largely on a local or regional circle of authors, with whom the editors probably had direct personal connections, yet the list of contributors given above also includes authors from other Arab regions and diaspora communities in both Americas. In particular, *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* published original contributions from a broad transnational network of prominent authors.[30]

Some contributions were not written specially for the periodical in which they appeared. These include texts translated from European languages, speeches that had been held at various occasions, and some poems. Others, however, were dedicated to the journal. This is evident from introductory comments by the editor or the authors themselves, who often declared their support for the journal's aims, praised its quality and the erudition and commitment of its editor, or promised to contribute to future issues.[31] Accordingly, periodicals stood to benefit from publishing contributions by prominent authors, while at the same time helping emerging authors, among them women writers, to establish themselves as intellectuals and activists by publishing their articles or speeches.

4 Intended Audience and Actual Readers

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, there was a shift within the Arabic periodical press from text-dominant content to the inclusion of more and more pictures and various text genres, which spoke to different interests. Compared to the early cultural-scientific periodicals, Syrian women's journals of the 1920s addressed different, mainly female readerships. *Al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* is the most explicit in this regard, targeting a broad range of women in various stages of their lives. Its masthead

28 According to Michel Jiḥā, for instance, in 1925, the names of sixty-three male but only twelve female authors appear in *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*. Jiḥā, *Jūliyā Ṭuʿma Dimashqiyya*, pp. 36–37.

29 While publishing anonymously or pseudonymously was also practised by male authors, women mainly did so to safeguard their own and their family's reputation, in a social milieu where veiling and gender segregation were still prevalent. However, the identity of the person behind the pseudonym was often widely known. See, for instance, Glaß, vol. 1, pp. 353–57 (chap. IX.4), and Baron, pp. 43–50 (chap. 'To Sign or not to Sign').

30 For a discussion of both local and transnational networks of contributors, focusing on speeches and cultural events presented in *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, see Barbara Winckler, '"Translating" Orality and Sociability into Print: Strategies for Building a Community of Shared Values in a 1920s Beirut-Based Women's Magazine', *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 15.1–2 (2022), 34–55.

31 See, for instance, Jibrān's letter to Mārī Yannī, published in *Mīnarvā*, 1.5 (15 August 1923), 236–37.

(Fig. 7), which remained unchanged over the years, expresses the periodical's intended functions and addressees, by stating that it is meant to be 'the mother's book, the wife's guide, the young woman's mirror, the child's companion'. The masthead also mentions the goals of the journal, which are 'to spread the spirit of an education of independence, to enhance family life, and to elevate the Arab woman, in science, ethics and society'.[32] In the editorial of the first issue of *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, Jūliyā Dimashqiyya addresses her readers, imagining them explicitly as differing in terms of age, marital status, and educational level, from young, unmarried women to mothers, from working women to uneducated wives.[33] In this respect, the editor stresses that the journal is not intended to be an erudite medium which exclusively addresses well-educated readers. On the contrary, she continues, it was founded in particular for those women who had only basic education, as a kind of 'madrasa baytiyya' ['domiciliary school'].[34] At the end of this editorial she addresses yet another group of women, authors and intellectuals, inviting them to 'collaborate in order to elevate our mothers, sisters, and friends', and relying for this important task on the support of members of the Women's League, along with male authors and intellectuals.[35] Yet despite these indications of a female target readership, *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* was not exclusively addressed to women, sometimes speaking explicitly to male readers by discussing general social and cultural issues and calling on men to support women's education and liberation.[36]

Jūliyā Dimashqiyya thus apparently addresses mainly female readers, echoing the first editorial of *al-ʿArūs* by Mārī ʿAjamī, quoted at the beginning of this article, who also dedicated her journal to women. Substantial sections of ʿAjamī's editorial, too, had spoken to men, calling on them to foster women's education through the reading of valuable books and journals, which would open their minds: not least for the benefit of men themselves, and of the family, since an educated woman could secure a better education for her children.[37] This attitude, which reflects dominant discourses arguing for women's education since the late nineteenth century, can partly be attributed to the fact that ʿAjamī's journal was launched more than ten years before Dimashqiyya's. While ʿAjamī, in the inaugural issue, apparently felt the need to introduce *al-ʿArūs* to fathers or husbands in order to reach women readers, in the first issue of the second year, apparently having gained some confidence in the periodical's accomplishments, she spoke explicitly to female readers, declaring her firm belief in women's emancipation and the journal's role in helping them to believe in their capacity to be men's equal when given the same educational opportunities.[38]

32 *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* 3.7 (July 1923), 225. The Arabic original phrases read as follows: 'كتاب الأمّ / مرشد الزوجة / مرآة الفتاة / سميرة الولد' and 'مجلّةٌ غايتها بثّ روح التربية الاستقلالية وتحسين الحياة العائلية وترقية المرأة العربية علميًا وأدبيًا واجتماعيًا'.

33 Editorial, *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, 1.1 (April 1921), reprinted in Jiḥā, *Jūliyā Ṭuʿma Dimashqiyya*, pp. 89–92. Reference is made to Jiḥā's anthology in case the respective journal issue is missing in the collection of the Bibliothèque Orientale of the Saint Joseph University in Beirut.

34 Editorial, *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, 1.1 (April 1921), quoted from Jiḥā, *Jūliyā Ṭuʿma Dimashqiyya*, p. 91.

35 Editorial, *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, 1.1 (April 1921), quoted from Jiḥā, *Jūliyā Ṭuʿma Dimashqiyya*, p. 92: 'تعالين نتعاون على إنهاض أمهاتنا، وأخواتنا، وصديقاتنا'.

36 See, for instance, the series of editorials published between July and December 1925 in view of the upcoming elections. In these editorials, exceptionally titled 'To my homeland's ruler / and my homeland's son' (الى حاكم بلادي / وابن بلادي), instead of the usual 'To my homeland's daughter' (الى ابنة بلادي), Jūliyā Dimashqiyya points to serious deficiencies in the educational system, urging the government to take measures to improve girls' education in particular. *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* 5.7–12 (July–December 1925).

37 'al-Muqaddima' ['Introduction'], *al-ʿArūs*, 1.1 (December 1910), 1–4 [also reprinted in Jiḥā, *Mārī* ʿĀjamī, pp. 133–36].

38 'Sanatunā al-thāniya' ['Our Second Year'], *al-ʿArūs*, 2.1 (January 1912), reprinted in Jiḥā, *Mārī ʿĀjamī*, pp. 137–40.

Fig. 7 Masthead and ornamented title of editorial ‘To my homeland’s daughter’ (‘الى ابنة بلادي’) of *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, 3.9 (September 1923), n.p. [p. 305]. Bibliothèque Orientale, Saint Joseph University of Beirut, Lebanon, call number: 184F4/183D2.

The strategy to reach female readers through their male relatives does not seem to be the only reason for addressing an audience beyond women. In later years, Mārī ʿAjamī repeatedly used the masculine form when referring to her readers, such as when the journal resumed publication in October 1918 after a four-year hiatus,[39] and at the beginning of its tenth year. In the latter instance, she declared confidently that *al-ʿArūs* had come of age, thanks to people who continuously supported the periodical, qualifying her readers as ‘belonging to those who are aware of the value of their reading matter’ — men as well as women, presumably.[40]

In the introduction to the first issue of *Mīnarvā*, Marī Yannī gives no hint that her periodical targeted a female readership, using the masculine form when readers are mentioned.[41] Moreover, neither the journal’s title, which refers to the Roman goddess of wisdom and the arts, nor the phrase beneath it specifying its focus — ‘majallat adab wa-fann wa-ijtimāʿ’ [‘Journal for Literature, Art, and Society’] — points to

39 *al-ʿArūs*, 4.10 (October 1918), quoted in Jiḥā, *Mārī ʿĀjamī*, p. 144.

40 *al-ʿArūs*, 10.1 (March 1924), quoted in Jiḥā, *Mārī ʿĀjamī*, p. 143: ‘فلأنهم من تلك الطبقة التي تدرك قيمة ما تقرأ’.

41 *Mīnarvā*, 1.1 (15 April 1923), 3–4.

women-specific interests. Nevertheless, the three contributions by guest authors that follow the editor's introduction, along with much of the contents of later issues, explicitly deal with the women's press, thus characterizing *Mīnarvā* as predominantly (although not solely) concerned with women's issues.

While all three publications address women in particular, they also — and successfully — speak to a male audience. As noted previously, the lists of people who had donated the journal to another person or institution did include men, among them — at least in the case of *Mīnarvā* — high-ranking figures, such as the Sultan of Muscat and a person holding the title of doctor.[42] Furthermore, a closer look at the content suggests that some of the rubrics and topics figuring in *al-ʿArūs* and even more so in *Mīnarvā* are more likely to appeal to readers of both genders than most parts of *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*: this will be discussed in more detail below. We can conclude from these observations that the journals were not limited to a female — and thus arguably marginal — readership, but held interest for broader audiences, including men. Thus, they occupied — or worked strategically towards securing — a central position within society.

5 Topics and Political and Social Views

The material published in each of the journals covers a broad range of social, political, and cultural topics, as well as more practical everyday issues. All three seem to have been eager to present a great variety of material that would provide their readers with whatever was needed to meet the challenges they faced in relation to their societies' progress and development, the welfare of their families, and their personal lives. The periodicals contain, in varying amounts, historical and biographical essays, opinion pieces about social and ethical questions, and transcripts of speeches given at various occasions; news, about recently published books and journals, social or cultural events, and the weddings or deaths of prominent figures with connections to the periodical; and practical advice about 'tadbīr al-manzil' ['household management'] and child-rearing, along with poetry, stories, and jokes. While the three journals seemingly address a similar audience — mainly middle- and upper-class women — and chose their contents accordingly, they are different in character, focusing on different topics and, sometimes, conveying different opinions.

Among the topics discussed in *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* are questions relating to a woman's place in society and her role within the family, which the journal, conveying wider societal opinion, considered to be the core of society. These questions were explored in biographical essays about women from Syria, the Arab world, and other, mainly Western countries, opinion pieces, and practical advice. Education is a central topic, particularly the education of girls, in the sense of both knowledge acquisition and the building of character (*taʿlīm* and *tarbiya*). Several articles discuss issues relating to married life, domestic duties, and the role of the mother in educating her children. Although Jūliyā Dimashqiyya generally advocates marriage, she emphasizes women's right to choose between married and unmarried life, along with the importance of raising children, particularly girls, in a way that allows them to develop according to their character as individuals. She also demands that women be self-confident, that they claim their rights, and that they exercise self-criticism and abandon bad habits, such as wasting time and money on fashion and appearances. Rather than demanding full political participation equal to that of men, Jūliyā Dimashqiyya calls on men to acknowledge women's work at home. Her editorials are characterized by the subtlety with which they point to social and political ills, and question prevailing beliefs and attitudes,

42 *Mīnervā*, 1.6 (15 September 1923), 285 and 1.5 (15 August 1923), 239–40.

rather than targeting them with blunt criticism. Despite her unambiguous support for women's rights, she was thus cautious not to demand what could be considered too radical a change. It is important to note that — like the other two journals — *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* does not open a front against men, but constantly calls upon men and women to work together towards the unity, progress, and independence of the nation.

In contrast, Mārī ʿAjamī typically adopts a more offensive and confrontational stance in *al-ʿArūs*. As mentioned above, she was known for her social and political activism; in particular, she advocated for women's emancipation and national sovereignty, spoke out against Ottoman and, later, French mandate rule, and objected to the adoption of European languages, habits, attitudes, and products at the expense of Arabic language and local cultural and material production. The way that *al-ʿArūs*, along with *Mīnarvā*, continued to commemorate the 'martyrs' (the activists who were executed in Beirut and Damascus by the Ottoman authorities in 1915 and 1916) on 6 May, gives reason to believe that this commemoration is meant to encourage renewed resistance against the current foreign rule, the French mandate.[43] Mārī ʿAjamī overtly proclaimed her refusal of the journal to be coopted by the French government in Syria, despite the financial and material support, including access to paper, this would have entailed. In May 1925, *al-ʿArūs* reviewed a local performance of the French play *Les Demi-Vierges* by Marcel Prévost (1862–1941), which highlights the negative impact of modern education and city life on young women, criticizing the author for blaming one gender only.[44] In the same issue, a short text reports on the opening of an American school in Damascus, emphasizing that this school did not have a colonial agenda.[45]

Al-ʿArūs and *Mīnarvā* gave less space than *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* to articles about housekeeping, or dispensing tips in relation to everyday practical issues, privileging instead articles that contributed to political, social, and intellectual debates by tackling issues crucial to their society. These issues included Western culture and colonial politics, gender relations, especially between wife and husband, family issues, and education. As already explained, *Mīnarvā*, particularly, presents itself as a 'general' cultural periodical, avoiding the term 'women's journal' and including more general cultural and intellectual topics, such as literature and art, history, and geography. In addition to women's emancipation, it emphasizes the importance of preserving the local language and culture, and of resisting dominant European cultural influence and commercial power.[46] The periodicals' choice of topics and discourses, and the ways in which they presented them, suggest that all three editors, albeit to various degrees, aimed at — and succeeded in — reaching a wider, educated audience, thereby securing a less marginal position in society than one would probably expect from 'women's journals'.

6 Local, Regional, and Transregional Networks

Periodicals typically create circles of people around them: editors, contributors, readers — who often take on an active role, through readers' letters or even articles — and their wider networks, on a local, regional, or transregional level. These individuals often meet personally, in salons, scientific, or cultural associations, for instance, or at other kinds of social or cultural events. Close ties could, however, also develop over wider distances.

43 See, for instance, *al-ʿArūs*, 11.2 (May 1925), which starts with a text calling upon the 'martyrs' to arise and return, as the nation is giving itself to foreigners. 6 May is still commemorated as Martyrs' Day in today's Syria and Lebanon.

44 *al-ʿArūs*, 11.2 (May 1925), 108–12.

45 *al-ʿArūs*, 11.2 (May 1925), 122.

46 For a summary and discussion of the topics and general orientation of *Mīnarvā*, based on the journal's first year, see Slim and Dupont.

The range of these networks, along with the reputation of the people belonging to the journal's circle and the quality of their relations to the journal and its editor, could also enhance the publication's prestige.

Much of this local, regional, and transregional exchange is reflected on the pages of the periodicals discussed in this article. As mentioned above, many contributions are written by guest authors, among them regular readers of the journal, attendees of its editor's salon, or members of an association formally or indirectly related to the journal. We thus find references to interactions between the editor and readers or guest authors, which took place outside the periodical, such as articles reporting on meetings of the Women's League (in *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*), poetry readings, a journal's jubilee, or mourning ceremonies, as well as speeches, which had been held at these and other occasions and were printed in the periodical. We often find expressions of mutual veneration and friendship between authors and editor, as well as references to common interests or shared memories. Reciprocal support is also expressed in the common practice of authors and editors announcing and commenting on each other's publications, books as well as periodicals.

The information given in earlier sections of this article in relation to geographical distribution, contributors, intended readers, and actual subscribers, demonstrates how each of the periodicals belonged to a wide network that included prominent male and female figures and less-known persons of various professions, who were active in their respective fields and mainly belonged to the middle and upper classes. All three journals maintained close relationships with their local milieu, in Beirut, Damascus, and neighbouring cities, as well as with persons and institutions within the wider Syrian region, including individuals located in Jerusalem or in schools and associations in various Palestinian cities. Moreover, we can also trace numerous transregional connections with various actors — such as contributors, readers, and agents — from other Arab regions, Europe, and North and South America. The bonds between Beirut and Cairo appear to have been particularly close, especially via Syrian emigrants to Egypt, many of whom were also active in the publishing field. This is reflected in individual contributions and in reports of broader events, for instance, accounts of the festivities of the journal *al-Muqtaṭaf*'s Golden Jubilee, which were held in Cairo and Beirut, or of festivities celebrating a famous poet in Cairo.[47] Finally, in all three journals, both the contributors and the list of donated subscriptions reflect transregional connections to diaspora communities in both Americas, with *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* exhibiting a particularly broad web.

These local, regional, and transregional networks might be a natural outcome of social and cultural life in Beirut and Damascus as well as private and professional connections within Greater Syria and, due to migration, with Egypt and North and South America, along with trade and cultural exchange with other countries. The networks might also, however, be considered a form of strategic networking, which aimed to build communities of shared interest and develop alliances with influential actors in the fields of culture and politics.

7 Archival Practices and Material Transmission

This final section turns to another indicator of a journal's position as 'central' or 'marginal' by exploring its success and the importance attributed to it, beyond its contemporary distribution, within libraries and archives today. Unlike books, the periodical press is usually considered an ephemeral medium, a day-to-day form of publication. This is,

47 For a discussion of these practices as forms of media cross-over and networking in *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, see Winckler, '"Translating" Orality and Sociability into Print'.

however, not exactly true for at least some periodicals of the Nahda period. Several of the most successful periodicals, such as *al-Hilāl*, *al-Muqtaṭaf*, or *al-Manār*, can be found today in university libraries, both in the Arab world and the West. While readers and subscribers were given the option of having the issues they had received over a year bound once that year was over, library copies are often annual volumes which were published a few years later, with a separate title page and sometimes an index. Probably because of their encyclopedic character and cultural-scientific contents, these journals appear to have been perceived as reference works. They encouraged two distinct reading practices: the successive reading of 'single numbers separated by time'[48] and the parallel, 'temporally autonomous' reading.[49]

The above is not, however, the case for women's journals, many less-known 'general interest' periodicals, and illustrated magazines. The three journals discussed in this article are hard to find, even in libraries or (private or public) archives in the Arab world. The copies I worked with are preserved as individual issues in the Bibliothèque Orientale of the Saint Joseph University in Beirut, in a collection with significant gaps. Commonly, several issues in a run and sometimes whole volumes are missing entirely; in some cases, individual pages have been torn out or a part of a page has been cut out, probably when a short piece of text or a picture was of personal interest to the reader. This kind of discontinuous transmission is common to most of the periodicals of the era, yet the number and character of libraries that hold a specific journal and the number of volumes and issues preserved in them are certainly measurements of its former prestige and presence in the market. To ensure that more reliable information about the centrality or marginality of these periodicals is obtained, further research needs to focus on the collection, acquisition, and archival practices that have eventually led to this discontinuous transmission of the journals in today's libraries and archives.[50]

Conclusion

This article presented preliminary thoughts about whether Syrian women's journals of the 1920s could be categorized as occupying a 'central' or 'marginal' position within both the field of periodical publishing and wider society. It explored a number of factors and indicators that could help to define a periodical's place within the intellectual, political, and social fields of the time, speculating about strategies employed by the editors to position themselves and their publications within these fields and questioning the validity of the 'central'/'marginal' dichotomy.

As I have argued, *al-ʿArūs*, *Mīnarvā*, and *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, cannot clearly be conceived as belonging to either of the two categories, but rather, lie between them, tending to one of the two poles in relation to some aspects, while being closer to the opposite in others. As far as geographical distribution, the editor's social position, the

48 Margaret Beetham, 'Open and Closed: The Periodical as a Publishing Genre', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 22.3 (1989), 96–100 (p. 96).

49 Nicola Kaminski, Nora Ramtke, and Carsten Zelle, 'Zeitschriftenliteratur/Fortsetzungsliteratur: Problemaufriß', in *Zeitschriftenliteratur/Fortsetzungsliteratur*, ed. by Nicola Kaminski, Nora Ramtke, and Carsten Zelle (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2014), pp. 7–39 (p. 25). The authors use this term (in German: 'zeitlich selbstbestimmt') referring to the reading of books, in contrast to the 'temporally heteronomous' reading ('zeitlich heteronom') typical for periodicals.

50 This aspect is discussed in slightly more detail, contrasting *al-Hilāl* and *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, in Winckler, 'Seriality, Journal-Specific Communication and Archival Practices', pp. 245 and 255. While it still holds true that women's journals are to be considered marginal in view of their presence in today's libraries, the fact that an (albeit tiny) selection of articles by Jūliyā Dimashqiyya and Mārī ʿAjamī were published in an anthology dedicated to each of these two women intellectuals (Jiḥā, *Mārī ʿAjamī* and Jiḥā, *Jūliyā Ṭuʿma Dimashqiyya*), can be seen as an effort to restore their prominent position in the social, cultural, and intellectual fields of their time.

prominence of contributing authors, and the eminence and scope of local, regional, and transregional networks of contributors and readers are concerned, these three journals could easily compete with prominent 'general interest' periodicals of the time. Their editors, however, faced dominant misogynic attitudes and gender-related restrictions in relation to public roles, having limited access to political offices or administrative positions. That the three journals succeeded in running for seven to eleven years gives them a mid-range position in terms of longevity. With regard to their intended audiences and actual readers, and the topics and views they published, they also fall somewhere between the poles of 'central' and 'marginal'. Addressing a mainly female middle- and upper-class audience, they occupied an important place in public discourse; they also targeted, and were read by, men, and were referred to in other prestigious publications, not least because their editors also wrote for the 'general' press. Yet their prestige was limited in comparison to periodicals that were intended for a mainly male audience. As might be expected of publications targeting women, *al-ʿArūs*, *Mīnarvā*, and *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* addressed issues relating to household management and child-rearing; nevertheless, substantial space was given to the most virulent debates of the time. Women editors, however, often refrained from bluntly criticizing political and social shortcomings, uttering their criticism in a more subtle way. Finally, a presence in today's libraries and archives represents their most blatant difference from more prominent 'general' periodicals, as — with few exceptions, such as the six volumes of *Mīnarvā*, preserved in the Bibliothèque Orientale, both in print and digitized form — in most cases, several issues or entire volumes of the journals are missing, if they are preserved in libraries at all.

While this article mainly relied on information provided within the periodicals themselves, more research needs to be done in order to further test its findings, using, on the one hand, archival material, such as personal and commercial documents and correspondence, and discussing, on the other, conceptual questions, drawing on research in the fast-growing field of periodical studies.[51]

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51 To mention only one aspect, the role and concept of 'periodical' editor, a number of recent publications have raised important questions and discussed them productively. See, for instance, Matthew Philpotts, 'The Role of the Periodical Editor: Literary Journals and Editorial Habitus', *Modern Language Review*, 107.1 (2012), 39–64 and Fionnuala Dillane, 'What is a Periodical Editor? Types, Models, Characters, and Women', *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 6.1 (2021), 7–24.

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