

Editorial boards in the Arab region
Background Paper for the Third Arab Social Science Report

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Abstract

Instead of an attempt to determine the quality of Arabic refereed journals, this paper argues in favor of thinking about what these journals' editorial processes might reveal about the state of scholarly activity. In order to do so, this paper explores the editorial processes of leading refereed journals in the Arab region from the Institute for Palestine Studies, the Center for Arab Unity Studies and the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. It argues that there are several challenges pertaining to the editorial processes of the leading Arabic periodicals selected here. While Abou Chedid and Abou Zeid (2019) have identified a discrepancy between how editorial processes are conceptualized on paper and then put into application in real life, this paper emphasizes the institutional and professional challenges that often complicate the peer review process. In addition, it suggests three hypotheses concerning the state of scholarly activity in the Arab region: That research centers can be important hubs for intellectual activity and debates; that it may be problematic to conceptualize the marginalization of Arabic from global social science research on the basis of the politics of citations only; and that journals ought not to be the only medium for publishing research.

1. Introduction

The relationship between social research in (and on) the Arab region and Arabic language itself is fraught. The marginalization of the Arabic language in social science¹ research is a challenge that social scientists continue to face. Arab universities, both public and private, evaluate their scholars' work on the basis of their publications in refereed journals with high impact factor and an increasing number of professors strives to publish in English journals with high international visibility (AlMaghlouth et al. 2015). The Arabic language's marginalization is also a reflection of the difficulty of conducting research in the Arab region; a difficulty structured around the fragmentation of research communities, the scarcity of rigorous academic periodicals published by scholarly associations (Bamyeh 2015; Al Harass 2015); and the subsequent absence of Arabic references in research concerning the region (Hanafi & Arvanitis 2015). The globalized political economy of knowledge production further complicates the matter. Local research agendas are increasingly shaped by research priorities that emerge from the Global North and are subjected to the consequences of a commodification of knowledge, the neoliberal transformation of the university and a hierarchy of knowledge that places scholarship produced in the Global North on a higher pedestal (Sukarieh & Tannock 2019).

The politics of citations are also inscribed in similar dynamics. In the academic conversation on the 2011 Arab uprisings in periodicals for instance, scholars and academics from the United States working in Ivy League schools and/or think tanks on foreign policy set the theoretical, analytical and empirical tone (AlMaghlouth 2015). Knowledge produced by scholars from the Arab region, writing in Arabic, was very peripheral. Although these scholars cited their American peers, they, in turn, were rarely cited and did not reference each other either (AlMaghlouth 2015). In that particular case, scholars from the Arab region, writing in Arabic, referenced more frequently media outlets and social networks, blogs, and newspaper articles. Even more so, on rare accounts, did they rely on fieldwork as a methodological approach in their research (Al-Harass 2015). Again, this conveyed a hierarchical structure where Western-based knowledge production prevailed.

Where does that leave the plethora of refereed social science periodicals in the Arabic region then? The most well-known refereed Arabic journals with regular periodicity and longevity are "Majalat al-Dirasat al-Falastiniya," published by the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut; "Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi" and "Idafat Al Majalla al Arabi'a li 'Ulm Al-Ijtima'" (by the Arab Sociological Association), both published by the Center for Arab Unity Studies in Beirut; "Al-Hayat Ath-Thaqafiyyah," published by the Tunisian Ministry of Culture; "Hespéris Tamuda," published by the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences of the University of Rabat; "Majallat Al-'Ulm Al-Ijtima'iyyah" by the University of Kuwait; "Al-Majallah Al-Ijtima'iyyah Al-Qawmiyyah," published by the National Center for Social and Criminological Research, Egypt; "Insaniyyat," published by the National Centre of Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology in Algeria; and "Imran", published by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS)

¹ This paper adopts the ACSS broad definition for social science: political science, anthropology, sociology, economics, history, and psychology in addition to interdisciplinary fields that employ social sciences, such as gender studies, urban studies, and cultural studies.

based in Doha and Beirut (ASSM 2015; Al-Harras 2015; Hanafi & Arvanitis 2015; AlMaghlouth et al. 2015).

In light of such structural hindrances, how can we then evaluate those leading periodicals and assess whether they are of credible academic quality? Instead of an attempt to determine the quality of these journals, this paper argues in favor of thinking about what these journals' editorial processes might reveal about the state of scholarly activity. In order to do so, this paper first presents some characteristics of refereed journals in the Arab region from the Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS), the Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS) and the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS). Second, it showcases some of the challenges found in the editorial processes in these centers. In light of these findings, it shows how editorial processes show that in the Mashreq, and in lieu of professional associations, research centers are important hubs for intellectual activity and debates. It also critiques the concept of marginalization of Arabic from global social science research and underscores the importance of publishing in different formats. In what follows, this paper includes a methodology section, a main findings section, an analysis section and a final conclusion.

2. Methods

2.1. Data collection

Research for this paper was a qualitative three-tiered approach and included a desk review, interviews and triangulation with secondary sources whenever possible. I first started with a desk review of the growing literature exploring the topic of quality of Arabic refereed periodicals, bibliometrics in relation to Arabic refereed periodicals and the relationships between local and global knowledge production. Second, and building on data from the first Arab Social Science Report (Bamyeh 2015) and the Arab Social Science Monitor which showed that the majority of Arabic language periodicals² are based in research centers³, I decided to select three accessible and representative⁴ research centers based in Beirut that publish well reputed journals. These centers were: the IPS, CAUS and the ACRPS. What further motivated my selection of research centers as a starting point for my fieldwork was the established importance of the institutionalization of scientific activity. I thus conducted three semi-structured interviews with senior staff in the three centers and one interview with a journal editor. There was another

² Especially in the Levant (as opposed to the Arab Maghreb where many journals are based in university departments).

³ Based on a sample of 217 periodicals, Bamyeh (2015) states that independent research centers play a central role in journal publication. He also notes that independent centers currently issue 52 percent of Arab scholarly periodicals compared to only 37 percent issued by universities. But these figures also reflect the weakness of professional societies in the Arab world who do publish more than 6 percent of the scholarly periodicals mapped (14 out 217).

⁴ Because of the diversity of authors and geographical areas covered especially for the journals published by CAUS and ACRPS (Al Harass 2015).

journal editor I wanted to interview but couldn't as he was out of town during the time I had dedicated for my research and it was very difficult to reach him otherwise. Other staff members in these centers declined to reply to specific questions I asked about the journal as it did not pertain to their area of responsibility. In all of these interviews, I asked about journals' editorial boards and processes, and mechanisms set in place to ensure sustainable quality. I also analyzed all of these journals' webpages on their centers' respective websites. Last but not least, and whenever possible, I triangulated my findings.

2.2. Limits

There were several limits to this research. First of all, and regardless of selected periodicals' diversity, this research focuses on Beirut-based centers and hence Beirut-based journals⁵. Second of all, another limitation relates to working with social scientists as interviewees; it is difficult to subject social science researchers to social science research. To mitigate this limitation, I adopted a participatory approach and included interviewees' conceptual propositions in my research. Third, my approach was solely qualitative. From such an approach, one cannot derive or draw conclusions about trends or patterns in editorial processes in the Arab region for instance. A quantitative approach (in the form of a survey sent to editors of major journals similar to the work conducted by Abou Chedid and Abou Zeid [2019] on journals of education) can in the future complement this research. Fourth and last, my positionality as researcher has also proved to be a challenge. As a PhD student in anthropology in Canada, I am also part and parcel of a global community of Arab researchers who work, do research and cite in English.

3. Findings

3.1. The Institute for Palestine Studies: JPS in Arabic and English

IPS publishes "Majalat al-Dirasat al-Falastiniya," an Arabic language quarterly conceived as a platform for debate, conversation and monitoring of sociopolitical and cultural developments related to Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict. It also aims to bring together Palestinian writers and researchers from Palestine as well as from the diaspora. "Majalat al-Dirasat al-Falastiniya" includes different formats of articles ranging from opinion papers, essays, research articles, interviews, in-depth investigations, archival material, book reviews and special issues. It also usually includes two special sections. The first section is dedicated to the follow up and the publication in Arabic of research on Israeli politics and internal affairs and which usually relies

⁵ See other background paper for more details.

on Hebrew primary sources. The second special section relates to historical and cultural studies on the city of Jerusalem.

“Majalat al-Dirasat al-Falastiniya” is interesting in that it is not entirely peer-reviewed. Only the articles published under the section titled “Dirasat” (Studies) are refereed and not every issue of the journal includes that section. The IPS website specifies that a group of academic experts, who are not part of the journal’s editorial board, conduct the peer review. “Majalat al-Dirasat” is both online (in open access) and in print. It has an editor-in-chief, an associate editor, an editorial secretary, an executive secretary, and a consultative editorial board comprised of 15 researchers, writers and scholars of the Arab region in general and Palestine in particular. The majority of these researchers are based in the Arab region (mainly Beirut and Ramallah) with two members based in Europe (Brussels) and another in the United States. “Majalat al-Dirasat” has two more particular characteristics. First, the journal has a Palestine representative in the West Bank (the director of IPS) where Israeli authorities forbid the circulation of Arabic print magazines that are printed outside of Palestine. Second, and from its inception, prominent Arab intellectuals and artists who supported the Palestinian cause have been involved in the publishing of “Majalat al-Dirasat”. For example, Mohieddine el Labbad, co-founder of Dar el Fata publishing house was the journal’s initial art director whose name as the journal’s art director still features on the pages of the journal today.

In recent years, it seems that there has been a willingness at the IPS to include a younger generation of scholars and activists conducting research pertaining to Palestine and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. A group of young researchers was even designated as members of the journal’s newly founded consultative advisory board with a very vague mandate. It is unclear whether this initiative has materialized as of yet. The journal’s latest issue included a special dossier on Palestinian culture as seen through my interlocutor at IPS who I interviewed, Palestinian cultural production and cultural history are amongst the center’s priorities. On another note, and since 1971, IPS’s office in Washington, D.C. publishes the Journal of Palestine Studies (JPS), an English language quarterly that explores questions related to Palestine and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. JPS falls outside of the scope of our study here but it is worth noting that it is part of English language databases. Last but not least, the journal issues certificates of publishing which scholars can use when applying for tenure or promotion. The University of Birzeit near Ramallah for instance considers these certificates when evaluating a professor’s application for a promotion.

The journal encourages submissions of essays, research articles (which are subjected to a peer review process) and book reviews provided they relate to the broad topic of Palestine or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The journal accepts submissions to be sent by email or on CD format sent to the IPS offices in Beirut. The journal’s website lists the submission guidelines. These guidelines include the following criteria: The article cannot have been published or submitted for publication in another journal; specific word count limits for research articles study (7,000 words), essays (3,000 words), and book reviews (2,000 words). In all these cases, a 200-300 word abstract is also required. The submission guidelines specify that submission results are shared with the authors following a period of three to six weeks during which the editorial committee (and referees when/if needed) would have reviewed the works submitted.

IPS's board of trustees regularly inquire about the circulation "Majallat al-Dirasat". As IPS aims to engage with broad audiences, not only limited to scholars or academics, analytics of the IPS website (which has its own editors and is regularly updated), social network pages (Facebook and Instagram), and book sales are also monitored. Last but not least, as the IPS is also known for its library and comprehensive collections on Palestine, the number of visitors to the library also features among those metrics. In a discussion on the role of public sociology in relation to Palestinian issues, Sari Hanafi (2014) writes about co-authoring a paper in "Majalat al-Dirasat" with urban planner and researcher Ismael Sheikh Hassan on the thorny process of negotiating the highly politicized reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp after its destruction in 2007. Hanafi claims the paper "in Majalat al-Dirasat" did not garner much attention nor engender public debate. However, and upon publishing it in a different format in the widely read Lebanese newspaper "An-Nahar", the article generated much public controversy. The co-authors were also subjected to public intimidation, even leading up to the arrest of Sheikh Hassan (Hanafi 2014).

3.2 The Center for Arab Unity Studies and the Arab Future

The Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS) was founded in 1975 with the objective to produce politically committed knowledge that would accompany Arab societies struggle towards Arab nationalism. Kheireddine Hassib (who holds a PhD in public finance from Cambridge University) was the center's general director from 1975 until he retired in 2017. During his tenure, the center's output had kept a strong nationalist ideological bent that was sometimes reflected in editorial processes and selection of works for all of the center's publications (journals and books included)⁶. According to a former senior CAUS staff, Hassib also "protected the center from political interference" from funders or other stakeholders who had a relationship with the center⁷. The former staff member also notes that, during his tenure at CAUS, there was always room for methodological conversations with the center's main staff as well as Hassib. Through these conversations, the staff member claims that Hassib aimed to encourage the adoption of more sociologically inflected work where the relevance of methods and theoretical framing prevailed over the work's relationship to Arab nationalism. With its new board of directors, CAUS aims to position itself as "part of the Arab knowledge society and in line with development principles which consider that knowledge infrastructures are indispensable to the democratic development of Arab societies"⁸.

CAUS is home to five journals. It publishes "Al-Mustaqbal Al-'Arabi" as well as "Contemporary Arab Affairs", the center's English language journal published jointly with University of California Press. It also supports the publication of "Idafat - Al Majalla al Arabi'a li 'Ulm Al-Ijtima'" edited by the Arab Sociological Association. It used to support the publication of "Al-Majalla Al-'Arabi'a lil-'Ulum Al-Siyasiyah" (published by the Arab Association for Political Science) until it was discontinued in winter 2016; and "Majallat Bouhouth Iqtissadiya" (published by the Arab Association for Economic Research), which was discontinued in summer 2017. The fact that these two publications have been discontinued speaks to a concern with the

⁶ Interview with former senior CAUS staff member

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Interview with senior CAUS staff

weakness of Arab professional associations, a matter corroborated by the findings of the second Arab Social Science Report (Bamyeh 2015).

Al-Mustaqbal Al-'Arabi

Al-Mustaqbal Al-'Arabi is a monthly refereed journal edited and published by CAUS since 1978. It is considered to be one of the region's oldest, longest standing, and most respected journals (Al-Harras 2015). It is plural and diverse in its selection of authors published and coverage of geographical areas of the Arab region (Al-Harras 2015). It includes broad topics and themes related to the Arab world's unity and development with more than two-thirds of articles published not including a substantial fieldwork component (Al-Harras 2015). According to the journal's website, the journal seeks to encourage critical thought and controversial debates, and to present a rational, scientific and objective reading of issues and questions important to the Arab region. Since July 2019, the journal is supported by the Ali Khalifa Al-Kuwari⁹ Foundation for Arab Studies and the Strengthening of Democracy¹⁰.

Al-Mustaqbal Al-'Arabi has publicly available submission guidelines¹¹ which include criteria for both content and form. In practical terms, and according to my CAUS interlocutor, who's also involved in the journal, the editorial process of publication looks at the following criteria: Quality of the work submitted, its political direction, and methodological and theoretical contributions. The list of editorial committee members is not publically available on the journal's website or in print. However, as my CAUS interlocutor explained, there are two committees that contribute to the editorial process of the journal: The CAUS broader consultative committee and a smaller editorial committee who both help delineate the journal's general directions. Moreover, submissions are sent to two referees from different disciplines and specializations (the CAUS has lists of referees they work with per discipline). The journal's editors are keen on preserving a particular structure and make sure that there is a set of criteria that are taken into account in every issue. These include: To publish in every issue at least one article on Palestine, to ensure that there's a balanced geographical distribution in authorship and regions covered, and to feature position papers and book reviews. CAUS and its publications are not immune to the consequences of Arab political polarization which impacts the center both positively and negatively. While since 2011, the Arab uprisings constituted an impetus for the revival of the center and its scholarly activities of research and publication, it also quickly produced an unprecedented polarization at all levels. It is for example very difficult to publish articles that tackle the Syrian uprisings and its repercussions.

In terms of readership and audience, the CAUS publishes 1,500 print copies which are distributed in the Arab region. These include 300 subscriptions, 1,000 copies that are sold and the rest are distributed for free¹². Currently, the journal is part of the e-Marefa database and is available on subscription on the CAUS website. According to Arcif (e-Marefa's citation analysis

⁹ A Qatari oil magnate who's also been critical of Qatari government official policies.

¹⁰ For an initial duration of one year.

¹¹ See <https://caus.org.lb/ar/الكتابة-للمجلة/>

¹² Interview with Senior CAUS staff

initiative), the journal's impact factor is of 0.2475¹³. Last but not least, the journal issues certificates of publishing which scholars can use when applying for tenure or promotion¹⁴.

Idafat Arabic Journal for Sociology

“Idafat: Al-Majalla Al-Arabi’a li ‘Ulm Al-Ijtima’” is a quarterly refereed journal edited by the Arab Sociological Association¹⁵ and whose publication is supported by the CAUS. First launched in 2000 as a yearly publication, it was discontinued in 2005 before re-launching in 2008. The journal publishes research in sociology and anthropology produced in and about the Arab region as well as international social science knowledge production and the latest theoretical interventions in translation to Arabic. Like Al-Mustaqbal Al-’Arabi, Idafat is also plural and diverse and is available in print and online, through subscription, on the website of CAUS and part of the e-Marefa database.

As Idafat is a journal edited by the Arab Sociological Association, its editorial board and the board of trustees of the association are one and the same. Submission guidelines and peer review processes of Idafat are available on the journal's online page and in every print issue and include criteria pertaining to both form and content. As Abou Chedid and Abou Zeid have shown (2019), peer review processes, even if well developed on paper, are not necessarily always applied as such in reality. There are several challenges posed sometimes by the lack of interest, time and involvement of referees in the publication process of the journal. In the case of Idafat for instance, submissions are sent to referees and they are also proposed to the editorial committee. Referees sometimes refuse to review an article or do not respect publication deadlines when providing their feedback. The editorial committee is also not very involved. The journal has no editorial secretary and it is up to the editor-in-chief's discretion to follow up on correspondences and tasks pertaining to the journal's editing and reviewing process (with referees, with the board and with authors)¹⁶. My interlocutor at Idafat also asserted that the journal was not directly affected by political polarizations that may have an influence on other CAUS-based publications. Idafat is sold in bookshops and newspaper kiosks.

Contemporary Arab Affairs: CAUS intervention in a global conversation

Contemporary Arab Affairs (CAA) is the CAUS' international multidisciplinary quarterly journal, published in association with University of California Press¹⁷. It showcases knowledge produced from and about the Arab region. Its objective is to take part in a global social science conversation that has marginalized the Arabic language (as we have seen in the introduction) and

¹³ <http://emarefa.net/arcif/arcif-2018/>

¹⁴ Interview with senior CAUS staff member

¹⁵ For a detailed overview of Idafat, see Hanafi, Sari, and Rigas Arvanitis. Part II - Chapter 6: “Writing sociology in the Arab World; The case of Idafat” in *Knowledge production in the Arab World: The impossible promise*. Routledge, 2015.

¹⁶ Interview with senior member of the Idafat editorial team

¹⁷ Formerly published in association with Routledge.

to “promote meaningful dialogue with the West”¹⁸. CAA falls outside of the scope of our study here but it is worth noting three things. First, that it is part of English language databases. Second that 90 percent of its published works used to be Arabic submissions translated to English but now there are 50 percent of articles published that have been originally written in English -- an indicator that CAUS welcomes¹⁹. Third, that it includes in every issue a bibliographic section that presents synopses of new Arabic language publications (mostly books).

3.3 The ACRPS’ Five Journals

The ACRPS was founded in 2010 by Azmi Bechara, a Palestinian politician and academic. It has offices in Doha and Beirut and publishes five peer reviewed journals broadly related to the social sciences. These journals are: “Omran,” a social sciences quarterly published since 2012; “Siyasat ‘Arabiyya,” a bi-monthly journal on political science and international relations, published since 2013; “Tabayyun,” a quarterly of philosophy and cultural studies; “Ostour Istishraf,” a bi-annual publication on historical studies; and “Istishraf,” a yearly publication on the future of energy and resources in the Arab world.

A glance at the ACRPS website²⁰ reveals that the ACRPS journals publish abstracts and tables of content in English. The journals also have an editorial board and an advisory board and publicly available submission and ethical guidelines. They are also available in print, and online for free a year after their publication. Last but not least, more than 90 percent of the articles published in Omran, the center’s journal on sociology and anthropology, do not include any fieldwork component (Al-Harass 2015).

4. Analysis: Editorial Processes and the State of Social Science Research

The journals’ editorial processes hint at three important possibilities concerning the state of scholarly activity in the Arab region. First, they show that research centers are important hubs for intellectual activity and debates. Second, they highlight the problematics of conceptualizing the marginalization of Arabic from global social science research on the basis of the politics of citations. Third, they remind us of the importance of publishing in different formats.

4.1. Journals and scientific communities

¹⁸ Interview with senior CAUS staff member.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/BooksAndJournals/Pages/Journals.aspx>

Journals are a reflection of the scientific communities that harness and produce them (Hanafi & Arvanitis 2015). While this paper did not explore the gap between the peer-review processes published in the journals on one hand and the ways through which the practical, hands-on selection and publication of articles is done on the other²¹. It allowed me to identify further challenges that are both institutional and related to professionalization²². In many cases, a lot of the tasks pertaining to the review process end up being the responsibility of a journal's editor-in-chief. While Idafat for instance has all the set up needed (collaboration with CAUS, an editorial board, list of referees, etc.), there's a lack of engagement of the editorial committee members²³.

This poses a challenge to the journal's sustainability and jeopardizes the journal's commitment to professional standards of scientific publication. Most journals in the Levant are not based in universities and not published by professional societies. Rather, they stem from independent research centers (Al Harass 2015) including those journals we have presented here. In that sense, it would be pertinent to ask what roles research centers in the Arab region play not only in the creation of knowledge infrastructures but also in influencing (if at all)²⁴ research agendas, epistemologies, methodologies, and professional standardizations of scholarly activities. While CAUS for instance used to actively produce research in the 1970s, over the years, it has turned into a platform for publishing books²⁵. Even more so, an impactful and meaningful function of a research center is very difficult to envisage given the current socioeconomic and political landscape of the Arab region today (monarchies, authoritarian regimes and the plethora of actors working with Arab states on questions of development and governance)²⁶.

4.2. The politics of citation and the marginalization of Arabic in the social sciences

As we have seen in this paper's introduction, the marginalization of Arabic in the social sciences has been conceptualized on the basis of the politics of citation. Recently, Clarivate Analytics²⁷ has partnered with the state sponsored Egyptian Knowledge Bank (EKB) to launch in 2020 an Arabic Citation Index (ARCI) and an Arabic interface on Web of Science, the world's largest citation index and on which several citation impact measures and analyses are based (such as for example the Journal Impact Factor). The EKB and Clarivate Analytics suggest that this initiative will allow one to explore content and citation analysis of knowledge produced in Arabic (PR Newswire 2018). According to EKB, it will produce metrics that can be used in determining which institutions, scholars, research centers would be prioritized in receiving funding for research. EKB also states that it will also increase the presence of Arabic journals in international databases and hence also increase the visibility of knowledge produced in Arabic to

²¹ For more information see Abou Chedid & Abou Zeid (2019).

²² See also Hanafi & Arvanitis 2015.

²³ Interview with Idafat team member

²⁴ For more information see background papers on social scientists in research centers.

²⁵ Interview with senior CAUS staff

²⁶ Interview with former CAUS staff member

²⁷ Formerly Thomson Reuters.

the global academic community of researchers. The ARCI is an initiative that is built on the model of other regional citation indexes developed by the Web of Science, such as the Chinese Citation Database and the Russian Science Citation Index. According to Clarivate, the ARCI will have an editorial board which will be in charge of establishing a methodology for the selection of Arabic journals which will be included. ARCI can be criticized mostly on two levels: First, academic freedom and the guiding principles of the ARCI editorial board which will be operating within the repressive Egyptian state and second, the market-driven and North American-centered logic of Web of Science (WoS)²⁸. It is unclear whether this initiative will materialize in 2020 or not. As of the time of writing, leading journals in the Arab region such as Idafat²⁹ have not been contacted to be included in this initiative.

On another note, there are already two initiatives rooted in the Arab region that have been looking into citation metrics and the classification of refereed Arab journals and they are: Arcif Analytics, an e-Marefa³⁰ led initiative; and the Arab Impact Factor initiative from the Association of Arab Universities (AARU). According to their website, Arcif's selection process is based on criteria which follow international standards but that have also been modified to fit in with the specifics of the Arab region's knowledge landscape. These criteria include journal publishing standards, parameters related to editorial content and disciplinary specialization and journal's emphasis on research related to the Arab region and where Arabic is the primary language of publication. They also list their policy on citation analysis on their website. On the other hand, the Arab Impact Factor lists a broader set of criteria for selection and analysis, including for instance for the journal to have an ISSN, to be published regularly, to have an editorial board including well reputed academics, and to respect the rules and ethics of intellectual property and good publishing, etc. There are substantial inconsistencies that emerge when comparing the two initiatives. The same journal can have two very different impact factors. Taking the case of Idafat as an example, we find that it has an impact factor of 0.0746 on Arcif versus 2.795 on the Arab Impact Factor website. As Meho (2007) notes, bibliometric indicators play an increasing role in scientists' chances to win a research grant competition, get tenured, promoted or secure a new job position. He also cautions that, in the age of the internet, it is now scientists' responsibilities to disseminate their research on various platforms, including open-access sources.

Leaving the politics of citations aside, Arabic, while not very visible in citation metrics, may not be as marginalized in the social sciences. As Bamyeh (2015) notes, it is the language of fieldwork of knowledge produced about the Arab region whether this knowledge is in English, French or Arabic. In thinking about marginalization, more important perhaps is to start at the level of research and to ask with Sukarieh and Tannock (2013; 2019) in what ways can research be rooted in empirical work and address urgent and pertinent questions.

²⁸ For more information on the Arab region's relationship to WoS, see Hanafi & Arvanitis (2015) "Part II: Chap. 2: Scientific Publication: Growth, Specialization and Internationalization." In *Knowledge Production in the Arab World: The Impossible Promise*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015

²⁹ Correspondence with Idafat editor-in-chief.

³⁰ The e-Marefa database is a database for knowledge produced in Arabic including academic journals, articles, theses and dissertations, e-books and book reviews, statistical reports, research abstracts, and conference proceedings in all disciplines.

4.3. Experimenting with formats

As Meho (2007) has argued, and in line with Burawoy's call for a public sociology (2005), researchers could disseminate their findings through multiple outlets. The centers we included in our research have expressed their willingness to reach out to a wider audience. IPS already maintains a website as well as multiple social media accounts (on Facebook and Instagram). It also publishes multidisciplinary work in a rigorous, albeit non-academic, format (like for example its chronology of Palestine³¹). CAUS is considering similar initiatives and is thinking of experimenting with different formats namely to activate the center's rich archive and make it accessible to a wider audience, including through teaching activities and modules at schools and in universities.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that there are several challenges pertaining to the editorial processes of the leading Arabic periodicals we have selected here. While Abou Chedid and Abou Zeid (2019) have identified a discrepancy between how editorial processes are conceptualized on paper and then put into application in real life, we have sought to emphasize the institutional and professional challenges that often complicate the peer review process. In addition, we have seen that journals' editorial processes suggest three hypotheses concerning the state of scholarly activity in the Arab region: That research centers can be important hubs for intellectual activity and debates; that it may be problematic to conceptualize the marginalization of Arabic from global social science research on the basis of the politics of citations only; and that journals ought not to be the only medium for publishing research.

As a final note, and with the objective of further analyzing social science knowledge production in the Arab region, this paper puts forth the relevance of an in-depth research that looks at the genealogies and trajectories of particular concepts in Arabic language social science research. Such research could take into account the relevance of the Arabic language as a medium that allows for the creation of a community of scholars in conversation. Such genealogies might enable us to understand for example the relevance of social science research, its connectedness to the reality of the lived experience of societies across the Arab region and to understand how in light of the recent structural, economic and geopolitical arrangements of the Arab region it is still possible for a research center to uphold a commitment to Arab unity.

6. Bibliography and Sources

³¹ For more information, see background paper on social scientists in research centers.

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Annex 1: List of Acronyms

AARU: Association of Arab Universities
ACRPS: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies
ACSS: Arab Council for the Social Sciences
ARCI: Arabic Citation Index
CAA: Contemporary Arab Affairs
CAUS: Center for Arab Unity Studies
EKB: Egyptian Knowledge Bank
JPS: Journal for Palestine Studies
IPS: Institute for Palestine Studies
WoS: Web of Science

Annex 2: List of Interviews

- Senior Staff (IPS)
- Senior Staff CAUS
- Former Staff CAUS
- Staff member ACRPS
- Senior member Idafat team