Identities in early Arabic journalism: The case of Louis bnj
Visser, R.W.

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Louis Şăbŭnji, as he appears in two of his publications: 
*Al-Naḥla* 1(2), dated 1 July 1877, London, p.16. 
*Tanzīh al-absār wal-afkār fī riḥlat Sulṭān Zanjabār* (1879), London, p.95.
Introduction

Multiple identities and early Arabic journalism
From the late fifteenth until the early twentieth century, the Ottoman Empire encompassed much of North Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. The language of administration of the Empire was the Ottoman language, a Turkish language with numerous Arabic and Persian loanwords. The dominant religion of its administrators was Sunni Islam, which was also the religion of its ruler, the Sultan. However, the Empire was linguistically and religiously highly diverse. The Ottoman language was but one of numerous languages that were used in the Empire. Other languages of the Empire were Greek, Bulgarian, Armenian, Albanian, Romanian, and Arabic, to name only a few. Similarly, Sunni Muslims formed but one of many religious communities, besides Twelver Shiites, Catholic Christians, Orthodox Christians, Armenian Christians, Jews, and Druze.

For centuries the minorities –mainly Christian– were imagined by Europeans as being under threat from a despotic Islamic Ottoman administration.¹ In the nineteenth century European pressure and influence on Ottoman affairs mounted. Under the judging eyes of Europe, the position of minorities in Ottoman society became one of the topics of Ottoman reform policies, known as the Tanzimat reforms, that were aimed at modernizing and strengthening the Empire. Key reform edicts were the Hatt-i Sherif decree of 1839, the Hatt-i Humayun decree of 1856, and the Ottoman nationality law of 1869. The first edict established the rule of law for all Ottoman subjects. The second edict established equal status irrespective of religion, thereby abolishing the privileged position of the Sunni Muslims. The third

¹ On the representation of the Ottoman Empire in Europe, see Kuran-Burçoğlu 2007 and Çirakman 2002. See also Makdisi 2000: 15-27 for the European perception of minorities in Ottoman Lebanon.
edict stipulated that everybody who lived in the Empire was an Ottoman citizen unless he could prove otherwise.2

These different edicts touched upon the issue of the identity of the different peoples in the Empire. It is this issue, identity, that forms the topic of this study. What the Ottoman policymakers formulated in these edicts was the ideal of unity against the background of a highly fragmented Empire, casting Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Bulgarians, Greek, Armenians, and other ethnic communities, in the role of Ottomans.3 Similarly, they also cast Muslims, Christians, Jews, Druze, and other religious communities, in the role of Ottomans.4

The Arabs were one of the largest linguistic minorities of the Empire, and they were found in the North African and Middle Eastern provinces. They too were religiously highly diverse, and this diversity differed from province to province. The Ottoman provinces in what is currently Syria and Lebanon were among the most religiously fragmented. Their Arabic-speaking population was composed of Sunni Muslims, Twelver Shia Muslims, Alawis, Druze, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Maronites, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholics, Jews, and others.5 Mutual relations were not always peaceful; in the period after 1830 sectarian tensions mounted, eventually erupting in fierce fighting in the year 1860. In the area of Mount Lebanon, Maronite Christians and Druze were fighting for hegemony. In Damascus, Christians and Muslims took up arms against each other.6 Thousands, mostly Christians, were killed.

Faced with these outbreaks of violence, some Arab intellectuals in Beirut and other places took up the task of interpreting these events and formulating ways of avoiding similar

2 On the Tanzimat reforms, see Davison 1963; Shaw 1977; Findley 1980; and Farah 2000. A specific study on Syria and Lebanon is Maoz 1968.
3 Zachs 2005: 90-95.
4 Chapter Two of this thesis addresses what this new Ottoman ‘role’ entails.
5 The Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic communities used Arabic rather than Greek as daily language. Most Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic communities also used Arabic as daily language; a minority of them used –and continue to use– modern Aramaic variants.
6 For a comprehensive study on these conflicts, see Fawaz 1994.
conflicts in the future. One of the ideas that they proposed was a new framework of collective identity. They argued that identity should be derived from one’s fatherland, which was Syria, rather than from one’s religious community. The ideal of unity of all Syrians was aptly formulated in the *Nafīr Sūriya* (‘Trumpet of Syria’) pamphlets, the first of which appeared in 1860, only months after the hostilities had ended. In one of these pamphlets its author, Buṭrus al-Bustānī, states “O sons of the fatherland, you drink the same water, breathe the same air, and speak the same language. The land upon which you walk, your common interests and your customs are one.” Thus, al-Bustānī addressed Maronites, Druze, Sunni Muslims, Twelver Shia Muslims, Greek Orthodox, et cetera, as *Syrians*.9

The nineteenth century is also the century of the ‘discovery’ of Europe by Arab intellectuals. Lewis points out how Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, became poignantly aware of European power and dominance. This awareness sparked an interest in uncovering the many differences between Europe and the Muslim world.10 Christian Arabs from Syria and Lebanon showed a similar interest in Europe in the nineteenth century. Writing specifically about intellectuals in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, Heyberger argues that Europeans had hardly caught their attention in the preceding three centuries. However, the situation changed dramatically during the nineteenth century. The writings of Christian Arab intellectuals became permeated with references to a European ‘Other’. Their concern for Europe and the Europeans highlighted questions such as: how and why are we different from Europeans? It is in this sense that Europe functioned for Lebanese intellectuals as a mirror of their own community.11 In this context, both Muslim and

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7 The Syria that they envisioned does not exactly correspond with the state of present-day Syria, but also included the area of what is now the state of Lebanon.
9 The emergence and the development of this Syrian identity is studied by Zachs 2005.
Christian Arab intellectuals started to think about themselves as Easterners.

This study addresses the topic of identity in relation to nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals from modern-day Syria and Lebanon. Until now I have referred to them as Arab intellectuals, because they used the Arabic language as means of communication. This is not to say that they called themselves Arabs. It must be noted that the term ‘arab was generally limited to the nomadic Bedouins until well into the nineteenth century.12 This changed gradually during the second half of the nineteenth century, when intellectuals started using the word ‘arabī and ‘arab in reference to a speaker of Arabic and the Arabic speaking community. In 1859, Khalīl al-Khūrī, a Christian intellectual from Beirut, used the term al-umma al-‘arabiyya (approximately ‘the Arab nation’) for the first time.13 Thus, al-Khūrī approached Bedouins, town-dwellers, and everybody else who spoke Arabic as Arabs.

During the nineteenth century Beirut was a dynamic center of Arabic culture. A large number of books were printed, various scholarly societies appeared, and many schools were founded. In addition, Beirut was the unequivocal center of Arabic journalism during the years 1858-1880.14 Concomitantly, a strong sense of identification with the city is discernible in the writings of many of its early journalists.15 These journalists saw themselves as Beirutis.

The present study deals with the issue of identity in the context of early Arabic journalism. As pointed out above, this is a complex issue. Early Arab journalists in Beirut could, and did, refer to themselves as Ottomans, Syrians, Easterners, Arabs, and Beirutis. These are all different, but invariably sensible answers to the

12 Only during the second half of the nineteenth century did the word ‘arab acquire the association with the community of the speakers of the Arabic language. See Firro 2009: 6-26.
13 Zachs 2004: 34.
14 On the emergence of private Arabic journalism, see primarily Ṭarrāzī 1913a and 1913b, and Ayalon 1995: 28-49.
15 In 1860 Buṭrus al-Bustānī ([1860] 1990: 64) dwelled on the difference between Bedouins and the inhabitants of Beirut, displaying a strong preference for the latter group. In 1870 Louis Ṣābūnjī (1870b: 58-60) called the city of Beirut his waṭan, a word that is often translated as ‘fatherland’.
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An ostensibly simple question: who are we? I am interested in how early Arab journalists dealt with this question. This book studies how one of these journalists, Louis Ṣābūnji, approached issues of identity.

Journalism and Louis Ṣābūnji (1838-1931)

Private Arabic journalism refers to the Arabic periodical publications that were founded at the initiative of private individuals rather than government officials or church authorities. Private Arabic journalism emerged in Beirut with the publication of the newspaper *Hadīqat al-Akhbār* in 1858. Very soon Beirut became the indisputable center of journalism. At the start of 1875, of the ten Arabic periodical publications in the world, eight were published in Beirut. With very few exceptions, private Arabic journalism in the early years was a Christian affair. The Christian entrepreneurs who founded periodicals were in many cases also the journalists who wrote the articles. Beirut lost its prominence in journalism when, in the early years of the 1880s, the center of gravity shifted to Egypt.

One of the early Arab journalists who were active in Beirut was Louis Ṣābūnji (1838-1931), who is the central figure in this study. Louis Ṣābūnji led a peculiar life. He was born in 1838 into a Syriac Catholic family—a small Christian denomination in the Middle East—in Derik, a town in Northern Mesopotamia, currently in Turkey. Educated in Catholic schools in Mount Lebanon and in Rome, he served for a number of years as a Catholic priest in Beirut. While occupying this position, he started the weekly magazine *al-Naḥla* (‘The Bee’) in 1870. In 1876 he settled in London, where he

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16 For this newspaper, see Glaß 2001: 37-42. Its founder and editor was the aforementioned Khalīl al-Khūrī. On him, see Zachs 2004 and Zachs 2011.
17 Glaß 2004: 89. The other two private periodicals were *al-Jawāʾib* in Istanbul and *Rawḍat al-Madāris al-Miṣriyya* in Cairo. Both were also under heavy government influence, unlike their equivalents in Beirut.
18 The only exception in Beirut was *Thamarāt al-Funūn*, founded in 1875 by a Muslim. Not until 1886 did another non-Christian start a periodical in Beirut.
19 Ayalon 2008: 564.
20 This occurred primarily because the rules of censorship became much stricter. See Farah 1977 and Cioeta 1979 for more information about this issue.
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republished *al-Naḥla*. In 1890 Ṣābūnjī found his way to Istanbul, where he acquired a position in the Ottoman bureaucracy as a translator of the European press. Some years after the Young Turk revolution of 1908, he moved to Egypt and from there to California, where he died in poverty in 1931.

Ṣābūnjī repeatedly came into trouble, with both his peers and the authorities. Less than one year after its founding, *al-Naḥla* was banned by the Ottoman authorities in Beirut, thereby becoming the first periodical publication to receive a ban in the history of Arabic journalism. As an immediate consequence, Ṣābūnjī became the first of many Syrian émigré journalists in Egypt. Three years later he was back in Beirut, where one of his pamphlets caused so much outrage among the local Maronites that he had to flee the city. Ṣābūnjī often ventilated inconsistent and sometimes blatantly contradictory opinions. On some occasions he spoke favorably of, for instance, his fellow journalist Buṭrus al-Bustānī, the Egyptian nationalist leader Ahmad ʿUrābī, the Ottoman Sultan, the Ottoman Empire, English colonialism, and Islam, while on other occasions he expressed negative opinions about these persons and topics.

His unpredictable behavior has proven difficult to interpret for scholars. Albert Hourani, the most prominent historiographer of nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals, wrote that he had been “puzzled for many years” by Ṣābūnjī. Gendzier, the biographer of one of Ṣābūnjī’s associates, called him an “odd character by any standards”. It is perhaps because of his unpredictability that Ṣābūnjī occupies a marginal position in scholarly literature on nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals. The present study aims to show that this lack of attention is undeserved. His London-based magazine *al-Naḥla*, published during the years 1877 to 1880, is

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21 His biography will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three of this study.
22 Hourani 1989.
23 Gendzier 1966: 67. Ṣābūnjī’s associate in question was James Sanua (Yaʾqūb Ṣānūʿ in Arabic).
24 There are only three articles that discuss Ṣābūnjī in detail: Zolondek (1978), Fontaine (1969), and Kramer (1989). Fontaine also wrote Ṣābūnjī’s entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 
regarded as one of the best designed, produced and written Arabic magazines of the early period.\(^{25}\) In addition, his oeuvre consists of more than forty pamphlets, books, periodicals and unpublished manuscripts.\(^{26}\) An important aim of the present study is to bring to light a number of hitherto undocumented and unstudied sources. These sources have shed new light on his biography, which is discussed in detail in the third chapter.

In the present study I approach Ṣābūnjī’s journalistic texts as a window on issues that pertain to identity and community, issues that he and other early Arab journalists were exploring. As pointed out above, persons such as Louis Ṣābūnjī could refer to themselves and to their own community as Easterners, Syrians, Ottomans, Arabs, Christians and as Beirutis. Unlike other journalists, Ṣābūnjī could also refer to himself as belonging to the community of Mesopotamians and Syriac Catholics.\(^{27}\) What concerns me is how Louis Ṣābūnjī navigated through the different ways of defining his own identity and community.

**Identities as self-view**
The multifariousness of one’s own community in nineteenth-century Arabic journalism is not generally a topic of scholarly attention. When the presence of different identities does catch the eye, scholars usually understand them as part of the self-view or self-image of the person under discussion. This understanding is nothing special. When Ṣābūnjī refers to himself as Ottoman, Easterner, and Arab, the conclusion must be that he viewed himself as such. Concomitantly, these identities are taken to require no further discussion. From the starting point of self-view, I have

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\(^{25}\) This is the opinion of Philippe de Ṭarrāzī, the most prominent historiographer of the Arabic press (see Ṭarrāzī 1913b: 248-251).

\(^{26}\) I have listed these in the second appendix. My bibliography corrects and expands Ṭarrāzī’s (1913b: 78-81) bibliography, published in 1913. Note that Ṣābūnjī continued to publish after that year; these are therefore not included in Ṭarrāzī’s version.

\(^{27}\) Note that the term Syriac, *suryānī* in Arabic, relates to the Syriac Aramaic language or heritage. Syriac should not be confused with the term Syrian, *sūrī* in Arabic, which relates to a Syrian territory.
identified two approaches that further address the variety of identities in reference to one’s own community.

The first approach, which I will call the ‘overlap approach’, is based on the observation that Ottomans, Syrians, Easterners, Arabs, and Beirutis are in no sense mutually exclusive groups of people. This leads to the conclusion that Arab journalists in fact held *overlapping* self-views, because they held all these identities at the same time. The idea of overlapping self-views is most succinctly articulated by Ernest Dawn, who observed that “many, perhaps all, of the early Western influenced intellectuals of the Ottoman territories and Egypt held overlapping selfviews without any sense of contradiction”. Dawn also notes that nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals “could have more than one *watan* [fatherland] and more than one nation (*umma*)”. Similarly, in reference to the Christian middle stratum in nineteenth-century Beirut, Fruma Zachs writes that “their self-image [was] a combination of four circles of overlapping identities: the Eastern (*Sharq*), the Ottoman, the Arab, and the new circle they were promoting, the Syrian”.

The defining aspect of the overlap approach lies in the mere observation that various identities ‘overlap’. To both Zachs and Dawn this observation functions as the starting point for more focused discussions. Neither Zachs nor Dawn systematically discusses how the overlapping identities differ from each other in cultural, national, ethnic, linguistic, or religious terms. Herein lies the difference with the second approach, which I will call the ‘compartmentalization approach’.

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28 Dawn 1991: 7. The ‘Western influenced intellectuals’ that Dawn uses also includes the early Arab journalists. I prefer to avoid referring to East-West transfers of information because I approach the East and the West as social constructs. I will devote more attention to this issues when discussing the methodological and theoretical framework below.


30 Zachs 2005: 168 and most recently Zachs 2011: 95. The Christian middle stratum also includes the early Arab journalists, with very few exceptions.

31 Dawn focuses on the Arab identity, and how this identity became central to the political ideology of Arab nationalism, and Zachs focuses on the evolution of the Syrian identity.
The compartmentalization approach attempts to associate every identity with a particular element of the social experience. For example, one can argue that the Arab identity derives from a shared culture, the Ottoman identity from a shared state, and the Syrian identity from a shared nation. This is exactly what Abu-Manneh argues in the case of Buṭrus al-Bustānī, Louis Ṣābūnjī’s most prominent peer. Abu-Manneh points out that al-Bustānī worked tirelessly for the advancement of Arabic culture, that he preached loyalty to the Ottoman state, and that he regarded the Syrians as a nation. In addition, Abu-Manneh takes into account that his actions and writings were aimed at the overall improvement of the position of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire. In his conclusion, Abu-Manneh compactly illustrates what I call the compartmentalization approach towards multiple identities:

“In the last analysis, however, [Buṭrus al-Bustānī] was concerned about the Christian communities and their destiny within the context of Syrian society and nation. In short, in the second half of the nineteenth century in Syria, Bustani led the way culturally to Arabism, politically to Ottomanism, and inevitably to Syrian nationalism.”

Thus, Abu-Manneh dissects al-Bustānī’s self-view, and then isolates a Syrian national identity, an Ottoman political identity, an Arab cultural identity, and a Christian religious identity.

The problem with self-view
Both the overlap approach and the compartmentalization approach see the different identities as a reflection of the self-view of the persons under discussion. In this perspective, the study of the identity of persons such as Ṣābūnjī or al-Bustānī becomes the study of the image that they have of their own identity. On the individual level, identity is the “mental image” or “mental silhouette”

34 The discipline of imagology studies these images. See Beller 2007.
that people hold of their own identity.\textsuperscript{35} The different identities that Arabic intellectuals dealt with then become different mental images or silhouettes. However, the start of this introduction has highlighted the ambiguity and fluidity of many identities in the nineteenth-century Arabic context. Against this background, the question is whether different people who understand themselves as Syrian, Arab, or Eastern hold the same mental images of these identities. The following two examples will make it clear that this is not always the case.

The first example concerns the term ‘Arab’, or ‘\textit{\textit{\textit{arab}}’}. In the first half of the nineteenth century this term denoted the community of the Bedouins, whereas it later denoted the entire community of Arabic speakers. At a certain moment in time, some speakers of Arabic would be aware of this new meaning of ‘\textit{\textit{\textit{arab}}’}, while other speakers would be unaware. At that very moment, the first category could refer to themselves as ‘\textit{\textit{\textit{arab}}’}, while the second category would not do so because the new meaning of ‘\textit{\textit{\textit{arab}}’} would not have reached them. Thus, at that moment there were two interpretations of what it means to be ‘\textit{\textit{\textit{arab}}’}, as the term could point to two differently constituted groups of people: the Bedouins or the entire language community.

The second example concerns the term ‘Syrian’. In the rhetoric of intellectuals such as Buṭrus al-Bustānī, the meaning of ‘being Syrian’ was inspired by the experience of sectarian violence in the nineteenth century. To be Syrian, then, was framed as an answer to the social ills of religious polarization and sectarian violence. In the logic of al-Bustānī and others, to be Syrian entailed taking up an ideological position vis-à-vis religious polarization and violence. However, the historical record shows that people who were from the Ottoman province of Syria –and who therefore were Syrians according to al-Bustānī’s frame of reference– had fought bloody wars with each other. From al-Bustānī’s perspective, these people were unequivocally Syrians, but they did not act in conformity with what is expected or desired of Syrians. As such, al-Bustānī’s rhetoric about being Syrian can also be approached as reflecting a desire to...

\textsuperscript{35} Beller 2007: 4.
become what one is not, or not yet. From this perspective, being Syrian is not part of an existing self-view. What is important is that the Syrian identity can be derived from two different sources, either from a shared territory or from a shared reaction to the experience of sectarian violence.

The examples of the Arab and the Syrian identities show that self-view in terms of collective identities is problematic in the nineteenth-century Arabic context. These identities can be interpreted differently by different people, and can acquire different meanings at the same time. This observation can easily be extrapolated to the Eastern identity. Who exactly are Easterners? What is it that Easterners share? From what do Easterners derive their identity? Do Easterners share a history? Has there ever been a common ancestor to all the Easterners? Do Easterners share a culture? Or a territory? It is very unlikely that everybody who would classify himself as Easterner would answer these questions identically, although a definite answer cannot be given.

What I want to point out is that terms that denote collective identities, such as Syrian, Arab, and Eastern, can be interpreted differently by people who understand themselves to be Syrian, Arab, Eastern, et cetera. The possibility of diverging meanings in case of collective identities renders the idea of collective self-view problematic. The observation that different people ascribe themselves the same identity diverts attention away from any possible discussion, debate, or disagreements about the meaning of these and other collective identities. I set out to highlight any potential friction, disagreement or debate about the meaning of identities in the context of early Arabic journalism. In order to do so, the present study takes another approach towards identity in the context of early Arabic journalism, interpreting it not as self-view but as communicative acts.

**Identities as communication**

In order to account for the possibility of different meanings of identities, I approach identity as something that is performed in communication. The central and most fundamental idea that lies at the basis of the present study is that identity is something that
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people refer to and make use of in communication with others. I focus on references to identities within their communicative context in order to take into account the possibility that identities can carry different meanings in different situations. For example, the word ʿarab could refer to the Bedouins in one situation, but it could refer to the Arabic-speaking community in another situation. In this theoretical case, the word ʿarab refers to two differently-constituted groups of people in two different contexts, even though one word is used. This observation underscores the notion that the identity ʿarab should be analyzed from case to case, from reference to reference.

This study analyzes references to the identity of Ṣābūnji’s own community. He could frame his own community differently: as Easterners, Syrians, Arabs, Ottomans, Christians, Catholics, Beirutis, Lebanese, and perhaps in more ways too. In very simple words, I visualize all these different possible identities as separate marbles within a large bowl, where each marble represents one identity.36 Nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals can pick and choose a marble from the bowl, and then refer to the identity of their choice in ways that they see fit, as part of their communication with others. From this perspective, the different identities do not reflect overlapping self-views or a hybrid identity, but rather a spectrum of tools that one can use in communication with others. Thus, the present study explores how Ṣābūnji made use of identities in his communication with his readers. Importantly, I do not dismiss the idea that there are mental images or mental silhouettes that correspond with particular identities. What I am interested in is how these ambiguous and fluid identities are used by individuals, in communication between persons who perhaps hold different mental images.

The present study takes an anti-essential approach towards identity. This means that I dismiss the idea that there are objective and unchanging criteria that define Syrians, Arabs, or Ottomans. In the absence of objective criteria, what remains are the historically contingent meanings that people associate with identities. These

36 In the first chapter I will give a detailed overview of my method.
meanings are the constellation of practices, characteristics, features, and values that are normatively or conventionally understood as ‘typically’ Syrian, Arab, or Ottoman. These meanings help to shape our understanding of the complex social world, in which individuals rarely act in conformity with the stereotypical Syrian, Arab, or Ottoman. From an anti-essential perspective, studying identities therefore starts with studying the practices, characteristics, features, and values that are couched in terms of identity. People do so by making references to identities in their communication with others, and herein lies, again, the centrality of communication in the study of identities.

Research question
The research question of this study is twofold. Firstly, how did Ṣābūnjī use references to identities in his journalistic texts from the period 1870-1880? This period coincides with the “enthusiastic beginnings” of the Arabic private periodical press, in which Ṣābūnjī was a participant. Secondly, does Ṣābūnjī’s usage of references to identities support the observation that identities in early Arabic private journalism are ambiguous and fluid?

In order to answer this question, the present study disregards any preconceived identities. In other words, I do not approach or understand Ṣābūnjī as an Arab, an Easterner, a Syrian, et cetera. Instead, I look for passages in his journalistic texts in which Ṣābūnjī refers to his own identity or to the identity of his own community. I then focus on the passages that contain further information about the identity that he refers to, information that relates to practices, characteristics, features, and values.

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37 It is this constellation of meanings that is associated with an identity that can be called a mental image. However, I approach this mental image on the individual level. This study thereby explicitly leaves open the possibility that different people hold different mental images of the same identity.
38 Ayalon 1995: 28-49. Ṣābūnjī also published texts before 1870 and after 1880 but these are not included. His earlier works are excluded because they were educational in nature and not journalistic. After 1880 Ṣābūnjī continued to publish journalistic texts, but these have unfortunately not surfaced yet. I refer to the bibliography, included in the second appendix, for an overview of his lost journalistic works.
Subsequently, I approach the selected passages with two issues in mind. Firstly, on whose behalf does Ṣābūnjī (pretend to) speak? Does he speak, for example, as an Easterner, as an Arab, or as a Catholic? Or does he speak as an Easterner, as an Arab, and as a Catholic at the same time? Secondly, which practices, characteristics, features, and values does Ṣābūnjī couch in terms of the identity under consideration? In this example, the question is which practices, characteristics, features, and values are presented as ‘typically’ Eastern, Arab, or Catholic, in Ṣābūnjī’s eyes.

My focus on identities in communication is geared towards uncovering any friction, discussion, disagreement and debate, between Ṣābūnjī and his peers or between Ṣābūnjī and his reading public, about issues of identity. It is the aspect of conflict that draws attention to the presence of different and diverging meanings of identities – the ambiguity and fluidity of identities – in the context of early Arabic journalism.

Source material
The source material of this study consists of Louis Ṣābūnjī’s journalistic texts which date from the period 1870–1880. With very few exceptions Arabic journalism in this period was the product of Christians, such as Louis Ṣābūnjī, who operated in what is now Lebanon. After 1880 – and thus outside the scope of this study – Arabic journalism transformed and matured. In the years 1880–1900 hundreds of magazines appeared, primarily in Egypt.39

The following publications, in chronological order, are taken into account. The magazine *al-Naḥla* (‘The Bee’, Beirut, 1870) forms a rich and as-yet unexplored source for students of early Arabic journalism. To a lesser extent the same is true for its short-lived successor, *al-Naḥla wal-zahra* (‘The Bee and the Flower’, Beirut, 1871). In 1874 Ṣābūnjī published two pamphlets that deal with a conflict with the Maronites of Beirut: *Tarjamatā al-ʿallāma al-khūrī al-usqufī Yūsuf Dāwud wal-sayyid al-fāḍil Yūsuf al-Dibs* (‘The biographies of the erudite priest Yūsuf Dāwud and the honorable Yūsuf al-Dibs’, Beirut, 1874; I abbreviate this pamphlet

39 For a list of Egyptian newspapers from this period, see Ḥārīrī 1933: 163-229, and for a list of Egyptian magazines, see Ḥārīrī 1933: 275-332.
to *Tarjamatā* and *Le Decalogue sur le Liban* (Liverpool, 1874; it is, despite its French title, entirely in Arabic). I approach these pamphlets as public, journalistic texts because of their association with current affairs. These two pamphlets also appear to have been unstudied until now. Finally, in 1877 Ṣābūnjī started his bilingual magazine *al-Naḥla* (London, 1877-1880). This magazine has been studied before, by Leon Zolondek.40

Besides these publications, many additional sources have been used for the chapter that deals with Louis Ṣābūnjī’s biography.

**Structure of the thesis**

The first chapter of this thesis gives a detailed overview of the methodology and theoretical framework. I use a combination of two approaches, Membership Categorization Analysis and Discourse Analysis, in order to answer the research question.

The second chapter gives an overview of the historical and discursive context in which Ṣābūnjī was active. The first part of the chapter discusses the emergence of the idea, underscored by many nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals from the period, that their society or community was backward and failing vis-à-vis the West, Europe, or America. This interpretation of the social world led them to construct narratives of progress and reform, aimed at correcting this inferior position. The second part gives an overview of the different identities that are relevant for Ṣābūnjī, such as Arabs, Easterners, and Syrians.

The third chapter contains important background information about Louis Ṣābūnjī’s biography. During the course of this study, various unstudied sources were found and subsequently used in compiling this chapter. These sources provide significantly more information on various aspects of Ṣābūnjī’s life than was previously available, for instance on his relation with the Syriac Catholic Church. The chapter devotes special attention to the various controversial writings that Ṣābūnjī produced. What stands out is the variability and inconsistency of his opinions.

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40 See Zolondek 1978.
The fourth chapter contains the first case study, the ban of the magazine *al-Naḥla* in 1870. The chapter focuses on the role that identities played in the texts that Ṣābūnjī wrote, texts that eventually led to the ban. Ṣābūnjī wrote quarrelsome articles in *al-Naḥla* that targeted Buṭrus al-Bustānī and his son Salīm al-Bustānī. The Bustānīs protested to the Ottoman authorities, who subsequently banned *al-Naḥla*. Ṣābūnjī tried to circumvent the ban by starting *al-Naḥla wal-zahra* one week later, but this was—not surprisingly—also banned. He then went to the “free country” of Egypt in order to publish *al-Naḥla al-ḥurra* (‘The Free Bee’) in order to “correct the corruptions” that Buṭrus and Salīm al-Bustānī had disseminated.41

The fifth chapter contains the second case study, involving another conflict in which Ṣābūnjī was involved. After the demise of *al-Naḥla* in 1870 Ṣābūnjī left Beirut and went on a trip around the world. Upon his return in 1874 he immediately published a highly polemical and aggressive pamphlet targeting the Maronite archbishop of Beirut Yūsuf al-Dibs (1833-1907). This pamphlet, the *Tarjamatā*, sparked a religious conflict and was placed on the Vatican index of banned books.42 It enraged the Maronites in Beirut to such an extent that Ṣābūnjī’s safety could no longer be guaranteed by the authorities.43 As a consequence Ṣābūnjī left Syria, not to return for about forty years. He recorded the events surrounding this conflict in another pamphlet, *Le Decalogue sur le Liban*. This conflict is of interest because it touches upon the issue of religious identity and religious polarization, which was an important concern for early Arab journalists. This chapter analyzes references to being Maronite, being Christian and being Lebanese in the *Tarjamatā* and in the *Decalogue*

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41 Unfortunately, no copy of *al-Naḥla al-ḥurra* has been located. Nevertheless, some information about it is available, and this is discussed in the fourth chapter.

42 It is listed under the Latin title *Interpretatio doctorum Chorepiscopi Josephi David et rev.mi Josephi Debs auctoris libri cui titulus: Spiritus confutationis, per sacerdotem Aloysium Sabungi Syrum*. See Bujanda 2002: 794.

43 This episode even made it to the *New York Times* on 12 July 1874, see ‘A Missionary Press Closed’.

16
Introduction

The sixth chapter contains the third case study. Ṣābūnjī restarted the magazine *al-Nahla* in 1877 in London. It was bilingual in Arabic and English, and, unlike its predecessor with the same name, it did not include violent polemical content. It proved to be more successful than the Beirut-based magazine, even though it only existed for three years. In this chapter I will focus on the fact that *al-Nahla* had two publics, those who read Arabic and those who read English. I approach these two audiences as two identities: the Anglo-Saxon and the Arab public. With this in mind, I compare the Arabic text with the English text. This chapter discusses how Ṣābūnjī makes use of the background knowledge that is associated with these two identities.

In the conclusion I will summarize the insights that are acquired when understanding identities in the context of early Arabic journalism as something that people make use of in communication with others.

Finally, two appendices are included with complementary information. The first appendix contains the original texts of the Arabic quotes that are discussed in the case studies. These quotes are explicitly indicated with the abbreviation *qtd.* followed by a number. The second appendix presents a bibliography of Ṣābūnjī’s works which corrects and complements the existing bibliography from 1913.44

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44 By Ṭarrāzī (1913b: 78-81).