Identities in early Arabic journalism: The case of Louis bnj
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2 Discursive background, collective identities

Ṣābūnjī’s journalistic texts acquired their meaning within the social discursive context of early Arabic journalism. This chapter gives an account of the discursive background against which Louis Ṣābūnjī was active.

Ṣābūnjī worked in many cities around the world, including Beirut, London, Cairo, Istanbul, and New York. Life in each of these cities was different, and rooted in different historical circumstances. It is arguably impossible to attempt to describe one general discursive background to Ṣābūnjī’s writings. As a consequence, a pragmatic choice had to be made, and I decided to focus on the city of Beirut. As will be discussed in more detail below, Arabic private journalism took shape in this city. After about 1880 many Beiruti journalists ventured abroad and took with them their experience in journalism. In this way the early Beiruti periodical publications also functioned as blueprints for Arab journalists in other places. In addition, Ṣābūnjī’s periodicals and pamphlets from Beirut form a substantial part of the source material of the present study. It is for these reasons that I will discuss the discursive background of Beirut.

The first part of this chapter is devoted to Arab and Ottoman perceptions of the place of their own community within the larger picture of the social world. As we will see, a recurrent interpretation of both Arabs and Ottomans in the nineteenth century was that they lagged behind Europe. The second part of this chapter gives an overview of the various ways of imagining one’s community vis-à-vis other communities. The relevant collective identities that I will touch upon include Arabs, Ottomans, Easterners, and Syrians.

2.1 Pre-modern to modern

In his 2004 book *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914*, C.A. Bayly argues that areas all around the world, including the Ottoman Empire, witnessed a transition from a state of pre-modernity to modernity roughly simultaneously. This transition is
reflected by various developments, such as the religious revivalist movements, the expansion of professional administration, and the crystallization of different nations. What concerns me here is how people themselves interpreted, gave meaning, and made sense of the changing world around them. In other words, the discursive aspect of the transition from pre-modern to modern is what matters in the present study. As will be discussed in more detail below, I follow Michel Foucault, who suggests that a historically contingent understanding of the passage of time underlies discursive modernity. It is for this reason that I start this chapter with a focus on time.

**Time**

Johannes Fabian argues that imagining societies as modern vis-à-vis pre-modern, backward vis-à-vis advanced, and barbaric vis-à-vis civilized, demands an understanding of time that is historically contingent. In particular, his argument goes, European thought witnessed transformations of the understanding of the passage of time over the course of centuries. In the Middle Ages, time was essentially biblical time, and history started with the Creation of the world. This event was imagined as having taken place a few thousand years earlier. Biblical time lost its centrality when, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the presence of other accounts of chronology and history were recognized, including those of the classical world and the Babylonians. This ‘secularization’ of time, however, did not essentially change the understanding of how many years the past had seen. This only happened in the first half of the nineteenth century, when the naturalization of time made the past expand, from thousands into millions and eventually billions of years. This shift towards naturalized time severely altered the perception of the relation between the past and the present.

The idea that the past encompassed billions of years made it possible to imagine patterns of evolutionary progress in terms of a timeline, along a continuous stream of time. This is exactly what

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happened, according to Johannes Fabian and Michel Foucault, in the early nineteenth century. Foucault theorized an epistemic shift in Western thought in the early nineteenth century, which enabled understanding the present as the contingent outcome of gradual processes that had taken place earlier. According to Foucault, this shift heralded the modern episteme. Europeans came to understand that the world is the way it is because the past has made it so. In the case of paleontology and geology, emerging disciplines in the nineteenth century, the shift that Fabian and Foucault describe resulted in a sound and consistent understanding of processes of historical change within this continuous stream of time. When applied to the human populations that were found around the world, the evolutionary paradigm had other consequences. Fabian argues that the consequence of naturalized time was the emergence of a particular taxonomy of human variety that aspired to accommodate all the societies, practices, and identities of the world within one universal scheme. Through the lens of the passage of time, different societies were imagined as living in different times, as these societies occupied different stages in the continuous stream of time. In this understanding expressions such as primitive and advanced, barbaric and civilized, or pre-modern and modern denote stages within a *temporal* hierarchy. Western observers imagined non-Western African and Asian ‘primitives’ as living in the past, and this, according to Fabian, rationalized scientific study in the form of the discipline of anthropology.

The temporal hierarchy made it possible to envision human societies, practices, and identities along an axis that ranges from the past to the future. In this framework, the ‘past’ stands for backwardness, barbarism, failure, and decrepitude, while the ‘future’ stands for progress, civilization, advancement, success. Following this logic, people who were understood as primitive and backward were in need of reform, so as to catch up with the stream of time and acquire a higher position on the hierarchy. From the European perspective, Europe was imagined as advanced,

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successful, progressed, and modern. Europe was therefore distinct from the rest of the world, which was imagined as the locus of primitive, tribal, backward, or savage societies. This inequality in the temporal hierarchy became a fundamental legitimation for imperial policy, justifying foreign rule over so-called backward areas.\textsuperscript{49} It was the ‘white man’s burden’ to bring advancement and success to the primitive peoples abroad. The idea was that the primitives could advance through European intercession, and this legitimized European colonial domination. Importantly, this ideologically inspired treatment of others depended on a historically contingent understanding of the relation between the past and the present.

Both Fabian and Foucault stress that the notion of naturalized time was distinctly European or Western, and so was the ensuing perception of the non-West as primitive and backward. For the present study, I focus on the underlying logic of this European perspective, and in this light two principles stand out. Firstly, all the different societies around the world share one universal humanity, as a common ground. Based on this common ground, Africans can be meaningfully compared with the inhabitants of Beirut or with Europeans. Secondly, time is understood essentially as a continuous stream. The perceived differences between Europeans and Africans can then be viewed as variations in how far ‘up’ or ‘down’ they are in the temporal hierarchy. These two points combined result in an inescapable need to reach a higher position on the hierarchy, to realize progress and civilization.

As will be discussed below, this underlying logic was also adopted by people outside the West and outside Europe. Both Ottoman policymakers and Arab intellectuals came to perceive their society as backward and failing vis-à-vis Europe. In response, they proposed different answers to the question of how their inferior positions could be overcome. In the course of this study, I refer to these different answers as narratives of reform.

European time in the Ottoman territories

The Ottoman Empire developed under different historical circumstances than Europe. Makdisi has argued that, before the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire legitimated itself in religious terms, by representing itself as a superior Islamic state, and this continued until well into the nineteenth century. This status quo did not demand reform from the state. During the middle of the nineteenth century, however, European narratives of reform began to penetrate the Ottoman Empire. As Makdisi and Deringil point out, Ottoman policymakers adopted the European logic of naturalized time, resulting in an unavoidable need to reform, to reach an as-yet unattained state of progress and advancement. Especially after 1856, European elites of London and Paris came to be imagined as the metaphor of success and progress in the eyes of Ottoman policymakers. Faced with this perceived superiority, the Ottomans’ aim was to realize progress and civilization through reform. In other words, it was their aim to change the status quo, whereas previously it was to maintain the status quo. Distinctly Ottoman narratives of reform were produced, and these were grounded in the Ottoman circumstances, even though they were based on the principles of naturalized – European – time.

The clearest articulation of Ottoman reform narratives were the Tanzimat reforms of the nineteenth century which were aimed at creating a unified bureaucratic state that was capable of imposing its policies on all the corners of the empire. These corners of the empire were imagined as the locus of what Makdisi called Ottoman Orientalism. The Ottoman elites understood the minorities in the Empire, such as Arabs, Armenians, and Kurds, as uncivilized, undeveloped, or otherwise simple, leading to an ‘Ottoman man’s burden’ of bringing light to these pre-modern peripheries. Simultaneously, Istanbul was perceived as the most advanced, civilized, and modern place within the empire. Thus, an

50 Makdisi 2002b: 771.
52 Makdisi 2002b: 771, 778.
53 Makdisi 2002b: 768-796.
Ottoman narrative of reform was created, based on a center, Istanbul, which was separated from a periphery, epitomized by the ‘desert tribes of Arabia’. Moreover, the separation between Istanbul and the periphery was not only spatially understood, but also temporally. Istanbul was imagined as further up the stream of time, whereas the periphery lagged behind, in need of the progress and advancement that policies from Istanbul could bring. The modern challenge of the Ottoman Empire thus became to unify the different stages of progress that were found throughout the Empire within one Ottoman modernity. The Tanzimat reforms reflected this agenda.54

Closely associated with this development was the idea that all the inhabitants within the empire shared one Ottoman identity.55 On this communal basis the Tanzimat reforms were framed: the goals of progress and advancement were applicable to the entire Empire and to all the Ottomans, not only to the desert tribes of Arabia or other backward peoples. Attempts at integrating the Ottoman Empire therefore reflect and reproduce a discourse of collective identity, Ottomanism or Osmanlılık, that came into being during the nineteenth century. For this reason the discourse of ‘being Ottoman’ has its roots in a political agenda: to reform the Ottoman Empire in order to achieve advancement and progress.

European and Ottoman narratives of reform also penetrated Syria. Şābūnjī’s most prominent peer was Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819-1883), and I have mentioned him already in the introduction.56 Born to a Maronite family of high standing, Buṭrus received the best possible education. He became close to the American Protestant missionaries, working for them as a translator and as a teacher in a missionary school in Abeih, Mount Lebanon. Al-Bustānī also became one of the earliest converts to Protestantism of the mission. Stephen Sheehi points out how Buṭrus al-Bustānī came to understand his own community as part of the universal history of mankind. Within this universal history,

54 Makdisi 2002b: 779.
56 Sheehi 2011: 57-78. The following biographical information about Buṭrus al-Bustānī is taken from Sheehi’s article.
the concerns for all societies are identical: to realize progress and civilization.\textsuperscript{57} One fundamental pillar of this universal history is the logic of the stream of time; al-Bustānī applied this logic to his local circumstances. He speaks of a ladder of civilization (\textit{sullam al-tamaddun}), consisting of steps (\textit{darajāt}) between a conceptual state of barbarism (\textit{tawaʿʿur} or \textit{tawahḥush}) towards a state of civilization (\textit{tamaddun}). Following this logic, it is necessary to elevate the people (\textit{rafʿ al-shaʿb}), one by one and little by little (\textit{shayʾan fa-shayʾan}) in order to reach the highest steps (\textit{asmā darajāt}) of civilization.\textsuperscript{58} As Ussama Makdisi has also noted, al-Bustānī reproduced the outlines of nineteenth-century European colonialist discourse almost verbatim, and the continuous stream of time is clearly discernible.\textsuperscript{59}

Al-Bustānī imagined the state of ‘civilization’ of the Arabs as between that of the European elites and that of the ‘cannibals of Africa’. Interestingly, on one occasion he specifies the temporal distance between Europe and the Arabs: it is four hundred years that the Europeans are in advance vis-à-vis the Arabs.\textsuperscript{60} According to al-Bustānī, barbarism is to civilization not only as dark is to light, and as beast is to human, but also, significantly, as the African cannibals are to the Parisian and British elites, and as the Arab Bedouins are to the inhabitants of Beirut.\textsuperscript{61}

The parallels with the Ottoman imagination are conspicuous: al-Bustānī reproduced Ottoman notions of the barbarity of the desert tribes of Arabia – the pre-modern within the Ottoman Empire – and of the civilization, or \textit{tamaddun}, of the European elites. Similarly, according to al-Bustānī’s interpretation of the local circumstances, Beirut was further up the stream of time than outlying areas. Beirut was imagined as the center and the Arabian deserts as the periphery, just as Ottoman policymakers imagined Istanbul as their center and the Arabian deserts as their

\textsuperscript{57} Sheehi 2004: 46-75.
\textsuperscript{58} Bustānī [1860] 1990: 64-66.
\textsuperscript{59} Makdisi 2002a: 614. See also Karam Rizks survey of al-Bustānī’s understanding of the social world in 1869 (Rizk 2002).
\textsuperscript{60} Bustānī [1859] 1999: xxviii, found in Heyberger 2002: 16.
\textsuperscript{61} Bustānī [1860] 1990: 64.
periphery. These taxonomies are local interpretations of the local social environment, perceived through a lens that aspired to locate all human variety across the globe along the axis ‘advanced-backward’.

**The ‘mantra’ of progress and civilization**

As pointed out above, the idea that different areas and collective identities occupy different stages of progress resulted in varying interpretations of the social world. Europeans, Ottoman policymakers, and Arab intellectuals had a different perception of their primitive and advanced people, as well as their centers and peripheries. The narratives of reform that were formulated in this light, such as European colonial discourse and Ottoman Orientalism, were manifestations of this need to realize progress and civilization.

For Arab intellectuals in the nineteenth century, the concern for progress and civilization made it increasingly unavoidable that all aspects of social life were judged along the axis of advancement and backwardness. With each reference to *tamaddun* (civilization), *taqaddum* (progress), *najāḥ* (success), *tawahḥush* (barbarity), or *tawaʿʿur* (roughness), the necessity to become progressed and civilized became increasingly compelling and explicit. In spite of this shared concern, there were no uniform answers to the question of what exactly civilized and barbaric meant, and this ambiguity resulted in varying interpretations of these terms. It is for this reason that Stephen Sheehi saliently speaks of the “mantra of progress and civilization” in reference to the conflicting articulations of terms such as progress and backwardness. 62 Particularly problematic for these Arab intellectuals was – and arguably still is – the issue of ‘Westernization’, or *tafarnuj*, and its relation to progress and civilization.

In theorizing this aspect, Sheehi argues that nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals were engaged in a Master-Slave struggle with the West.63 Sheehi points out that individuals like Buṭrus al-
Bustānī imagined their own society as failing in the eyes of Europe. Al-Bustānī interpreted widely diverging practices, such as sectarian violence and religious polarization, but also the disregard for books and reading among the Arabs, as manifestations of this failure. By contrast, the West was understood as successful, and therefore became the “referent for progress”. Within this framework of native failure vis-à-vis foreign success, the West became firmly embedded within the social consciousness of Arab intellectuals. In response to the perceived native failure, intellectuals postulated and narrated a hypothetical ‘ideal Arab’. This ideal Arab was represented as progressed and advanced, as someone who worked for the welfare and reform of the community, and who would not succumb to fanaticism and violence.

To many nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals, the relation between the postulated ‘ideal Arab’ and the superior West was deeply problematic. On the one hand, the hypothetical ideal Arab needed to be imagined as capable of realizing progress and advancement for the community without foreign intercession. Simply emulating the foreigner maintained the idea of an inferior ‘material Arab’ who was unable to direct its own success, and who needed to be paternalized by an external party. On the other hand, the West, epitomized by the European elites, provided the model of progress and advancement that the Arabs sought to achieve. In other words, the foreigner determined the rules of the game according to which the Arabs needed to play. Sheehi finds in this conflict a Hegelian Master-Slave struggle with the West, and it is this uneasiness about the discursive function of the West for Arab subjectivity that generated much discussion and debate.

One of the most contested topics, and one of the most visible examples that illustrate this conflict, was Western clothing. Critics contended that shifting to Western clothing was a symbol of unwanted Westernization, native shallowness, and native failure. Fruma Zachs reproduces an image from al-Jinān in which Western dress is ridiculed. Similarly, Sjoerd van Koningsveld discusses

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64 Sheehi 2004: 42-43, 75.
66 Zachs 2005: 76.
Islamic debates about whether exchanging Islamic head-gear for European hats is desirable or objectionable.\(^67\)

In general, *tafarnuj*, and its adjective *mutafarnij*, had a pejorative meaning, and was used to criticize those who were (imagined as) distancing themselves from their own society. This general meaning made it possible to rebuke people who, for instance, dressed too ‘*mutafarnij*’, or who acted too ‘worldly’\(^68\). Nevertheless, it was not always clear what *tafarnuj* and its adjective *mutafarnij* entailed, and therefore there were no clear-cut boundaries that separated *tafarnuj* from the non-pejorative, the sound, and the acceptable. It was at the discretion of the individual to interpret widely diverging practices or values, such as clothing, gender relations, religion, smoking, class relations, as *tafarnuj* or not.

**The Nahḍa**

As pointed out above, many nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals shared the analysis that native society was failing vis-à-vis a more successful West. The activities that they undertook in order to struggle against this inferiority are associated with the so-called *Nahḍa*. This term refers to an ‘awakening’ of Arab culture which was, in the words of Ami Ayalon, essentially “an idealistic desire to contribute to the edification of society”.\(^69\) It is often loosely translated as “the Arab cultural revival”,\(^70\) “the Arabic literary renaissance”,\(^71\) or “the Arab renaissance”.\(^72\) Beyond these generally vague notions, there are remarkably few precise definitions of the Nahḍa. As will be discussed below, different authors give different characteristics of this development. However, there are two central themes that return in discussions about the Nahḍa. Firstly, its aim: innovation of the native cultural and literary production. Secondly, the role of Europe, or the West, as influence upon, or model for, this

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\(^67\) Koningsveld 1995.
\(^68\) This aspect will be discussed in Chapter Four.
\(^69\) Ayalon 2008: 568.
\(^70\) Weismann 2005: 11.
\(^71\) Tibawi 1971: 15.
\(^72\) Patel 2009: 71.
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innovation. These two aspects clearly resonate in Dagmar Glaß’ definition:

“Die “arabische Renaissance” bedeutet vor allem Verwestlichung und insofern eine Wiedergeburt durch den Zugriff auf ein modernes, aber fremdes kulturelles Referenzsystem.”

Two other recurrent characteristics are the period when it took place–between the second half of the nineteenth century and roughly the First World War– and its locus, primarily Egypt and Syria, and later in other places in the Middle East. Tomiche articulates this approach as follows: “The substantive Nahḍa is used to designate the rebirth of Arabic literature and thought under Western influence since the second half of the nineteenth century.”

A number of recurrent disagreements also appear in scholarly literature. One of the most fundamental points of discussion is the question of whether Islamic reformers, such as Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849-1905), Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1897), and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935), are to be situated within or outside the Nahḍa. Tomiche explicitly excludes them, instead postulating a second movement of Islamic reformism that was different from the Nahḍa. Elizabeth Kassab, on the other hand, includes them; about Muhammad ʿAbduh she writes that he “remains a towering figure of the first Arab nahda”. A second disagreement is that the word Nahḍa often seems to apply to a movement that seeks cultural renewal and innovation, and at the same time a countermovement that seeks to limit these innovations. Mixing these two meanings can lead to remarkable

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73 The idea of the West as model, however, is not universally accepted by scholars. Tibawi (1971) for instance, challenges this.
74 Glaß 2004: 2.
75 Tomiche 1993.
76 Kassab 2009: 28. Following Abdallah Laroui (Laroui 1976), Kassab distinguishes between a first Nahḍa (nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) and a second Nahḍa (post-1967).
contradictions. In an article on Sa‘īd al-Shartūnī (1849-1912), a Beiruti intellectual who was engaged in a number of cultural activities, Patel writes that al-Shartūnī “died in 1912 after establishing himself among the leading literati of the nahḍah”.77 A few pages further Patel contradicts this earlier statement by arguing that al-Shartūnī was a “critic of the Nahḍa” who displayed “a strong conservative taste for earlier writings”.78 This minor inconsistency is not necessarily an inaccuracy in the article, but rather a reflection of a recurrent problem: the ambiguity of what the term Nahḍa means.

Elizabeth Kassab offers an elegant solution to this ambiguity by using the term Nahḍa-debates.79 She thereby suggests that the Nahḍa should be understood as a culture of discussion and debate, driven by a desire for advancement and progress, and manifested in cultural production. In this understanding, the various intellectual debates make the Nahḍa, and not one particular strand of thought, movement or ideology.

Obviously, these Nahḍa-debates took place in many places. Nevertheless, Beirut particularly stands out, especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century.80 During this period the city witnessed a notable upsurge in cultural productivity that was unequalled by any other Arab city. The Nahḍa was manifest in the number of printing presses, books, and periodical publications that flourished. In 1850 there were four presses in the city;81 in 1900 there were twenty-two. The total print run of books, pamphlets, newspapers, and magazines that were published in the period 1850-1900 reached hundreds of thousands, while in the years 1800-1850 there were almost none. The first Arabic private magazine in Beirut, Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār, was founded in 1858. Between 1870 and 1880 Beirut became the first Arabic city with a

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77 Patel 2009: 74.
78 Patel 2009: 83.
79 Kassab 2009: 19.
80 The first two parts of Ṭarrāzī’s history of the Arab press (Ṭarrāzī 1913a and Ṭarrāzī 1913b) give a good outline of the development of Beirut as the center of the Nahḍa. See also Kassir 2003: 195-272.
flourishing private journalistic industry.\textsuperscript{82} By 1900 fifty-four more periodicals had been established.\textsuperscript{83}

In the period up to 1875 most private publications were marginal and disappeared very quickly. The first Arab media entrepreneur, responsible for the first private Arabic newspaper, was Rizq Allâh Ĥassûn (1824-1880), who later became acquainted with Şâbûnji in London.\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Mir'ât al-Ähwâl} was the first periodical publication aimed at a general public, rather than at members of a religious community or a demarcated group of government employees, such as \textit{al-Waqqā'î} and \textit{al-Miṣriyya} in Egypt. After \textit{Ḥadiqat al-Akhbâr} was founded in Beirut, others soon followed and Beirut developed into the unequivocal hub of Arabic journalism.\textsuperscript{85} At the start of 1875, of the ten Arabic private periodical publications worldwide, eight were published in Beirut.\textsuperscript{86} In addition, in Beirut alone fourteen other periodicals had appeared and disappeared already before 1875. \textsuperscript{87} Beirut maintained its journalistic prominence until about 1880, when Sultan Abdul Hamid's strict rules of censorship caused many Syrian journalists to move to the more liberal Egypt.\textsuperscript{88} In Cairo and Alexandria, Arabic journalism exploded; in the years 1880-1900 hundreds of magazines and newspapers were founded there.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{82} Ayalon 2008: 562.
\textsuperscript{83} Ṭarrāzī 1933: 5-9 and 107-109. Many of these periodicals existed for only a short period.
\textsuperscript{84} In 1855 in Istanbul, Ĥassûn founded \textit{Mir'ât al-Ahwâl}, which existed for a little over a year and which primarily focused on the Crimean war of 1853-1856. Ĥassûn later published a different newspaper (albeit under the same name) in London, during the years 1872-1873 (Ṭarrāzī 1913a: 55).
\textsuperscript{85} For this magazine, see Glaß 2001: 37-42.
\textsuperscript{86} Glaß 2004: 89. Moreover, the other two (\textit{al-Jawā'ib} in Istanbul and \textit{Rawdāt al-Madâris al-Miṣriyya} in Cairo) were under heavy government influence.
\textsuperscript{87} Ṭarrāzī 1913b: 312-313.
\textsuperscript{88} For accounts of Hamidian censor, see Farah 1977 and Cioeta 1979. An interesting contemporary account of the arbitrariness of the censorship policies is Sarkîs 1896.
\textsuperscript{89} For a list of newspapers, see Ṭarrâzî 1933: 163-229, and for a list of magazines, see Ṭarrâzî 1933: 275-332.
Christian prominence

Private Arabic journalism in primarily Beirut was dominated by Christians, such as Louis Ṣābūnjī and Buṭrus al-Bustānī. First of all, it is interesting to connect this aspect with the foreign American missionaries who were present in Mount Lebanon and who engaged in the same activities. In the years 1851-1871 these foreign missionaries published seven different Arabic titles in Beirut. Their publications might have provided a blueprint for publications by later Arab intellectuals, and the missionaries also provided a printing infrastructure that made it possible to produce texts on a level that was hitherto impossible. On the other hand, their influence and their reach must not be overestimated, since most of their Arab publications disappeared within a year.

Secondly, economic aspects explain the prominence of Christians in journalism. After about 1830, the economy of Mount Lebanon became integrated with the world economy, and especially with the French economy, where Lebanese silk was in high demand. The result was a dramatic economic transformation of Mount Lebanon from a subsistence economy to a cash crop economy based on silk exports to Europe. Before this transition, most scholars distinguish between two separate classes in Mount Lebanon, the ruling elite on the one hand and the commoners or ahālī on the other hand. Fruma Zachs distinguishes between the landowners and the land cultivators, “with no social mobility between them”. Similarly, Akram Fouad Khater distinguishes between the shuyukh (sheikhs) and the peasants; people were simply born in either of these two classes. Makdisi argues that the social order was a sophisticated and rational system, based on

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90 The only exception in Beirut was *Thamarāt al-Funūn*, founded in 1875 by ʿAbd al-Qādir Qabbānī. Not until 1886 did another non-Christian start a periodical in Beirut. With few exceptions the same Christian prominence is visible in other parts of the Arab world. One such exception was the Jewish James Sanua, who first published his *Abū Naẓẓāra* periodical in Paris in 1878.
91 Ṭarrāzī 1933: 312-313.
93 Firro 1990: 151-152.
94 Zachs 2005: 15.
allegiance and obedience.\textsuperscript{96} He argues that families were associated with social ranks, and their positions in the social hierarchy did not change if they fell into poverty or accumulated wealth.\textsuperscript{97}

This strict hierarchical division into two groups, also referred to as the old regime, gradually changed when, during the early nineteenth century, a third middle stratum emerged. Zachs traces the beginning of this development to the rule of Amīr Bashīr II (1788-1840). Thanks to primarily trading and silk production, the wealth, influence, and power of a group of merchants and traders gradually increased.\textsuperscript{98} Amīr Bashīr II fostered these mainly Christian traders and relied on them on various occasions, and they eventually formed a distinct third class between the elite and the \textit{ahālī}.\textsuperscript{99} Concomitantly, the strict boundaries of the old regime became less strict, and this heralded a breach with the past. Various representatives of the old classes (both landowners and former peasants who had managed to acquire wealth) joined ranks, forming a new middle stratum. Consequently, the balance of power shifted towards the new middle stratum, and away from the elite.

As the most important port of the eastern Mediterranean, Beirut became the primary center of this middle stratum. The emerging wealthy middle class of mostly Christians constituted a new reading public, and they were willing to pay for information.\textsuperscript{100} As such, the urban setting of Beirut proved to be a breeding ground for various cultural developments that are associated with the Nahda. Many authors, journalists, educators, consular clerks, and entrepreneurs, again most of them Christians, became active in writing and printing in Beirut. On this basis, Zachs argues, the middle stratum was not only composed of economic professionals such as merchants, but also of intellectuals who engaged in cultural production.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{96} Makdisi 2000: 29.  
\textsuperscript{97} Makdisi 2000: 34.  
\textsuperscript{98} Zachs 2005: 16  
\textsuperscript{100} Zachs 2005: 39-85.  
\textsuperscript{101} Zachs 2005: 39-85.
A third factor that led to the prominent position of the Christians in cultural production was the relatively high level of literacy and education of Christians in Mount Lebanon, especially later in the nineteenth century. However, these literacy rates should not be overestimated. Ayalon estimates the reading public as merely a few percentiles of the total population. In 1868, al-Bustānī wrote that he had to “search hard” in the markets of Beirut before he could find someone who could read. For this reason, Glaß rightly warns against ‘Presseeuphorie’ when discussing the potential impact of Arabic printed material. Rather than speaking of a middle stratum, both Glaß and Ayalon prefer to speak about a reading elite, predominantly composed of young men living in cities, with Christians forming the majority.

Two other points should be mentioned: firstly, the Tanzimat reforms of the Ottoman Empire, and secondly, the political stability after the sectarian civil war of 1860. The reforms authorized the emancipation of Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire, and in this light encouraged the Christians to step into the limelight. The sectarian civil war in Mount Lebanon took place primarily between Christian Maronites and Druze, with the Maronites suffering the heaviest losses. As a consequence, many Christians fled the Mountain and found a new home in Beirut, transforming it into a predominantly Christian city by 1861. The ensuing period of stability and freedom of the press proved favorable to the development of Christian journalism.

2.2 Discourses of Collective Identities

Territorial and national identities
In the following pages I will discuss the relevant discourses of identity. I will not present an exhaustive list of all the different

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103 Ayalon 1995: 143.
104 Found in Ayalon 1995: 141.
105 Glaß 2004: 11.
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identities. Two criteria determine which identities are discussed. Firstly, the identities should have a territorial association. For example, the Ottoman state gives the Ottoman identity a territorial association. Similarly, the area that is called Syria gives the Syrian identity a territorial association, and the area in which the Arabic language is the lingua franca gives the Arab identity a territorial association. This criterion for inclusion means that identities such as gender, age, or class, are not dealt with here. As will be discussed below, many religious identities in the context of nineteenth-century Ottoman Syria also carried territorial associations; the Maronites were understood as primarily from Mount Lebanon, people from Jabal ʿĀmil were likely to be Twelver Shia, the Ḥawran area is associated with Druze, et cetera.108

I introduce the criterion of territorial association as an analytical tool in order to shed light on the issues of identity and community. However, I do not suppose that all the people who live in one territory share the same group feeling or claim the same identity. This aspect is also underlined by Groiss, who argues that, before the nineteenth century, large territorial identities barely played a role in the social imagination. Instead, “one was attached to one’s own city, or village, and its immediate vicinity”.109

Groiss’ observation leads to the second criterion of inclusion: the social group that forms the collective identities should be large. The definition of ‘large’ is of course open to debate, but what is important is that the group is so large that it becomes imagined. I thereby follow Benedict Anderson’s idea that a community becomes imagined when there are so many group members that nobody would ever be able to know or meet all of his fellow members.110 I also follow Anderson’s idea about the power of print-capitalism, and specifically newspapers, which catalyzed the emergence of these imagined communities. He argues that the shared experience of reading the same newspapers and the same texts, by many individuals who do not know each other, fosters a

108 Jabal ʿĀmil is located in present-day southern Lebanon; Ḥawran is a plateau on the border between present-day Syria and Jordan.
feeling of belonging to the same community. The shared experience that print-capitalism offered “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways”.111 As pointed out in the previous chapter, this study also recognizes that the articles that are read contribute to the emergence of imagined communities.

The identities that are discussed include the Arab, Ottoman, Syrian, Lebanese, Eastern, and Beirut identities. As will be discussed in detail in the following pages, various of these identities acquired political connotations in the twentieth century. Arab, Syrian, and Lebanese nationalists ventured to create nation states for their respective communities. However, in the nineteenth century these nationalist movements were not yet crystallized. Ṣābūnjī and his peers used terms such as Syrians and Easterners. The former group eventually became politicized in a nationalist movement while the latter did not, but this was obviously unknown to Ṣābūnjī and other nineteenth-century intellectuals. It is for this reason that I approach references to the Syrian identity as not essentially different from references to the Eastern identity in the nineteenth century: both refer to imagined communities.

Thus, my approach does not favor those identities that eventually grew into nationalist movements. As a consequence I will also devote attention to other identities, and most extensively to the Eastern identity. The case studies in the following chapters will show that the idea that ‘we’ are Easterners was commonplace among Ṣābūnjī and his peers. However, the meaning of ‘being Eastern’ for the people who understand themselves as such has not yet received scholarly attention. Herein lies one of the contributions of this study to the scholarly literature.

In what follows, I will address the relevant identities from three different perspectives: the national perspective, the political perspective, and the religious perspective. At the end of this chapter I will discuss the Eastern identity.

**Identities from a national perspective**

When discussing collective identities in terms of imagined communities, the usual approach is to see these communities as *nations*. The Arabs, Syrians, and Ottomans can then be seen as an Arab nation, a Syrian nation, and an Ottoman nation. In theorizing these various nations, I reject the idea that there are objective or essential criteria that determine these nations. As a starting point in this discussion, the concept of *ethnie* is suitable. In his studies on nationalism, A.D. Smith argues that modern nineteenth-century nationalist movements were premised on the presence of existing groups of peoples, *ethnies*, that had already crystallized into distinct social groups before the nineteenth century. According to Smith, nationalism is the politicization of the pre-existing *ethnie*.¹¹² To the present study the concept of *ethnie* is promising because it focuses on intersubjective group feelings, thereby relegating the decision of ‘being’ a nation to the people involved *themselves*. By contrast, it is not the *analyst* who formulates collective national identities by prioritizing particular characteristics, such as language, cultural practices, or historical background. The focus on the people involved themselves suggests that the concept of *ethnie* is in accordance with the ethnomethodological approach that is applied in this thesis.

However, the idea that people *themselves* create their nation is problematic in the context of the Ottoman Empire and Mount Lebanon because of its fragmented social and religious composition. Kais Firro has demonstrated that different religious groups had different traditions of identity in Syria during the nineteenth century.¹¹³ He shows that Sunni, Twelver Shia, Christians, Druze, and Nusayris/Alawis attached different meanings to terms that denote community and identity, such as *waṭan* (usually translated as ‘fatherland’), *umma* (usually understood as referring to the community of Muslims; in other contexts it is often translated as ‘nation’), and *aṣṣabiyya* (often translated as group solidarity). Thus, different religious communities held different discourses of collective identities. As a

¹¹³ Firro 2009.
consequence, specific discourses of identity emerged in specific religious communities. These discourses of identity only reached certain parts of the population of a territory, while other parts maintained different ideas about community and identity.

A case in point was the emergence of a Syrian identity. Firro shows that the concept of fatherland (waṭan) was developed by one particular social group, Syrian Christian intellectuals. This discourse aspired to define their community as the total population of the fatherland, irrespective of religion. Hence, to ‘be’ Syrian was explicitly framed against the sectarianism and the religious polarization that devastated Mount Lebanon in the nineteenth century (I will return to this topic below). Significantly, this particular discourse of identity was developed by a small group of people—a number of Syrian Christian intellectuals— but it pretended to include a much wider group, namely the total population of the Syrian fatherland. The other people who were found in this Syrian fatherland, however, maintained different interpretations of ‘us versus them’, as Firro points out.

In the Ottoman context, I approach ethnie as specifically referring to a non-religious collective identity based on a shared communal history that took place in a shared fatherland, such as the Ottoman fatherland, or the Syrian fatherland. Defining a non-religious ethnie or nation, and answering the question as to who or what this nation was, was not an easy task for nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals. In the words of Hakim-Dowek, postulating a ‘nation’:

“entailed the selection of a ‘nation’ from among a plethora of races, ethnic groups, religious communities, parochial groupings, tribal confederations, and other political associations, and presented a challenging and puzzling endeavour to the would-be nationalists and nationalist propagandist.”114

Within this complex situation, various *ethnies* can be discerned, such as Arabs, Lebanese, Syrians, and Ottomans, and these are mentioned in the writings of many intellectuals, including Louis Ṣābūnjī. These collective identities are in no way mutually exclusive and also do not bear witness to any hierarchy. Most Arab intellectuals in Beirut seemed to understand themselves as belonging to the groups of Syrians, Lebanese, Arabs, and Ottomans at the same time. It is also important to underline that these discourses of identity had their own particular backgrounds. ‘Being Ottoman’ is informed by the political status quo, namely the Ottoman Empire in which Arab intellectuals worked and lived. ‘Being Arab’ is informed by the linguistic situation of the area. ‘Being Lebanese’, as Carol Hakim-Dowek argues, was closely related to Maronite Christianity in Mount Lebanon and its contacts with France, and the idea of a Syrian identity developed primarily among a Christian middle stratum of merchants and intellectuals in Beirut during the nineteenth century.

The Arab identity demands further discussion. As already pointed out in the introduction, the term ‘ʿarab did not conventionally denote the community of the speakers of the Arabic language. Instead, the term was generally limited to the Bedouins until far into the nineteenth century. When Khalīl al-Khūrī used the term *al-umma al-ʿarabiyya* (approximately ‘the Arab nation’) in 1859, he was probably the first who applied the term ‘ʿarab to the entire community of Arabic speakers. Khalīl al-Khūrī was one of the earliest Arab journalists in Beirut, and in this sense he was one of Ṣābūnjī’s peers.

What *ethnie* discourses have in common is the association between a group of people and a fatherland. As Choueiri points out, this fatherland should be loved by its inhabitants and is therefore more than merely the place of habitation. The concept of a

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115 Hakim-Dowek 1997. This is primarily the case in the 1840, when the idea of a Christian Lebanon first surfaced.
118 Zachs 2004: 34.
fatherland that is loved by its inhabitants is historically contingent, allegedly introduced into the Arab world by Rifā‘a al-Ṭahṭāwī. In his account of his stay in Paris, published in 1834, he sketched an image of the world as essentially comprising different nations with different characteristics, and different countries that are loved by their inhabitants. On this basis he formulated the Egyptian fatherland. Simultaneously, Ottoman Turkish intellectuals postulated an Ottoman vatan, the Ottoman fatherland, based on the same principle. Thus, the concept of a fatherland could have reached Syria from different directions.

Unlike al-Ṭahṭāwī’s patriotism in Egypt, the Syrian patriotism that appeared in the writings of intellectuals in Beirut was profoundly influenced by the experience of sectarian violence of 1860. Prior to this time sectarianism had already been perceived as a corrupting force by some indigenous intellectuals, such as the aforesaid Khalīl al-Khūrī in 1858. However, the violence of 1860 made it poignantly clear that something had to change. Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819-1883) most emphatically proposed the concept of ‘fatherland’ as a response to the sectarian tensions. Al-Bustānī was the foremost “ideologue of the age” and it is for this reason that I have mentioned him a number of times in the previous pages. Only months after the end of the hostilities, Buṭrus al-Bustānī published a number of waṭaniyyas, or patriotic pamphlets, under the title Nafīr Sūriya (‘Trumpet of Syria’). In these pamphlets he explicitly advocated unity, peace, and love for the Syrian fatherland as a viable answer to the wrongs of religious polarization and violence. The notion of a fatherland appeared prominently in his rhetoric; he anonymously signed each pamphlet with the pseudonym ‘Lover of the fatherland’. The idea of a religiously neutral fatherland, in which all the different religious communities are united, therefore

121 Dawn 1991: 5.
123 This phrase is taken from Sheehi (2011: 57). Sheehi’s article gives a recent overview of his ideas about Syrian patriotism. See also Abu-Manneh 1980: 287-304.
finds its immediate source, or perhaps its *raison d’être*, in religious polarization and sectarian violence. In other words, al-Bustānī’s call for love of the fatherland is meaningful because the people whom he addressed did *not* love their fatherland or their compatriots. Instead, the implication is that the people whom al-Bustānī addressed ‘loved’ their religious community and their coreligionists. This remark is relevant when references to religious identities are analyzed.

In conclusion, the Syrian patriotism that al-Bustānī and other propagated was a modern phenomenon that was consciously produced because it did not exist among large parts of the population. In addition, the particular origin of Syrian partiotism—a small elite of Christian intellectuals—combined with the low rates of literacy, means that the concept of the Syrian fatherland would have reached only small segments of the population, even though al-Bustānī and others enthusiastically disseminated it. As a discourse of identity it co-existed with various other discourses of identity that informed group identity, such as tribe, village, class, and primarily religious denomination. Importantly, Syrian patriotism was articulated as a response to sectarianism, but the former did not eclipse the latter. On the contrary, sectarianism remained a powerful social force in Syria and Lebanon up to the present.125

A final remark on the relation between *ethnie* and nationalism should be made. Nationalism postulates the ideal of a nation living within a political entity (the nation state), coinciding with a certain geographical area (the fatherland). As such, nationalism is the ideology of a politicized *ethnie*.126 Nevertheless, the Ottoman context in the nineteenth century demonstrates the presence of *ethnies* without political connotations. Fruma Zachs analyzes the emergence of a Syrian identity, a Syrian nation, a

125 Primarily Makdisi 2000: 96-117. Interestingly, at the turn of the twentieth century the meaning of ‘being Syrian’ among Christian Syrians who had emigrated to the United States transformed. They only referred to *Christian Syrians* when using the term Syria and Syrian. In this light the term Syria sometimes acquired anti-Muslim and anti-Ottoman connotations (Groiss 2011: 44-46).

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Syrian fatherland, and a Syrian history complete with Syrian heroes and heroines, such as queen Zenobia, which was distinctly non-political. The agents who constructed this ‘Syrianism’ (such as Salim al-Bustānī, the son of Buṭrus al-Bustānī) simply did not attach any political significance to being Syrian, and thus did not develop Syrian nationalism. With very few exceptions, these intellectuals recognized the Ottoman state as the legitimate polity. It is for this reason that one should distinguish between non-political ethnies, such as Syrian patriotism in the nineteenth century, and the politicized ethnies that prospered as nationalist movements in the Arab world in the twentieth century. I will now turn to the political aspect of collective identities.

Identities from a political perspective

The previous discussion on ethnie, and particularly the Syrian ethnie, shows that ‘national’ identities did not always carry political connotations in the context of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. Because of the close associations of the term ‘nation’ with the political ideology of nationalism, it is perhaps not justified to call the Syrian ethnie a nation. In contrast, the Ottoman identity obviously did carry political connotation, and al-Bustānī’s political allegiance was clearly with the Ottoman Empire. Al-Bustānī “never failed to advocate allegiance to the [Ottoman Empire]”, and he “believed that the interests of the Ottoman peoples and the interests of the state were identical on the question of preserving the unity of the Empire”. This observation again demonstrates the need to distinguish political identity from ethnie-identities when studying patterns of identity and allegiance during the Nahḍa era.

To the Syrian Christians who developed non-religious collective ethnie identities, the Ottoman Empire was the polity in which they were living. In the second half of the nineteenth century, most local intellectuals preached allegiance to the Ottoman state and the Sultan, just like al-Bustānī. Nevertheless, it is doubtful

whether this political status quo provided the inhabitants of the Arab provinces with any sense of identity during the nineteenth century. Similarly, the question is whether the Ottoman allegiance of Arab intellectuals demonstrates the presence of a political ideology that stipulated that the Ottoman 'nation' should live in the Ottoman fatherland. Abu-Manneh points out that al-Bustānī was most concerned about maintaining the strength of the Ottoman Empire in the face of European influence. This strength was threatened by internal instability, such as the sectarian violence and the religious polarization that he witnessed around him.\textsuperscript{130}

From this perspective, al-Bustānī’s Ottomanism does not have anything to do with an Ottoman nation, or with a history or culture that is shared by all Ottomans. Instead, al-Bustānī’s Ottomanism was an intellectual product, premised on the particular mundane developments that he saw around him.

Thus, the Ottomanism of al-Bustānī and many other nineteenth-century intellectuals was not a manifestation of a wider national movement among the Arab population that aimed at uniting all the Ottomans in an Ottoman fatherland. If anything, al-Bustānī’s arguments in favor of Ottomanism unveil the absence of such an Ottoman nationalism. If being Ottoman was a strong collective identity in Syria, then there would have been no need for al-Bustānī to argue for it in the first place. From this perspective, his Ottomanism unveils that he sees the Ottoman population as failing to act in accordance with what is expected of them. Again, al-Bustānī saw sectarian violence as a manifestation of this failure. This perspective again underscores the primacy of religious identification for many persons who from another angle would count as Syrians or Ottomans.

Finally, Arab nationalism is worth mentioning separately. Normally, references to the Arab identity during the nineteenth century generally carried no political connotations. However, a small number of nineteenth-century references to the Arab identity did carry political connotations.\textsuperscript{131} Interestingly, a number of these

\textsuperscript{130} Abu-Manneh 1980: 295-298.

\textsuperscript{131} Dawn (1991: 8) and Zeine (1966: 59-67; 1970: 587-590) mention some of these early expressions.
Discursive background, collective identities

references are by the hand of Louis Ṣābūnjī. In 1881, Louis Ṣābūnjī published the pamphlet al-Ittihād al-ʿArabī (‘The Arab Union’), in which he argued that the Ottoman claim to the Caliphate was illegitimate, and that the Caliphate should return to the hands of the Arabs. Also in 1881, Ṣābūnjī anonymously published a leaflet with the name Bayān-nāma al-Umma al-ʿArabiyya, in which he urged the Arabs to free themselves from the Turks. Both the pamphlet and the leaflet are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Religious identities and sectarianism

Ussama Makdisi has pointed out how, during the period between 1830 and 1860, religion became “the only authentic basis for political claims” in Mount Lebanon. In multi-religious areas this bond between religion and politics potentially leads to conflicting claims and to violence. It is this phenomenon that I refer to as sectarianism.

Makdisi shows that sectarianism was not the traditional situation in Mount Lebanon for centuries, but that it was an essentially modern phenomenon that developed during the nineteenth century. He argues that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was an image of Mount Lebanon in Europe as a Christian bastion within an essentially hostile Islamic surrounding. This polarized image of society did not correspond with the social reality that was perceived by the Lebanese themselves: pre-modern society in Mount Lebanon was much more divided in terms of elite versus commoners, regardless of religious affiliation, than in terms of different religions.

Under European pressure, the Ottomans reinvented the religious communities –and primarily religious minorities– as subjects of policy and reform, and religious differences became the cornerstone of changes in Imperial policy. The most evident reflections of these changes can again be seen in the Tanzimat reforms of the nineteenth century, and in particular the 1856 Hatt-ı Humayun, which stipulated equality before the law of all the

\[132\] Makdisi 2000: 2.
\[133\] Makdisi 2000: 28-50.
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subjects, irrespective of religion. This step authorized the emancipation of Christians in the empire, but at the same time uprooted the traditional patterns of allegiance and accentuated religious differences.\textsuperscript{134} In 1842 religious differences lay at the base of changes in policy: Mount Lebanon was partitioned into a Christian north and a Druze south. This so-called dual Qaimmaqamiyya immediately problematized the position of Christians in the Druze areas, and of the Druze in the Christian areas. The tensions between Maronites and Druze mounted in the years 1840-1860, and culminated in the 1860 civil war in which thousands died.\textsuperscript{135} As a consequence, the dual Qaimmaqamiyya was abolished in 1861 and Mount Lebanon was recreated as an Ottoman Mutasarrifate, ruled by a Christian governor who reported directly to the Sultan.

The sectarianism that uprooted Mount Lebanon was the local corollary of Ottoman and European reform projects, in which religion played a pivotal role. The result was that the meaning of religion and of the religious identity changed dramatically. The allegiance of the commoners to the traditional elite crumbled while sectarian tensions rose. Once violence erupted, sectarianism snowballed as the commoners blamed the elite for failing to provide security. For the same reason, the attempts of the Druze and Maronite elite to stop the commoners from attacking each other were unsuccessful. Sectarianism and the violence it generated in 1860 therefore was an “evident breakdown of mechanisms of social control”\textsuperscript{136}

The emergence of sectarian violence highlights the importance of religious identification in nineteenth-century Ottoman Lebanon. As pointed out in the previous chapter, I approach identity as something that people do in communication, and associations that relate to identities as social constructs. Against the background of sectarian violence, one of the

\textsuperscript{134} In reference to the sectarian skirmishes that took place in the years following 1858, Makdisi writes that the Maronite rebels “consistently justified their actions by referring to the Tanzimat” (2000: 97).

\textsuperscript{135} Makdisi 2000: 51-66.

\textsuperscript{136} Makdisi 2000: 135.
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associations that people have about their antagonists is that they pose a danger: the Maronites posed a danger vis-à-vis the Druze, and vice versa. As a social construct, this association about the religious antagonist becomes more deeply engrained with each act of sectarian violence.

I want to draw attention to the idea that reproducing negative associations about different religious communities does not always or necessarily go hand in hand with violence. As a social construct, the association that Maronites and Druze pose a danger may well be produced and reproduced in communication and interaction, in text or speech. Along these lines polemical writings come to mind. They may also contribute to negative associations about other religious communities, to religious polarization, and to a climate in which sectarianism can surface and thrive.

In addition, reproducing the negative aspects of a different religion does not always or necessarily take place in a political context. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the construction of the religious identity as an ongoing social process – through discourse and practice– and the politicization of the religious identity that is properly called sectarianism.

Maronite sectarianism should receive special attention because it has associations with the Lebanese identity. Carol Hakim-Dowek has drawn attention to the fact that, roughly around 1840, some Maronite Christians and French foreigners for the first time expressed the idea of a Christian Emirate, to be founded in Mount Lebanon. This idea, however, was not much more than a fantasy. The idea of a Lebanese state was more or less forgotten until it was revived in the first years of the twentieth century by a number of local intellectuals. These intellectuals, however, rejected the Christian and Maronite character of the proposed state that was envisioned sixty years earlier. Instead, they propagated a religiously neutral Lebanon, idealized as the fatherland for all the Lebanese irrespective of religious affiliation.137 Nevertheless, Hakim-Dowek’s analysis shows that in the middle of the nineteenth century a discourse developed that connected one particular

collective identity, the Maronite Christian one, with one geographical area, Mount Lebanon. This discourse was not solely a European fantasy or an Ottoman interpretation of the social composition of Mount Lebanon, but was adopted by local Maronite agents, even though presumably only by a tiny proportion of the local population.

Finally, Hakim-Dowek warns against understanding ‘the Maronites’ and ‘the Druze’ as coherent groups in the 1860 conflict. She points out that the internal cohesion of religious groups in Mount Lebanon in the nineteenth century should not be overestimated. For example, the Maronite defeat in the sectarian violence of 1860 largely happened because of the “divisions of the Maronites and their lack of solidarity and concern for the Maronite cause”. During skirmishes in 1860, Maronite factions accidentally shot at each other. This anecdote perhaps suggests the absence of effective leadership, but it also points to a lack of unity. The anecdote demonstrates that ‘being Maronite’ in fact covers up a social reality that is much more complex. The internal divisions and factions of the Maronites should not be overlooked when analyzing religious communities. Hence, the social groups that analysts usually distinguish (such as ‘the Maronites’ fighting ‘the Druze’) could well be a simplified representation. This point also legitimizes an ethnomethodological approach towards issues on identity in the context of nineteenth-century Mount Lebanon.

**The East as identity**

The Easterners, as a collective identity that denotes a group of ‘us’, deserves special attention because it lacks obvious national, political, or religious dimensions. From a structural perspective, the constitutive Other of the East and of the Easterner are the ‘foreigner’ and the ‘outsider’, or, in other words, people who are normatively understood as “not from here”. In this light the Easterners as a category is meaningful in contrast to the people who, geographically, do not belong to or in the East. From a theoretical perspective this observation is significant, as it

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generated various reflections on the East-West dichotomy that are grounded in subaltern theory.

Orientalism, Edward Said’s study on the construction of the East in European sources, emphasizes the difference in power between the East and Europe in the nineteenth century. The East was subjected to Europe, both discursively, through representation, and also directly, through political domination in a colonial context. For the subjected Easterners themselves, the presence of a hegemonic power may well reverberate in their self-view. In this context Joep Leerssen’s concept of auto-exoticism is useful. This concept refers to stereotypical representations of the –subaltern– Self that find their origin in stereotypes held by a –hegemonic– Other. Deringil gives examples of auto-exoticism in the Ottoman context. He shows that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Ottoman policymakers were obsessed with their image abroad. Faced with European discourses that represented the Ottoman Empire as backward and exotic, the Ottomans undertook much effort to resist and counteract such representations. Hence, they prohibited Sufi performances of dancing dervishes in the streets of New York and attempted to make use of the international congresses and world fairs to portray the Ottoman Empire as a ‘normal’ modern state. These attempts are premised on the idea that some Ottoman practices should be suppressed because they indeed were seen as backward and exotic.

Carrier proposes an understanding of the self-view of subaltern Easterners in a way that is similar to Leerssen’s concept of auto-exoticism. He approaches the stereotypical self-view of subaltern groups without taking the origins of these representations into account. He then proposes the term ‘ethno-Orientalism’ in reference to the self-view of the non-Westerners themselves, and ‘ethno-Occidentalism’ in reference to the image that the non-Westerner holds about the Western Other. His approach is inspired by the desire to distinguish between discourses of Selves and Others that are maintained by hegemonic

140 See Beller 2007: 325, 341.
141 Deringil 1999: 150-165.
groups and by subaltern groups, opting to use the addition ‘ethno-’ for the latter. Lindstrom\textsuperscript{143} and Woltering\textsuperscript{144} agree with Carrier’s analysis in general but disagree with his terminology. They use auto-Orientalism rather than ethno-Orientalism when discussing the self-view of the non-Western Self, and I follow this suggestion.

Confusingly, the terms Orientalism, ethno-Orientalism, and auto-Orientalism are often used in reference to any subaltern non-Western group or area. This is, for instance, the case for the Melanesians that are the focus of Lindstrom’s study on Occidentalism.\textsuperscript{145} These Melanesians would not refer to themselves as Easterners. This contrasts with nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals, including Şābûnji, who explicitly and repeatedly refer to themselves as Easterners, or sharqiyyīn in Arabic. This explicit usage demonstrates that the East, and the discourse of being Eastern, played an important role in their social consciousness.

Deringil’s examples of the dancing girls and Sufi dervishes show that certain people who classified themselves as Easterners perceived their own society \textit{indeed} as backward. Even for Easterners, the West –epitomized by Western elites– was often associated with advancement, while the East –epitomized by the desert tribes of Arabia, dancing dervishes and other exoticisms– was associated with backwardness.\textsuperscript{146} It is for this reason that the East must adapt to the West, and not the other way around. At the same time, however, nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals rejected the Westernization (\textit{tafarnuj}) that they perceived around them, and rebuked those who acted too foreign, too Western, or too ‘Frankish’. These two conflicting meanings of the West again justify an ethnomethodological approach towards issues of identity, as Ottomans or Easterners could refer to the West with a positive and with a negative connotation.

One last remark on the relation between East and West is necessary. There is an obvious geographical relation between the East and the West. It is therefore tempting to understand explicit

\begin{footnotes}
\item[143] 1995: 35.
\item[144] 2011: 4.
\item[145] See Lindstrom 1995.
\item[146] Deringil 1999: 150-165.
\end{footnotes}
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references to the East and Easterner in nineteenth-century Arabic texts as mirroring a discourse about the West and the Westerners. East-West dichotomies did appear explicitly around 1870. In 1861 Buṭrus al-Bustānī spoke of the benefits of civilization (‘fawā‘id al-tamaddun’) that came “from the direction of the West”.147 In 1870 Şābūnji referred to Augustine of Hippo as “one of the pillars of the West”.148 In the mid-1880s the concept ‘West’ had crystallized sufficiently for the Beiruti magazine al-Muqtaṭaf to regularly use the terms al-gharb without further explanation.149 However, as will be seen in the next chapter, references to the East also occur without references to a West. This implies that the hypothetical ‘non-East’, as constitutive Other that makes references to Eastern and East meaningful, does not necessarily demonstrate that the term ‘West’ is also meaningful and understood. Put differently, references to the East (al-sharq) or Easterner (sharqī) obviously are meaningful, but it is imprecise to conclude anything about the discursive West on the basis of such references.

For Louis Şābūnji, the Easterners and the Westerners as collective identities are especially significant because he worked both in London and New York –imagined as located in the West– as well as in Beirut, Cairo, and Istanbul –imagined as located in the East. The contrast between the discursive East and West is potentially very pronounced in Şābūnji’s al-Naḥla magazine, when it was published bilingually in both English and Arabic during the years 1877-1880. This magazine will be addressed in the last chapter of the present study.

**Conclusion**

The discourses of identity summarized above all have their own particular characteristics and backgrounds. For example, the national ethnie discourse of the Christian Syrian intellectuals was a theoretical construct, invented as a response to the challenges of religious polarization. As such, Syrian patriotism was the product of a tiny elite –a newly emerging Christian middle class– who

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148 Şābūnji 1870b: 162.
claimed the right to define identity for the rest of the population. This shows that Syrian patriotism was a response to the observation that people did not think in terms of national solidarity, but rather in religious terms. In general, the same is true for the Ottomanism of al-Bustānī. However, collective identification in terms of religious affiliation was not an intellectual response to perceived social ills. Religious polarization was the local corollary of European and Ottoman reform projects, and as such appeared without native theorists arguing for it. Despite this difference, both national and religious identities are resources for interlocutors to invoke in language.