Identities in early Arabic journalism: The case of Louis Şābūnji

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The Bee in conflict with Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1870)

“One day a boy saw a bee [naḥla] that sat on a flower [zahra]. The boy was very thoughtless and started to confront the bee with hatred and aggression. The bee noticed this, turned towards him, and stung him between the eyes. He immediately fainted and fell to the ground, beating it with his hands and his feet. Then his father, who was a peasant farmer, heard him. At that very moment he was ardently working with an unrefined pen, which he used to write letters to his friends. He put the pen aside, hurried to his son, carried him to the house, and asked the mother of the boy to cure him. His wife said to him: ‘bring me some honey of the bee that stung him, as this will cure the boy’. Her husband then said to her: ‘Alas woman, what to do now, because the bee who stung him is dead’. She said: ‘But how and when?’ He then said: ‘Well, our ancestors already knew that a bee dies when it stings a person’. When he said this, the bee suddenly buzzed around him, and he jumped around in fright of it. He wanted to chase it away, but the bee was more headstrong than him and stung him in his gloomy face. (...) The woman said: ‘Tell me, when will you stop being stupid? (...) God did not give the bee a weapon to destroy itself, but to protect itself from its enemy.”

Soon after Ṣâbūnjî started his magazine al-Naḥla in 1870, he initiated a polemic with Buṭrus al-Bustānī and his son Salīm al-Bustānī. This chapter deals with this polemic, which unfolded in different periodicals. Ṣâbūnjî’s side was represented in al-Naḥla and al-Naḥla wal-zahra, and the Bustānī’s side was represented in their two periodicals, al-Jinān and al-Janna. Ṣâbūnjî came off worst; both his magazines were banned by the Ottoman authorities while the Bustānīs were allowed to continue their periodicals. The parable above is taken from al-Naḥla wal-zahra; it gives a

1 Shalfūn 1871: 13.
metaphorical account of Şabûnji’s conflict with the Bustânîs from the former’s perspective. The bee (Şabûnji) is represented as the victim of aggression, by the son (Salîm) and by the father (Buṭrus). The son is heedless and immature and perhaps also frail. The father is simple, naïve and distinctly pre-modern for unquestioningly accepting knowledge that is handed down through the ages. The woman is represented as reasonable and intelligent, and sides with the bee. She explains that both the son and the father are ignorant, and that the bee merely reacts to what they do to it.²

The first part of this chapter consists of an account of the relations between Şabûnji and the Bustânîs and of their polemic. Besides a short article by Yazbak and a few lines by Zolondek, this conflict has not yet been studied.³ The second part analyzes those passages from the polemic that gives information about identities. The identity that plays the most prominent role in the polemic is the Eastern; others that will be discussed are the Syrian identity and different religious identities. Following the principles of Membership Categorization Analysis, I will analyze how Şabûnji makes these identities relevant and consequential as part of his communicative goals. The third part will discuss my conclusions about these references to collective identities.

4.1 Şabûnji and the Bustânîs

Key players and their magazines
The Christian-Druze conflict of 1860 was followed by a period of ‘long peace’ and prosperity for Mount Lebanon and Beirut.⁴ During the two decades after 1860, Beirut became the most vibrant center of cultural life in the Arab world. The year 1870 was to be a crucial year for Arabic journalism. In that year alone seven periodicals were launched in Beirut, including Şabûnji’s al-Naḥla, Buṭrus al-Bustânî’s al-Jinān, and Salîm al-Bustânî’s al-Janna.

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² Interestingly, bees do die when they sting a person.
³ Yazbak 1957; Zolondek 1966: 102.
⁴ The term ‘long peace’ is a reference to the title of Akarli’s book (1993), which discusses this period.
Buṭrus al-Bustānī’s role as the architect of a new national and religiously neutral consciousness has often been stressed. To al-Bustānī, the inter-confessional riots of 1860 demonstrated the necessity of embracing a religiously neutral waṭanī-identity based on a shared Syrian fatherland, rather than a religiously inspired identity based on the religious communities. Al-Bustānī repeatedly articulated this idea, firstly in his Naṭīr Sūriya pamphlets of 1860.

In addition, al-Bustānī’s National School (‘al-Madrasa al-Waṭaniyya’) was grounded on the same principle. In January 1870 al-Bustānī’s al-Jinān magazine appeared for the first time, becoming “the first major Arabic literary, historical, socio-political, and educational journal of the Arab world”. It was also al-Jinān in which al-Bustānī propagated patriotic unity. Its motto, printed on the first page of the first issue, underscores this unequivocally: ‘Ḥubb al-waṭan min al-īmān’ (approximately ‘Love of the fatherland is [an article] of faith’). Al-Jinān was published fortnightly, and addressed a wide range of subjects, including politics, society, history, and geography. Dagmar Glaß notices the priority that al-Jinān accords to objective coverage of political events. She also underlines the religious neutrality of al-Jinān, carefully avoiding sectarian tensions. Buṭrus al-Bustānī died in 1883, but his family members continued al-Jinān until 1886.

Fruma Zachs analyzes the emergence of a Syrian non-religious identity in the writings of Buṭrus al-Bustānī and others. In his review of Zachs’ book, Kedar asks the question whether there was “any opposition to the writing of those Christian Arab intellectuals she describes? Was there writing in newspapers or in books that expressed opposition to al-Bustānī and his

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6 Buṭrus al-Bustānī was not the very first to propagate this idea, as Khalil al-Khūrī already called for patriotic unity in 1858 (Zachs 2005: 163-164). However, al-Bustānī was the most outspoken person.
8 Zolondek 1966: 144.
9 On al-Jinān, see primarily Eissa 2000 and Glaß 2004: 134-139.
11 Ṭarrāzī 1913b: 45-47.
12 Zachs 2005.
proclivities?”13 As will be demonstrated in this chapter, this is indeed the case. In December 1870 Šābūnjī would vigorously attack al-Bustānī’s religiously neutral waṭanī-identity in the pages of his new magazine al-Naḥla.

Šābūnjī started his magazine in May 1870, and it closely resembled al-Jinān in appearance, size, and subjects. In general, the contents of al-Naḥla were very varied. The first page of the first issue (see the image) presents an outline of the contents that al-Naḥla planned to address. He mentioned eight topics: science, industry, history, linguistics, and domestic and foreign events (ḥawādith waṭaniyya, and ḥawādith ajnabiyya), humorous articles, and short stories. This first issue included, among others topics, the use of animals for mankind, tobacco, the benefits of industry over trade, and human sacrifice among Babylonians and the Assyrians.

Interestingly, the outline of al-Naḥla also explicitly mentions what the magazine will avoid: religious and political subjects. The statement that religious matters are omitted brings al-Naḥla in agreement with Buṭrus al-Bustānī’s policy of religious neutrality. At some point Šābūnjī jettisoned the principle of not discussing religion; as will be discussed below, al-Naḥla attacked al-Jinān for propagating atheism. The second subject to be avoided, politics, was indeed generally avoided, and this aspect sets al-Naḥla apart from al-Jinān. As a consequence the absence of articles on current affairs is remarkable; only the Franco-Prussian War that started in July 1870 generated some attention of the periodical.14

It seems that Šābūnjī wrote most of al-Naḥla’s articles himself, but there were also other contributors. One of them, Bishāra Zalzal (1851-1905), later became a medical doctor and a regular contributor to other magazines as well.15 One of Zalzal’s submissions to al-Naḥla discusses the need to buy locally manufactured products as opposed to imported goods. This was also done by “our early ancestors the Phoenicians, who developed a large number of skills such as the production of purple”.16 The

13 Kedar 2008: 784.
14 Šābūnjī was unmistakably sympathetic towards the French in this conflict.
16 Šābūnjī 1870b: 74.
النحلة

النحلة

تأملُ ما راق وأفاد مِن أمَّ المواد
مرتبة على ثانِينِ أبواب

عليَّ 2 صناعة 3 تاريِخية، لموية 4 حوادث وطنية
تحوادث أجنبية 24 مُؤفِّه سنة 6 روايات إخِتِراف
ما خلا المواد الدينية والسياسية

ها نحلة نجي ودور مَعَارِفٌ من رؤية فيها صدور تَشْرَح
رُهَدَت نهج حَيَّة وسِيَاسة حَفظة على دين وحكم مَقْطَع
قد أمر بالدنيِّ، أرباب الهدى وروع السِياسة لِلجرأة تَسْترِح

جُزَأ أَوْلٍ

طبعت في بيروت في المطبعة المُخصَّصة في 11 إبريل سنة 1870
genealogical relation between the ancient Phoenicians and the current inhabitants of the region that Zalzal sketches is revealing. His remark predates the earliest Arabic genealogical relation, found by Kaufman in his study on the emergence of Phoenicianism, by almost twenty years.¹⁷

In June 1870 Salīm al-Bustānī (1848-1884) started al-Janna, a newspaper that appeared twice a week, consisting of four pages. Buṭrus’ son also became a prominent figure in the Beiruti cultural scene. He is recognized particularly as a seminal figure in the evolution of the Arabic historical novel.¹⁸ In addition, he wrote many editorial articles, predominantly discussing politics, in his father’s al-jinān. Salīm’s al-Janna appeared much more frequently than the monthly al-jinān and the fortnightly al-Nahla, and al-Janna had a clear focus on current affairs, politics, and trade. One year later Salīm al-Bustānī founded an additional newspaper, al-Junayna, which appeared four times a week. Simultaneously he continued al-Janna, and the combination al-Janna and al-Junayna is regarded as the first Arabic daily newspaper.¹⁹ Both newspapers existed until about the same time that al-jinān ceased to be published, 1886.

An account of the polemic
During the first six months of 1870 Ṣābūnjī was on friendly terms with the Bustānīs. Ṣābūnjī wrote two articles in al-jinān on languages and language theory, which appeared in February and May.²⁰ When al-Nahla appeared for the first time in May, al-jinān wished Ṣābūnjī good luck with his magazine. Similarly, al-Nahla wished Salīm al-Bustānī good luck when he started al-Janna in June.²¹ In exciting metaphors, Ṣābūnjī praises the fact that Beirut’s intellectual climate was booming. In reference to various Beiruti

¹⁷ Kaufman (2004: 41) mentions an article in al-Muqtaṭaf, dating to 1889. Hansen (2005: 46) also found references to the “mythical lands of Phoenicia” from the late 1870s. Note also that, in 1872, Ṣābūnjī invoked the idea of Phoenicia in his Old Mother Phoenicia.


¹⁹ On al-Janna and al-Junayna, see Glaß 2004: 84-85. I have not found any copies of al-Junayna.

²⁰ Ṣābūnjī 1870a; Ṣābūnjī 1870c.

²¹ Ṣābūnjī 1870b: 61.
magazines, Ṣābūnjī writes that the bee (al-naḥla) can now fly from garden to garden (from jinān to janna) and from garden to flower (from janna to zahra) in order to collect good things. In a line of poetry Ṣābūnjī also writes (qtd 1): “May He [God] preordain that he [Salīm al-Bustānī] plants his pretty small garden, so that our tiny bee can indulge on the nectar of its flowers.”

In somewhat covert terms Ṣābūnjī proposes friendly relations and possibly cooperation with al-Janna. However, following the metaphor closely would suggest al-Naḥla to be parasitizing al-Janna. This is of course not what Ṣābūnjī meant, but it becomes a rather adequate description of the events that occurred later that year.

Four weeks after Ṣābūnjī had wished Salīm al-Bustānī good luck, he accused Salīm’s al-Janna of instigating apocalyptic fears among his reading public, thereby initiating the first of two distinct conflicts. Al-Janna had quoted two English astronomers who had observed that the sun’s surface was in ‘great disturbance’, and that the sun was sending out beams of electric light. Before the end of next year, this might result in ‘strange events’ that were hitherto unseen in the world. In Ṣābūnjī’s response to this article he claimed that al-Janna was spreading fears about drought and disaster because of this increased solar activity.

He devoted nine pages – half of the issue of al-Naḥla – to refuting these claims, and he did this in a particularly arrogant manner. The Bustānīs responded to al-Naḥla with an article in al-Jinān, and not in al-Janna, which published the original article. This response did not explicitly mention Ṣābūnjī’s critique, but it informed its readers that, as far as they could surmise, there was no reason to worry about the increased solar activity or any strange events. In his turn, Ṣābūnjī

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22 Ṣābūnjī 1870b: 61. Note Ṣābūnjī’s usage of the term ‘small garden’ (junayna); Salīm al-Bustānī later started a newspaper with that name.

23 The point under discussion is the discovery of solar flames by Richard Carrington and Richard Hodgson. For a contemporary account in an American newspaper, see in the bibliography ‘The Sun and the Earth’ (1870). Unfortunately, the issue of al-Janna that contained the article that Ṣābūnjī responded to, the fifth issue dated 9 July 1870, has probably not survived. I have reconstructed its contents on the basis of later references in al-Jinān and al-Naḥla.

24 Ṣābūnjī 1870b: 113-121.

25 Bustānī 1870: 432.
wrote a number of articles on the sun and on electricity in the ninth and tenth issues of al-Nahla. These articles did not explicitly refer to al-Janna or al-Jinān, but the conflict clearly resonated in al-Naḥla’s choice of topics.

The Bustānīs then responded for a second time in al-Jinān, directly addressing al-Naḥla and questioning Şābūnjī’s motives. This second response triggered Şābūnjī to become downright hostile to al-Janna and now also to al-Jinān. The eleventh issue of al-Naḥla included three articles that attacked the Bustānīs. The first article criticized the interference of Buṭrus al-Bustānī’s al-Jinān in a conflict that was initiated by Salīm al-Bustānī’s al-Janna. The second article, entitled ‘The downfall of the sunbeam of al-Janna and al-Jinān’, systematically refutes al-Jinān’s second response to al-Naḥla. In this article Şābūnjī accuses the Bustānīs of narrow-mindedness, intellectual incapability, and detestable self-aggrandizement. The third article is a parable entitled ‘Fatherly advice’, which is similar to the parable that introduced this chapter. The parable mentions a young boy who tries to take honey from a hive, angry bees who strike back, and a father who rescues his son and explains to him how to handle bees properly. Also included in the eleventh issue of al-Naḥla was a contribution—a eulogy on al-Naḥla—by a certain Aḥmad Wahbī. Aḥmad Wahbī subsequently complains in al-Jinān that Şābūnjī had distorted his original contribution to al-Naḥla so that it became a far more outspoken pro-Şābūnjī and anti-Bustānī text. Şābūnjī did not respond anymore to this charge of falsification, and the conflict fizzled out in August.

In December 1870 Şābūnjī initiated a second conflict, when al-Naḥla opened its 29th issue with the header ‘War on God, kings, and believers! Instigated by a student of Voltaire in al-Jinān’. The article that Şābūnjī responded to had appeared under the title ‘The

26 Bustānī 1870: 461-462.
28 Şābūnjī 1870b: 169.
29 Bustānī 1870: 526-528.
30 Şābūnjī 1870b: 449.
الجزاء التاسع والعشرون
السبت في 10 كانون أول غ. سنة 1870

حبب على الله والملوك وإماعاب الابن اجتازها أحد براءة
فولير في الجبان

قد جاء في النزال الغريب- أن الري ردي، كله ما جاكو صدي- فقد اعتى، إحدى كتب أجيال أصحاب السعادة والإضافة. ولم تنتج فيه النانج التي شوبها في الجالسة، حتى ألفت بالنص في النذل والاحكام. لا يُلب داراد كرارا على كثير وينقل عن الطعم في مذهب على حدة إلى النذل في جميع الإدابات وجميع الحكام جمع العلماء والعلماء والعلماء من来了ينوين والمرامين. وحاجز، على نذر نزاهية في جريدة ندي بالمدن والمدن، وحققها وشالة لتفر الترفع والحرف، وراً عل ذك الجران.

11- فقد جاء في النزال الغريب، إلى الذين من الرجال (صح 70) في خرفا - فترى ملكاً بالغ، بـ "بدأ بالرخ إلى ميام أنا عن خرجه لمكان قاطعاً بلاداً غريبة من بلاده ويطير إلى

الجبر- أما لما طالنا هذه العبارات، وعلناها في الجبر 32 من أجيال، وإنناها معرفة بالجملة والتعليم والإشارة والإضافة. ولهم لم تنزع إلى كفاحنا طعاما في إخراجه من مدارس الابن، بإحكام إلى جمعة المزار الملاح. لشيء السراج جملة من الكلمات على إماعاب السعادة، وإماعاب الإضافة، لا لانا استذكراها على ذلك الخطاب من شاريته الكبار، فصبرنا إذا في الصبر السلام، وبافنا مثناهن، على تلك العملاء، فتبين أن كتاب أجيال الذي أجرين في إماعاب السعادة، ويوارن أجيالنا، فإن لم يمض فقط على علبة مدارس المحلي والمملكة الإبدع ولا سبع عصرية تجف حرف النا. ولهم يدرس

عيونا على خمسة أمناء فيولير والطلاب روس وفيما يذكر الشاهدين. وقد نسب جزء إلى الجراك.

الفرض بادعاه على أنهم يحرون الحب في الأمة، وجمع أمائهم الإبداع التمائم السائل على بعض المؤمنين، وليس سندًا على حقوق النا، ويدرس الدماب، وادي الرهبر، القرآن، فليلئظ هذا الجراح تراج.
The Bee in conflict with Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1870)

War’ in al-Jinān. ³¹ This article, written by an anonymous contributor, mainly criticized incapable rulers and warmongers, all without any mention of the name Voltaire. Despite this, Šābūnjī argued that Rousseau, Machiavelli, and primarily Voltaire, whom he unambiguously and repeatedly referred to as ‘the unbeliever Voltaire’, had inspired the author of the article. On this basis he concludes that al-Jinān “spread the teachings of unbelief under the pretext of civilization and love of the fatherland”⁴² In addition, he classified Arabic translations of Voltaire’s works, and by implication also the article in al-Jinān, as a “flood of misery”.⁵³ Almost the entire 29th issue of al-Naḥla is dedicated to rebutting al-Jinān’s article.

Both the anonymous author of the article and the Bustānīs responded to Šābūnjī’s accusations in the 24th issue of al-Jinān, primarily condemning Šābūnjī’s aggressive tone. They argued that Šābūnjī consciously misrepresented their article “under the veil of protecting the religions”, that he had done so out of jealousy of the success of al-Jinān, and that he wanted to ferment trouble in order to overshadow al-Jinān’s earlier accusations of falsification.⁴⁴ The 30th issue of al-Naḥla is largely silent on the matter, but the 31st issue pours a torrent of abuse over al-Jinān. It not only systematically responds to the last issue of al-Jinān, but it also includes new attacks and accusations directed at the Bustānīs. For instance, Šābūnjī argued that Buṭrus al-Bustānī plagiarized others’ work,⁴⁵ and that the novel al-Huyām fī jinān al-Shām, written by Salīm al-Bustānī and published serially in al-Jinān, “corrupted the healthy minds of young people”⁴⁶.

At some point during their conflict, the Bustānīs contacted the Ottoman authorities in order to convince them to take action.

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³¹ Bustānī 1870: 689-690 and 721-722.
³² Šābūnjī 1870b: 463.
³³ Šābūnjī 1870b: 463.
³⁴ Bustānī 1870: 747-750.
³⁵ Šābūnjī 1870b: 494-495. He specifically mentions Jarmānūs Farḥāt (1670-1732), a Maronite archbishop of Aleppo.
³⁶ Šābūnjī 1870b: 492. This novel by Salīm al-Bustānī has received some scholarly attention in the last few years; see Bawardi 2007; Sheehi 2010.
against *al-Nahla*, which they did.37 Ṣābūnjī was first warned not to engage in slanderous behavior towards the Bustānīs. He did not obey, and he was consequently prohibited from publishing in Beirut. The 31st issue of *al-Nahla*, published on 24 December, proved to be the last.

Ṣābūnjī immediately tried to avoid the ban by cooperating with another Beirut journalist, Yūsuf Shalfūn, who had published *al-Zahra* magazine in 1870. They joined forces and published the first issue of *al-Nahla wal-zahra* magazine on 2 January 1871, and the second issue on 5 January 1871. The first page of the first issue announced that this new magazine would fight “unbelief and viciousness”, a statement in which the conflict with the Bustānīs clearly resonates.38 The first issue of the magazine also included the parable ‘A boy and a bee’ with which this chapter was introduced.39 Because of its polemical tone and contents, and because the title included the word *al-Nahla*, it is quite unsurprising that this magazine was also banned by the Ottoman authorities. However, Ṣābūnjī and Shalfūn did not give up. They rewrote the first issue *al-Nahla wal-zahra*, renamed it *al-Najāḥ*, and republished it on 9 January 1871. A comparison between the original *al-Nahla wal-zahra* and the rewritten *al-Najāḥ* (see next page for the first page of both issues) shows a number of significant alterations. For example, the reference to the fight against unbelief and viciousness was deleted, as well as the mentioning of *al-Nahla* in the first line. At the same time, not all the polemical content was removed in *al-Najāḥ*, as the parable was maintained. Again, the authorities responded; on condition that Louis Ṣābūnjī would not participate, Shalfūn was permitted to continue publishing *al-Najāḥ*.40 One week later, the third issue41 of *al-Najāḥ* appeared, and from this point on Ṣābūnjī’s name no longer appeared.

38 Shalfūn 1871: 1.
40 Yazbak 1957: 68.
41 Shalfūn and Ṣābūnjī did not bother to make a second issue of *al-Najāḥ*; instead, the second issue of *al-Nahla wal-zahra* was presented as the second issue of *al-Najāḥ*. Importantly, this issue did not include any polemical content, so there was no immediate need to rewrite it.
الغادة والزهرة

العدد الأول من السنة الثانية
الآلافن في 2 ك 3 سنة 1871

الغادة

تتملَّنا وبقية سعيّنا المعلمة. ونجدّ نكتنا ووزرنا في ممامتها
المدينة نقلت مكنتها بانتصارها مكبت. وسثبت أمها سواها كرايك السعيدة.
وقتًا لما حقًا على الفلاح. وجدًا سائر الصلاح. желَّناها للكافر والطوف.
وأرتعا في بريق نفيه الله في المساء والصباح. وعملنا في ربيع المسرات والاعفاح.
لقد لاحك كوكب النجاح. ونحل في سورية نوره الوضاح. ونتشر في الشرق شماع
هذا الصباح. وغردت بلبل العربي على أفناد العارف بوصوها المصاحب. وساد في
الشرق سلطان الصلاح. وعاد السورة حب المارف واللفاح. ورئاح بنو
الوطئ لرودي البهجة غابة الأذباح. فسمحت ذات لحمة وطوار عين اصمة
النجاح. لثبتي هذا الصيف المميز الفيد. الناسدها من بعيد. بعد احتراب
عن وطننا السعيد. وخلقت لمكان إلهي. إنزته في العالم المئي. وقالت له
وطيلة سحال. وابت أهلاً، هم ورقي اوج العلا. فاعطت لك أكباً من زهور
السورة والأذبح. وقد شاد لك المعزري شباك الموال. عرضا تعلّه باذا الجبل.
فهك رائدًا يرشدك الصراد الفلاح. وهو في سرح ورفتاح. من بانين دولته
فازت سورية بالنجاح. وبسيف صوفيه ذلت الأندلس. وألق الضاح.
فالي أعدوا منائه ندوين السيف والتحداد. ودقّت مئذناً رذاً ولين الجر من المداد.
فهذا الذي قام بصنعه أصدّرنا بسيف السفنون. نجاحه مرار الفيض من فوق
العصور. فثال

Al-Naḥla wal-Zahra 1, dated 2 January 1871, Beirut, p.1.
١٨٧١، بيروت، ص. ١.
Despite this prohibition, Şabūnjī anonymously contributed a number of articles to al-Najāḥ until May or August 1871. One copy of the third issue of al-Najāḥ contains a few marginal notes, in the handwriting of Şabūnjī, that point out which articles were written by him. In addition, it seems that Şabūnjī was also responsible for the translation and publication of Alexandre Dumas’ novel The Count of Montecristo, which appeared serially in al-Najāḥ until August 1871. However, during the spring and summer a conflict about Şabūnjī’s remuneration emerged which ruined his relation with Shalfūn and the new printer of al-Najāḥ, Rizq Allāh Khadrā. On 16 August 1871 Şabūnjī announced in the magazine al-Bashīr that he would quit working for al-Najāḥ altogether. Two days later he left Beirut and boarded a ship to Egypt.

Şabūnjī became the first Syrian journalist of many more who later fled Ottoman censorship. In Egypt he published al-Naḥla al-ḥurra (‘The Free Bee’), a pamphlet in which he continued his polemic with the Bustānīs. Its motto, printed on the first page, is telling: “The Free Bee is printed in a free country, published if necessary and without schedule, in order to correct the commentaries of al-Janna and al-jinān among the people”. Unfortunately, no copy of The Free Bee has been found.

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42 Şabūnjī points to May in Ḥallāq 1874: 40 and to August in the magazine al-Bashīr (found in Holt 2009: 63).
43 One article discusses the Franco-Prussian War, and the other discusses Victor Hugo. The copy that includes these notes is in the Beyazıt State Library in Istanbul. Holt 2009: 63. Şabūnjī’s incomplete translation was never published.
44 For an account of this conflict, see Ḥallāq 1874: 39-43. The conflict was still unresolved in 1874. Rizq Allāh Khadrā returns again in the 1874 conflict with the Maronites, discussed in the next chapter. Holt 2009: 63.
45 Frost 1890: 48.
46 The electronic database of the Alexandria Library (see in the bibliography Bibliotheca Alexandria (n.d.) gives al-Nahla al-ḥurra’s motto, but no copy seems to be preserved there. The Beyazıt State Library in Istanbul may hold a copy of al-Nahla al-ḥurra, but it has not been found there either. I thank Mr. Özcan Geçer for his enquiries about this pamphlet.
4.2 Identities in communication

In this study I approach Šābūnjī’s and Bustānīs’ debates as a polemic. As stated in the methodological chapter, I discern three parties to every polemic: the two parties who compete with each other regarding a certain topic or topics, and the reading public who is addressed. As such, the two opposing factions are competing for authority and legitimacy in the eyes of the public. This principle is clearly discernible in the conflict under consideration. In both cases of disagreement, solar activity and Voltaire, Šābūnjī explicitly stirred up the conflict by reacting strongly to a seemingly insignificant article. In this way Šābūnjī stresses the incapacity of the Bustānīs to grasp, evaluate, and explain the issues at hand to his public, thereby delegitimizing their authority to address these issues. At the same time, Šābūnjī stresses his own capacity to articulate and explain these issues to the public. This vying for authority in the eyes of the reading public reflects their intense competition in Beirut; both Louis Šābūnjī and the Bustānīs were simultaneously active in literature, education, journalism, and religion.

In the following pages I will study passages in al-Naḥla – and incidentally also in al-Jinān– which provide information about how ‘we’ are or how ‘we’ should act, whether ‘we’ is framed as Arabs, Syrians, Easterns, et cetera. Following the principles of Membership Categorization Analysis, I approach the references to identities as acts of ascribing an identity, which are made as part of communication with others. From this perspective, references to identities carry functions in the communication that takes place, and these functions vary from situation to situation. Consequently, each reference to an identity carries a situated function. At the same time, not every identity can be invoked with the same function in the same context. This is where Discourse Analysis complements MCA. Whether identities ‘fit’ the message depends on the meanings that are associated with the identities. These meanings are socially constructed in discourse. On the one hand, the language user remakes a meaning of an identity by referring to it in communication, thereby reifying the discourse of identity. Simultaneously, discourses of identity provide the language user
with information which identities fit and which do not. Thus, each reference to an identity also reflects a process of negotiation between language user and discourses of identity. This approach lets the people involved themselves –Ṣābūnjī and his peers– set their situated identities in their interaction with others, and in this case with their readers. This approach is inspired by the desire to see how they made sense of the various identities that were available to them.

**Solar flames and the blessings of the East**

In this polemic, the topic of identity is not an issue. Instead, they debate about the sun, electricity, and other topics in the domain of the natural sciences. However, one short passages does include a reference to an identity, and thereby touches upon the issue of identity. I take this short passage separately and analyze it in detail. *Al-Jinān* discusses the potential harm of the solar flames, and explains that there is no reason to worry (qtd 2):

“In the end, trusting divine providence, we do not fear evil from the sunbeam of the two mentioned scientists. If it [the sunbeam] visits our planet, then we the Easterners have blessings of the prophets and the saints, that push it away from our country and that avert its evil from us.”

*Al-Jinān* speaks here on behalf of the Easterners, and states that ‘we the Easterners’ do not fear evil from the sunbeam. The reference to ‘we the Easterners’ is understood as the act of ascribing an identity (Eastern) to a social group (‘we’). The ‘we’ is now cast into a category with characteristics or features that are normatively or conventionally associated with Easterners. The situation in which this act of claiming an identity is performed is a potential natural disaster. This situation makes identities that normatively or conventionally connote confidence or security suitable for reference. In this light, the situated function of this reference to

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49 Bustānī 1870: 432. After *al-Janna* had published its initial article on the solar flames, Ṣābūnjī responded in *al-Naḥla*, and subsequently the Bustānīs responded to Ṣābūnjī in *al-Jinān*. This passage is from this response.
being Eastern is to communicate to the readers that there is no need to worry about the solar flames. Being Eastern fits this situation, because of its association with divine privileges. Thus, *al-Jinān* couches the practice of ‘worrying about natural disasters’ as *un-Eastern*. As pointed out in the methodological chapter, this is a study on discursive practices, and specifically referencing practices. This means that the question whether ‘we’ **really** are Eastern, or whether the East really is divinely blessed, is irrelevant. Similarly, the question of who precisely are meant by ‘we the Easterners’ (does it include the Japanese? or Moroccans?) is also irrelevant. Any reference to East and Easterners is understood as having situated functions within the communication that takes place, rather than as reflecting any social reality.

*Al-Jinān’s* invocation of the Eastern identity is mediated by a particular meaning that is attached to the East, namely that the East is distinct because of its religious nature. As a social construct, this meaning is part of the discourse of being Eastern, and *al-Jinān’s* reference reflects this discourse. At the same time, *al-Jinān* repeats and reproduces the idea that the East is religious, thereby reifying the discourse of being Eastern. In other words, *al-Jinān* ‘reminds’ its readers that the East is **indeed** very religious and therefore distinct from the non-East. If, for whatever reason, the reader or listener was not already aware of this religious connotation, then a few of these reminders make it clear to him that this is a well-known connotation of the East and of the Easterners. Ascribing the Eastern identity is therefore not only an act of **making** a reference to an identity but also an act of **re-making** a discourse of identity.

Ṣābūnji did not reply to *al-Jinān’s* remark about Eastern blessings, nor did he make similar usage of references to identities in order to achieve particular communicative goals. Consequently, the dispute on the solar flames did not evolve into more than a scientific debate on the nature of the sun and the solar system. In contrast, as will be shown in the following pages, the second topic of disagreement did take the form of a clash of identities, becoming a full-blown dispute over identity, society, and behavior.
Voltaire
The second polemic revolves around the person of Voltaire. The essence of Šābūnjī’s criticism is that Voltaire is an unbeliever who should not be “received hospitably” by al-Jinān. Šābūnjī regularly refers to him as “Voltaire the unbeliever”, “leader of the unbelievers” (raʾīs al-kafara) or variations of these expressions. This unbelief, Šābūnjī argues, “destroys sound minds like fire and asphalt”. The disagreement about Voltaire becomes an example of contesting identity when Šābūnjī casts the conflict in an us-versus-them dichotomy (qtd 3):

“Our country is honored by religions since the beginning; we do not want it to become dishonored with the unbelief of certain students of Voltaire the foreigner and others, by the writers of al-Jinān.”

In this quote, Šābūnjī explicitly contrasts Voltaire with ‘us’, and he does this along an axis of religion and unbelief. On the one end of the axis lies ‘our country’, which is defined by one characteristic: it is honored by religions. On the other end of the axis lies ‘Voltaire the foreigner’, who is presented as a threat to the religious character of ‘our country’. The explicit label ‘foreigner’ furthermore highlights his Otherness. The situated function of the reference to ‘our country’ is to demonstrate why Voltaire’s unbelief is undesirable: it is incompatible with the essence of ‘our country’. This essence cannot be missed because it is explicitly spelled out: ‘our country’ is honored with religions. Šābūnjī thereby reminds his reading public of the association of ‘our country’ with religions, and at the same time also reproduces and reifies this association.

It is not coincidental that the meaning that informed the reference to ‘our country’ in the last quote is essentially the same meaning that informed al-Jinān’s reference to ‘we the Easterners’ in the previous discussion about the solar flames. Both references reflect and reproduce a socially shared discourse that associates

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50 Šābūnjī 1870b: 457.
51 Šābūnjī 1870b: 458.
52 Šābūnjī 1870b: 459.
religion as a defining aspect of their own community. In al-Jinān’s quote about the solar flames the ‘we’ was explicitly defined as Easterners, while in Ṣābūnjī’s quote the ‘we’ is implicated by the phrase ‘our country’. A few pages further into his polemic against al-Jinān, Ṣābūnjī makes explicit mention of the East, writing that (qtd 4):

“In this quote, Ṣābūnjī frames his attack on al-Jinān again as a collision between a religious in-group that is symbolized by ‘our East’, with an out-group that is symbolized by Westernization (tafarnuj) and by Voltaire. It is here that Ṣābūnjī unambiguously speaks on behalf of the Easterners. ‘Our East’ is represented as under threat, from the books that ‘some Easterners’ have translated, produced, and shipped to Aleppo. Ṣābūnjī couches these acts as decidedly un-Eastern: they cause a “flood of misery” over the East. In this light, the reference to the Eastern identity of the people from Aleppo must be read ironically; the quote draws attention to their failure to act in conformity with what is expected of Easterners. In this way Ṣābūnjī questions and contests the Eastern identity of these Easterners from Aleppo and their assistants. By implication, Ṣābūnjī also addresses the Bustānīs because their articles in al-Jinān also devote attention, Ṣābūnjī

53 Ṣābūnjī 1870b: 463. I have been unable to ascertain who Ṣābūnjī exactly refers to. A possible candidate is Jibrā’il Dallāl, who resided in Marseille and who wrote a poem which “reflects the anti-clerical writings of Voltaire” (Somekh 1992: 63). For further information on Dallāl, see Ṭarrāzī 1913b: 230-234.
alleges, to Voltaire. He thereby also questions and contests the Eastern identity of the Bustānīs.

The quote has not only an Eastern aspect, but also an Arabic aspect, because ‘our East’ is linked with the Arabic language. Thus, Ṣābūnjī couches the threat of Westernization and Voltaire not only as un-Eastern, but also as un-Arabic. By representing the Arabic language as a medium that should not be used for Voltaire’s atheism, the Arabic language also acquires connotations with religiousness.

Finally, the term ‘civilization’ (tamaddun) is used in an ambiguous sense. As has been stressed, civilization had a distinctly positive connotation during the Nahḍa era. However, in this quote it is contextualized by two negative concepts: Westernization and ‘the marginalization of religiousness’. Obviously, the civilization that the Easterners in Aleppo called for is not the civilization that would appeal to Ṣābūnjī. It seems that Ṣābūnjī paraphrased the ‘Easterners in Aleppo’, who merely propagated civilization, but who were not – in Ṣābūnjī’s eyes – civilized.

Finally, the ‘propagation of civilization’ of the Easterners from Aleppo underlines the presence of diametrically opposed ideas on what the term ‘civilization’ exactly entailed during the Nahḍa era. As pointed out in the second chapter, the concern for acquiring progress and civilization can be understood as a mantra, and the quote above nicely illustrates this. In another passage Ṣābūnjī gives his interpretation of what the term ‘civilization’ meant, and he frames it in religious terms. He writes that ‘real civilization’ (tamaddun ḥaqīqī) “can only be built on the foundations of religions”, and on this basis concludes that Voltaire’s unbelief is uncivilized. In extension, he concludes that al-Bustānī acted in conflict with civilization, because of the attention that he allegedly devoted to Voltaire. What Ṣābūnjī does is attack al-Bustānī on common grounds, namely their mutual concern for progress and civilization. It is important to note that this line of

54 It must be stressed again that the contested article does not mention the name Voltaire in the first place.
55 Ṣābūnjī 1870b: 457.
argumentation is possible because of the ambiguity of what the terms progress and civilization exactly entailed.

**Voltaire the Other**

Throughout the polemic Šābūnjī stressed that Voltaire was an unbeliever (kāfir), and he contrasted him with the religiousness of the own community (‘our country’ in quote 2, and ‘our East’ in quote 3). In this light the unbelief of Voltaire functions as constitutive Other that defines ‘our country’ and ‘our East’ as essentially religious. This function of Voltaire can be understood as reflecting a concern about avoiding tafarnuj, a concern which was also shared by the Bustānīs. The question is whether the unbelief of Voltaire is also framed as a characteristic of a collective identity that Voltaire belongs to. In other words, the question is whether Šābūnjī represents the unbelief of Voltaire as typically Western, typically French, or typically European. In order to answer this question, I will address quotes 2 and 3 again.

In quote 2 Šābūnjī writes that “we do not want it [our country] to become dishonored with the unbelief of certain students of Voltaire the foreigner and others”. He referred to Voltaire the ‘foreigner’ (al-ajnabī) rather than Voltaire the Frenchman, Voltaire the European, or just Voltaire. The expression ‘foreigner’ has strong connotations of exclusion, always denoting Otherness of an out-group rather than reinforcing the sameness of an in-group. In addition, this particular foreigner –Voltaire– is repeatedly referred to as an unbeliever, a term that carries a very strong negative connotation. Hence, in this particular example Šābūnjī attaches a negative association to the term ‘foreigner’.

It seems that the negative association of the term al-ajnabī in this example was not an isolated case. In various other cases in *al-Naḥla* the term ajnabī and ajānib carries a, sometimes subtle, negative connotation. In Bishāra Zalzal’s contribution to *al-Naḥla*, briefly discussed above, Zalzal writes that people should not buy foreign products (al-maṣnūʿāt al-ajnabiyya) which are also produced locally, such as shoes and chairs, so as not to rob the local artisans of their income. He also argues that it is a popular misconception that ‘products of foreigners’ (maṣnūʿāt al-ajānib) are
better than local products. In this example the term *ajnabī* and *ajānib* also carry a negative connotation. By contrast, references to Europeans, English, or French are not generally used in a context that invokes negative images about Westernization or *tafarnuj*, about unbelief, or about the protection of the own economy. From this point of view it can be argued that Ṣābūnjī called Voltaire a ‘foreigner’ in order to invoke negative associations, associations that would have been absent when referring to Voltaire as a Frenchman or as a European.

Returning to the question: does the unbelief of Voltaire the foreigner in quote 2 reflect and reproduce the idea that unbelief is a typical characteristic of foreigners? It seems that this is not the case, as the meaning of the terms *ajnabī* and *ajānib* does not go beyond a general negativity that is used as rhetorical device. In the case of Voltaire the situated function of the term *ajnabī* is to stress the religiousness of Ṣābūnjī’s own community. In the case of the foreign products the situated function of the same term is to stress that buying local products is better.

In quote 3 Ṣābūnjī wrote that “Some Easterners from Aleppo” were “wholly engaged in Westernization” as they have translated and produced Voltaire’s books and shipped them to Aleppo. In this example Voltaire was not explicitly defined as a foreigner, but was associated with the negative concept of *tafarnuj*, or Westernization. The question here is whether *tafarnuj* is an implicit reference to a collective identity, for instance to Europeans, Westerners, or to the community of *Ifraunj*. If so, the second question is whether this usage reflects and reproduces the idea that this collective identity is characterized by unbelief.

The terms foreigner and *tafarnuj* carry similar associations: both are ambiguous terms that can point to different practices and values at different occasions, such as clothing, smoking, or gender

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56 Ṣābūnjī 1870b: 74-76.
57 The term is sometimes also translated as ‘Frankification’, for instance by Dawn (1991: 7).
58 The term *Ifraunj* in reference to a collective identity is used sparsely. Ṣābūnjī used it in his London-based al-Naḥla in 1879 (see Ṣābūnjī 1879-1880: 102). Buṭrus al-Bustānī had already used the term in 1859 (found in Sheehi 2011: 62).
The Bee in conflict with Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1870)

relations. In addition, both carry negative connotations; tafarnuj even more so than foreigner. At the same time, the term tafarnuj is different from the term ‘foreigner’ as tafarnuj lacks the strong association of exclusion that the term foreigner has. From this point of view the term tafarnuj might well be used in order to denote an in-group of Ifranj or Europeans. In the conflict about Voltaire, however, Šābūnjī never applies the term tafarnuj to collective identities, to people. In other words, he never created an East-Ifranj or an East-Europe dichotomy in the conflict about Voltaire. Thus, the term tafarnuj also functions as constitutive Other that defines the East, rather than denoting a collective identity of Ifranj or Europeans. This is essentially the same function as the term ajnabi carried in quote 2.

An observation that sheds more light on the relation between tafarnuj and the West or Europe is that Šābūnjī regularly displays an anti-essential image when discussing Europeans. For example, in an attempt to position Voltaire in contemporary French debates Šābūnjī declares that (qtd 5) “the French elite hate to mention Voltaire and distance themselves from him”. What Šābūnjī points out here is that there are some French who hate Voltaire and some French who do not. This anti-essential representation makes it impossible to associate religion or unbelief with the French. Similarly, in a discussion in al-Naḥla that criticizes tobacco, Šābūnjī writes that (qtd 6):

59 This has already been discussed in the second chapter of this thesis.
60 Šābūnjī could have done so, because the terms ‘Europe’ (Urubbā) and East (al-sharq) were very common; the term West was definitely less common in 1870 but it does occur in the eighth issue of al-Naḥla, where Šābūnjī referred to Saint Augustine as ‘one of the pillars of the West’ (aḥad aʾmidat al-gharb, Šābūnjī 1870b: 162).
61 Interestingly, the dichotomy between a religious East versus a materialist West later became a much used topos in Arabic writings, especially in Islamist discourse (Woltering 2011: 130-133). A precursor to this topos can be seen in the discussion about Voltaire, where the East is represented as essentially religious, but the West is not yet represented as essentially unreligious or materialist.
62 Šābūnjī 1870b: 482.
63 Instead, Šābūnjī sketched an ‘elite’ as in-group, and he discursively placed himself in this group too, because he agrees with this elite.
“It is not only the peoples of barbaric countries [who smoke]; it is astonishing that the civilized peoples of Europe, despite their great knowledge, are plagued by the objectionable tragedy of tobacco.”

Again, an anti-essentialist image occurs, as Šābūnjī suggests that there are some Europeans who smoke and some who do not smoke. This aspect makes them similar to ‘the people of barbaric countries’, as they also include people who smoke and who do not do so. In spite of this anti-essential image, the quote does reflect and reproduce the idea that Europeans are more advanced than ‘barbarians’. The smoking of the Europeans is represented as a deviation from the norm, because of the explicit reference to their civilization and their great knowledge. This normativity sets them apart from the barbarians; their smoking is not ‘astonishing’, but rather their expected behavior.

In the light of quotes 4 and 5, it cannot be maintained that the term tafarnuj in quote 3 is an implicit reference to a collective identity, denoting Europeans, Westerners, or French. Instead, the reference to tafarnuj has a situated function as constitutive Other, defining ‘our East’ as religious rather than defining any other collective identity as unreligious. Thus, the term tafarnuj acquires its meaning in quote 3 in contrast with the ‘we’ who are represented as essentially religious.

**Contesting the waṭan**

In the discussion above it has been shown how Šābūnjī represented the Bustānīs as un-Eastern, by invoking and reproducing social knowledge that understands the East as essentially religious. In simple words, *al-Naḥla* communicated to its readers that Easterners are normatively religious, and that people who are not religious cannot really be called Easterners. What is important is that Šābūnjī framed membership of a collective identity –the Easterners– in religious terms. As pointed out in the second chapter, Buṭrus al-Bustānī repeatedly defined Selves and Others in

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64 Šābūnjī 1870b: 8.
religiously neutral terms. In his proposed Syrian fatherland all its inhabitants are bound together, regardless of religious affiliation. In the conflict about Voltaire, Ṣābūnjī attacked al-Bustānī’s ideologically inspired concept of a Syrian fatherland and the associated religiously neutral identity. In al-Naḥla Ṣābūnjī connects Voltaire’s unbelief with this identity, directly attacking Buṭrus al-Bustānī (qtd 7):

“Until now we did not understand the meaning of his [al-Bustānī’s] repeated statement that we, the sons of the East, should leave behind the religious union and adopt the union of the fatherland. But now we understand that it means that we should refuse obedience to faith, and that we should adopt unbelief under the pretext of ‘love of the fatherland and civilization’.”

A few pages further, the same idea returns (qtd 8):

“It comes to my mind that the head of al-Jinān agreed with the mentioned [persons] in order to spread the teachings of unbelief in the East under the pretext of ‘civilization and love of the fatherland’.”

In these two quotes Ṣābūnjī charges al-Bustānī of having a double agenda and acting in conflict with the religious essence of the East. He does so by questioning al-Bustānī’s ideological project that he repeatedly stressed in various publications: the need to avoid seeing the identity of their own community in religious terms. Instead, al-Bustānī proposes to see this ‘own community’ in geographical terms, grounded in a waṭan or fatherland that is loved by the people who inhabit it.

Ṣābūnjī does not denounce the expressions ‘fatherland’ (waṭan) or ‘love for the fatherland’ (ḥubb al-waṭan); he merely

65 Ṣābūnjī 1870b: 459.
66 In the previous line Ṣābūnjī mentions “Voltaire ‘the unbeliever’, Rousseau and Machiavelli” (Ṣābūnjī 1870b: 463).
67 Ṣābūnjī 1870b: 463.
rejects al-Bustānī’s religiously neutral views. In Şābūnjī’s definition of the phrase ‘love for the fatherland’, he again attaches a religious connotation. According to Şābūnjī, real love of the fatherland (ḥubb al-waṭan al-ḥaqīqī) “is the concern for maintaining religions and authorities; it is not, what the owner of al-Jinān thinks it is, spreading error and unbelief”.68

The discursive technique of juxtaposing a concept with its superlative (‘real love for the fatherland’ as opposed to ‘love for the fatherland’) has been seen before, as Şābūnjī contrasted al-Bustānī’s civilization (al-tamaddun) with real civilization (al-tamaddun al-ḥaqīqī), which is built on religious foundations.69 Hence, Şābūnjī attacks al-Bustānī on common grounds: both share a concern for the fatherland and for civilization. Their disagreement, however, lies in their different interpretations of the expressions ḥubb al-waṭan and tamaddun. A similar technique can be seen in al-Jinān’s original article ‘The War’, in which the author writes that ‘true religion’ (al-dīn al-ṣaḥīḥ) forbids killing and plundering.70 Thus, acquiring or maintaining civilization (tamaddun), love for the fatherland (ḥubb al-waṭan), and religion (dīn) are all concerns that Şābūnjī shared with al-Bustānī. Nevertheless, the two attached different interpretations to these terms. This resulted in trivial oppositions where civilization, love for the fatherland, and religion were contrasted with their ‘real’ or ‘true’ counterparts. These juxtapositions highlight, firstly, the importance of these terms in the social consciousness, and secondly, the ambiguity of what these terms exactly entailed. Importantly, their quarrels also make it clear that simply dismissing civilization or religion was not comme il faut for early Arab journalists.

Returning to the term ḥubb al-waṭan; Şābūnjī already used this term in 1866,71 and it also, sparsely, appears in al-Naḥla. Its fourth issue includes a poem entitled ‘Ḥubb al-waṭan’, which is significant as the term waṭan unequivocally refers to the city of

68 Şābūnjī 1870b: 459.
69 Şābūnjī 1870b: 457.
70 Bustānī 1870: 721.
71 Şābūnjī 1866: 140.
The Bee in conflict with Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1870)

Beirut. This usage is remarkable, because the term waṭan usually refers to a substantially larger geographical area, including Mount Lebanon, often Ottoman Syria, and sometimes even the Ottoman Empire in its entirety. Šābūnjī ‘shrinks’ his fatherland, his waṭan, so that it includes only one city. However, the effect of this is that the unifying, supra-confessional meaning that al-Bustānī repeatedly attached to the term is lost. The associations with the sectarian violence that devastated Mount Lebanon (and not Beirut, which became a place of refuge) are also lost. Whereas al-Bustānī combined and unified various social groups under one header, Šābūnjī unraveled the concept again so that the term is only applicable to his city of residence. From this perspective, Šābūnjī’s reference to Beirut as his waṭan can be read as a subtle contestation of al-Bustānī’s ideology of unity in the fatherland.

Another example where Šābūnjī contested al-Bustānī’s understanding of a united waṭan can be read in Šābūnjī’s usage of the plural awṭān. In the preliminary issue of al-Naḥla, Šābūnjī addressed his reading public with the term ‘oh sons of the fatherlands’ (yā banī al-awṭān). This wording has close associations with the well-known expression ‘oh sons of the fatherland’ (yā abnāʾ al-waṭan), which was used repeatedly by al-Bustānī. Šābūnjī changed the singular waṭan into the plural awṭān, and in this way he also challenged the ideologically inspired unity of al-Bustānī. What Šābūnjī stresses is the presence of different fatherlands, and these are all addressed by al-Naḥla. In this way Šābūnjī diametrically opposes al-Bustānī’s call for one fatherland. Al-Bustānī’s call for unity was an ideologically inspired answer to the societal ill of sectarianism, while in Šābūnjī’s usage of the plural awṭān this meaning is entirely lost. One could even argue that the plural awṭān draws extra attention to the internal divisions among al-Naḥla’s target audience.

Finally, the topic of religion obviously played an important role in the polemic with al-Bustānī. As a reminder, the first issue of

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72 Šābūnjī 1870b: 58-60.
73 Šābūnjī 1870b: 2.
74 For instance, every issue of Naḥīr Sūriya (1860) addressed its readers with yā abnāʾ al-waṭan.
Şabdūnji’s *al-Naḥla* explicitly excluded religion from the list of topics that it would address. Until the conflict about Voltaire, Şabdūnji indeed refrained from discussing religious issues. In the polemic with *al-Jinān*, however, Şabdūnji returned to his earlier statement by claiming that he meant to avoid displaying a preference for any religious denomination, rather than avoiding the topic of religion entirely.75 Interestingly, this justification is in line with al-Bustānī’s non-sectarianism, as al-Bustānī also avoided stressing religious divisions. Yet Şabdūnji does not seem to be concerned about fighting sectarian divisions, unlike al-Bustānī.

**Ascribing religious identities**

Şabdūnji stated that he did not want to display a preference for any particular religious denomination in *al-Naḥla* in order to avoid religious polarization.76 In spite of this, in a number of cases Şabdūnji referred to religious identities in ways that suggest disapproval. I argue that in those cases Şabdūnji actually nurtures religious polarization. In the 29th issue of *al-Naḥla*, Şabdūnji addresses the magazine *al-Nashra al-Shahriyya*, which was published by the American Protestant mission in Beirut.77 The following passage was written as an attempt to convince its American Protestant editors to take action against al-Bustānī. Şabdūnji writes (qtd 9):

“And you, Protestant publication [*al-Nashra al-Shahriyya*] (...) who considered it to be your habit to defend the doctrines of your American church, what made you shut your eyes to one notable of your religious denomination, who published in his *al-Jinān* [texts that] defame your religion, and the religion of your leaders, and that of your founders Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli?”78

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75 Şabdūnji 1870b: 457.
76 Şabdūnji 1870b: 457.
77 For more information about this magazine, see Ṭarrāzī 1913a: 69.
78 Şabdūnji 1870b: 459.
In this quote, Buṭrus al-Bustānī is identified as a Protestant, and Protestantism is defined as an American and therefore as a foreign church. It is here that Ṣābūnjī represents al-Bustānī as ‘Americanized’ Easterner. This charge fits within Ṣābūnjī’s wider attempt at contesting al-Bustānī’s identity as one of ‘us’. By defining al-Bustānī as an adherent of a foreign church, Ṣābūnjī represents al-Bustānī as failing to act in accordance with what is expected of members of ‘our’ community. In addition, Ṣābūnjī also criticizes al-Nashra al-Shahriyya and the American mission for failing to act properly: they have not taken action against al-Bustānī.

Ṣābūnjī does not only contest al-Bustānī’s Eastern identity in this quote, he also nurtures religious polarization. As pointed out in the methodological chapter, referring to someone’s identity is an act of making this identity relevant and consequential for the communication that goes on. At the same time, making someone’s religious identity relevant and consequential highlights the differences between religious denominations. Referring to someone’s religious identity therefore stresses religious divisions, and this is exactly what al-Bustānī wanted to counterbalance. The Otherness of the Protestant community is even more pronounced when representing it as a foreign and as an American product. This and similar references contribute to a climate of religious polarization in which sectarian tensions can thrive.

The effect of Ṣābūnjī’s addressing the Protestant magazine al-Nashra al-Shahriyya should also be discussed. Ṣābūnjī argues that the American mission should reprimand al-Bustānī because he is ‘one of their notables’. The implicit assumption that underlies this petition is that Protestants should reprimand other Protestants because they are Protestants. In other words, Ṣābūnjī dismisses the possibility that other Protestants could agree with al-Bustānī. He thereby stresses the normativity of unity within a religious community, at the expense of individual members such as al-Bustānī. In the fragmented religious landscape of Mount Lebanon and Syria, this discursive need for internal unity also connotes religious polarization.

A second example in which Ṣābūnjī makes al-Bustānī’s religious identity relevant pertains to al-Bustānī’s conversion. As a
reminder, al-Bustānī was born a Maronite, and converted to Protestantism in the early 1840s. Referring to this episode, Šābūnjī writes that al-Bustānī “did not entirely embrace the new Protestant religion”, that “his intentions sometimes lead him towards the old circumstances [the Maronite cause] and sometimes to the modern circumstances [the Protestant cause]”, and that “he changes colors like a chameleon”.79 Besides demonstrating a certain dislike for religious conversion, Šābūnjī also correlates one’s religion with one’s behavior. He stresses that a change of religion should be matched by a change of behavior, so that one’s religion is visible and understandable to outside observers. By suggesting that there are discrepancies between al-Bustānī’s religion and his outward behavior, Šābūnjī insinuates that al-Bustānī’s religious identity is superficial. From al-Bustānī’s point of view this insinuation was irrelevant, because he repeatedly stressed that religious differences should be bridged in order to fight religious polarization and sectarian tensions.80

In both examples discussed above Šābūnjī’s criticism also articulates the necessity of safeguarding the internal unity of religious communities, and to avoid transgressing the borders between these communities. He thereby contributes to a climate of religious polarization, and this is exactly the climate that al-Bustānī wanted to counterbalance with his waṭan-ideology. In this light, Šābūnjī’s desired unity within a religious community contrasts with the unity across the different religious communities, as proposed by al-Bustānī. It is this contrast that makes Šābūnjī’s invocation of al-Bustānī’s religious identity forceful. By making his religious identity relevant Šābūnjī points out to al-Bustānī and to his reading public that one’s religious identity apparently matters to who you are. This contrasts with the position of al-Bustānī, who repeatedly

79 Šābūnjī 1870b: 458. Šābūnjī paraphrases here a sentence from al-Jinān’s article ‘The War’. In its introductory words the anonymous author writes that this article may offend people “who still cling on to the old circumstances, or [who cling on to] the circumstances of this era, but whose intentions lead them to a different position” (Bustānī 1870: 689).

80 For instance, al-Bustānī writes that “The inhabitants of Syria, irrespective of their religious denominations [madḥāhib], classes [hayʾāt], ethnicities [ajnās], branches [tashaʿʿubāt], are the sons of the fatherland” (Bustānī [1860] 1990: 21).
stressed that one’s religious identity should not and does not matter within the shared fatherland. Ṣābūnjī’s references to al-Bustānī’s religious identity can therefore be read as a direct confrontation of the latter’s waṭan-ideology.

The barbarians!
In this chapter the mantra of civilization and progress in al-Naḥla has appeared a few times. In the quote criticizing tobacco (see above, qtd 6), Ṣābūnjī juxtaposed the “people of barbaric countries” with the “civilized peoples of Europe”, demonstrating a hierarchy between the two in the social consciousness of Ṣābūnjī’s social milieu. Similarly, the charge that al-Jinān’s article ‘The War’ goes against real civilization demonstrates a common concern for acquiring civilization. Both examples show the presence of a conceptual ladder on which behavior, values, and also collective identities can be measured and compared according to their level of civilization. In this framework the least civilized group of people, the conceptual barbarians, are at the bottom of the ladder. Every uncivilized act takes its actor one step down on the ladder, and one step closer to becoming a barbarian.81 Charging someone with uncivilized behavior thus becomes a reference to someone’s regression towards barbarism.

Interestingly, in the polemic on Voltaire both Ṣābūnjī and al-Bustānī make this regression explicit, by referring to the barbarians. In response to Ṣābūnjī’s polemical writings, the anonymous reporter of al-Jinān represents Ṣābūnjī as an uncivilized person by asking a number of rhetorical questions (qtd 10):

“And who is this man, who opposed the welfare of the world? Is he the hero of the battlefield whose habit it is to kill and to plunder? Or a king who aims to conquer another king’s land? (...) Or one of the leaders of the Bedouins,

81 Makdisi also found the same principle in the writings of Buṭrus al-Bustānī, albeit with ‘Africa’ as the lowest point on the ladder. He writes that “for Bustānī, the events of 1860 [sectarian violence] represented a regression away from modernity and a decline toward Africa” (Makdisi 2002a: 614).
whose nature it is to raid and to commit evils and adversities? Or one of the barbarians from central Africa who want wars, just like we want to hunt, in order to take possession of the members of their race and eat them? Or a devil who loves to destroy culture and to hang the flags of love, comfort, and peace at half-mast because of his natural disposition towards evil and animosity? But no, he is not one of those; he is a priest.”

Each sentence of this quote invokes social knowledge that prescribes how not to act. On the one hand, conquering, raiding, killing, plundering, cannibalism, and raging wars are represented as reproachable, and so are the people who do so – heroes of the battlefield, kings, Bedouins, barbarians from Central Africa, and devils. On the other hand, welfare, civilization, love, comfort, and peace are represented as commendable, and so are the people who are associated with them, even though these are not mentioned. By asking the rhetorical questions, the reporter of al-Jinān associated Şābūnji with the first –bad– group while associating himself with the second –good– group, by implication.

The two collective identities that are mentioned in the quote, the Bedouins and the barbarians from Central Africa, are referred to because they symbolize an inferior state of civilization. Şābūnji had already referred to Barbarians in the 29th issue of al-Naḥla, where he juxtaposed a war of defense with a “war of the Vandals and of Basūs” in order to argue that not all wars are necessarily bad. He returned to this quote in the 31st issue, where he explained that the Vandals were barbarians who attacked and destroyed Italy. Hence, both al-Naḥla and al-Jinān make use of the same background knowledge associated with barbarians, but they use this background knowledge in entirely different contexts and for entirely different reasons. Al-Naḥla used the barbarians to show that one needs to distinguish good wars from bad wars, while al-

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82 Bustānī 1870: 747.
83 Şābūnji 1870b: 451. The Basūs War was a legendary pre-Islamic war; see Fück 1960.
84 Şābūnji 1870b: 486. Şābūnji explicitly uses the term Italy.
\textit{Jinān} used the concept to illustrate that Ṣābūnji’s behavior ‘opposes the welfare of the world’. Put differently, the references to barbarians carry situated functions in different contexts. At the same time, the discursive framework makes the barbarians suitable for reference in these different contexts.

4.3 Mutually depending identities

In the introduction I discerned two models that attempt to fit the – inevitably hybridized– identities of Ṣābūnji and his peers. The overlap approach stipulates that people had different identities that overlap, and the compartmentalization approach stipulates that they had different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, national, and political identities, and each of these identities correspond with one identity, Arab, Christian, Syrian, Ottoman, and others. In the present study I set aside these two models in order to focus on how Ṣābūnji uses references to identities.

The polemics just described demonstrate that the meaning of terms such as East and fatherland, ‘\textit{waṭan}’, are contested and debated exactly by those people who allegedly are Eastern, or are the inhabitants of the \textit{waṭan}. This means that it cannot simply be decided who is Easterners and for which reasons, or what is a Syrian \textit{waṭan} and for which reasons. From this perspective, it is the act of claiming identities that needs to be studied, and the references to identities and their situated functions in the communication that goes on. It is the individual who gives meaning to the social world by making use of the identities within communication with other individuals. Simultaneously, the readers of the polemic are confronted with the presence of diverging interpretations of what it means to be Eastern or Syrian, and what is expected of Easterners and Syrians. This plurality invites them to reflect on their identity too.

On the most general level, the polemic entails Ṣābūnji contesting al-Bustānī’s identity of Easterner. He does so by invoking background knowledge that sketches the East as essentially religious, and he uses this background knowledge in order to criticize the writings in \textit{al-Jinān}, which, Ṣābūnji argues,
The Bee in conflict with Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1870)

spreads atheism. In this way he represents al-Jinān's authors and editors as un-Eastern.

Within this seemingly conventional polemic, Şābūnjī also takes into account ideas about foreigners and about Westernization, or tafarnuj. Firstly, the essentially religious East is contrasted with the foreign and the mutafarnij. Through this juxtaposition Şābūnjī articulates the idea that the defining aspect that separates the foreign from the East is found in their relation to religion. Şābūnjī represents atheism as a symptom of the foreign and of the mutafarnij, and as incompatible with the East. According to this logic, Şābūnjī posits that it is not coincidental that Voltaire is a foreigner and not an Easterner; Voltaire’s atheism is represented as a symptom of the foreigner. The foreign atheism of Voltaire and the contrasting religiousness of the East mutually reinforce each other in Şābūnjī’s polemical writings against al-Bustānī.

Secondly, Şābūnjī contrasts being religious with a waṭanī-identity, and specifically with al-Bustānī’s ideologically inspired usage of the term waṭan. Al-Bustānī frequently stated that the unity of the waṭan is the answer to sectarian violence and to religious polarization. However, Şābūnjī alleged that al-Bustānī had a hidden agenda: that he wanted to spread unbelief under the pretext of love of the fatherland. Şābūnjī asserts that a waṭanī-identity, in al-Bustānī’s usage, is associated with having no religion, which then conflicts with the perceived religiousness of the East and of the Easterners. He thus links a waṭanī-identity with the non-East, the foreign, and the mutafarnij, terms that all carry negative connotations.

At the heart of these encounters between identities lies religion as the central axis that determines one’s identity. On the one hand, Şābūnjī’s references to Eastern, Arab, Maronite, Protestant, and other identities were informed by the presence of religiousness. On the other hand, his references to foreign, mutafarnij, and waṭanī-identities were informed by a lack of religiousness. With each reference to any of these identities, Şābūnjī articulates that it is religion that makes us who we are. The same primacy of religion as the determining factor of one’s identity is visible in Şābūnjī’s representation of al-Bustānī’s conversion.
What matters most in Šābūnji’s texts is being religious, rather than being Eastern, Arab, or Syrian.

A focus on the function of references to collective identities within this polemic demonstrates how discourses of identities interrelate with and depend on each other. The fundamental aspect that ties these identities together, or sets them apart, is religion. In this framework, the ‘us’ is repeatedly represented by Šābūnji as essentially religious. The religious ‘us’ is often labeled as Eastern and often referred to by implication, in phrases such as ‘our country’. Al-Bustānī had already articulated the idea that the Easterners –or, in other words, ‘we’– are religiously blessed in the earlier discussion about the solar flames. The situated function of this reference was to calm the Eastern readers about a potential natural disaster. This shows that at the onset of the polemic about Voltaire the idea that ‘we’ are particularly religious was already part of their social consciousness. Šābūnji reproduced this idea in a different context, and used it with a different situated function, namely to criticize al-Bustānī for acting in conflict with what is allegedly expected of Easterners. In spite of these different functions, both Šābūnji’s and al-Bustānī’s reference reflect, reproduce, and reify the idea that ‘we’ are religious.

The polemic also demonstrates that the relation between the East and the waṭan was contested. Šābūnji frames being Eastern in opposition to a waṭani-identity, thereby representing these two as mutually exclusive. He argued that the term ḥubb al-waṭan carried associations with maintaining religions, and he thereby suggested that al-Bustānī did not really love his fatherland. In this way Šābūnji questioned and contested al-Bustānī’s identity as one of ‘us’. It can be surmised that al-Bustānī did not agree with Šābūnji. According to al-Bustānī, the notion of waṭan was premised by his ideology of unity across the different religious communities in Mount Lebanon and geographical Syria. Fundamentally, al-Bustānī’s approach does not correspond with Šābūnji’s unraveled usage of the term waṭan and awṭān. Again, Šābūnji’s and al-Bustānī’s references to Eastern and waṭani-identities have different functions and are made for different reasons.
In conclusion, the overlap approach and the compartmentalization approach cannot account for the presence of debate and disagreement on the meaning of terms that denote collective identities. The meaning of East and waṭan, and its various derivatives, such as Syrian or even Beiruti, were not fully crystallized in 1870, and this ambiguity gave intellectuals the opportunity to contest and debate these meanings. These debates remain unaddressed when observing that both al-Bustānī and Ṣābūnjī used terms like waṭan and ḥubb al-waṭan, and that both referred to themselves as Easterners and as Syrians. Secondly, both approaches cannot account for the presence of underlying principles that inform references to different identities. In this polemic, the underlying principle was religion and faith. In many references to identities, identity was framed either in conformity with, or in opposition to, religion and faith. This underlying principle remains obscured when studying different identities, such as Eastern, Maronite, or Syrian, in isolation from the communicative context.