

SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN POST-WAR LEBANON: ARAB VS PHOENICIAN

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Abstract

This study uses textual analysis and network mapping in order to understand the rhetoric surrounding Phoenicianism in modern day Lebanon, using 1,336 data points from a political discussion forum. The ability of rhetoric grounded in science to persuade others of genetically essentialist views is examined, as well as the ability of social constructionism to naturally resist such rhetoric. We identify common themes found in our data set, the use of science based ethos in Phoenicianist rhetoric, and the growth (or lack thereof) of the Phoenicianist network in order to answer this question. Our research indicates that science based rhetoric and science based proofs do not lead to the growth of a network through the persuasion of others. This also presents us with some interesting opportunities for future research, such as the reasons why Phoenicianism failed to create long lasting identity change in Lebanon. A study on the various environmental factors that resulted in this instance of failed rhetoric could shine a light on the importance of demographics when it comes to successfully creating social movements.

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Background

Lebanon is a country with an identity crisis. Deeply fractured along religious, sectarian, and ethnic lines, the struggle for identity is rarely peaceful as the parties involved see each other as existential threats rather than political opponents. Lebanon's identity is now coming under scrutiny in quite a new way as the field of genetics marches ever forward in the 21st century, changing everything in its path. The purpose of this project is to explore the impact of genetic research upon identity in the context of post-civil war Lebanon. Specifically, we want to observe the effects of 21st century DNA studies conducted in Lebanon on the rhetoric of Phoenicianism, an ideology which posits an unbroken ancestry for the Lebanese people that continues uninterrupted to the ancient Canaanites of the Bronze Age.

Lebanon: Antiquity to Modernity

Located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, the geographical area that now comprises the country of Lebanon, continuously settled since prehistoric times, has historically acted as a crossroads of cultures, civilizations, and empires.



Figure 1. Map of the Middle East. From “Middle East Political Map”, 2018, <http://libertaddeeleccion.org/middle-east-map-political/middle-east-map-politicaldigital-art-gallerymiddle-east-map-political>. Copyright 2018 by States Map with Cities.

As documented in the Library of Congress (1989), it was populated by the Canaanites in the Bronze Age. The Canaanites are commonly referred to as Phoenicians, the name given to them by the Ancient Greeks due to a purple dye Phoenician traders were known for (*Phoínikes*). The Phoenicians built ships and conducted trade across the Mediterranean. They also established a number of colonies, the most well known of which was the city of Carthage in North Africa, which eventually became a serious military threat to the Romans (and was eventually crushed in the Punic Wars). Similar to the Ancient Greeks, the Phoenicians were not a unitary political entity, but a collection of independent city-states including Sidon, Tripoli, Tyre, Beirut, and Byblos, all sharing a similar language, culture, religion, and economy, sometimes in conflict with one another and other times cooperating against some outside threat. In addition to being known in ancient times for their purple dye, ivory, and glass, the Phoenicians are significant historically for creating the earliest known alphabet and spreading it across their colonies and trade routes in the Mediterranean.

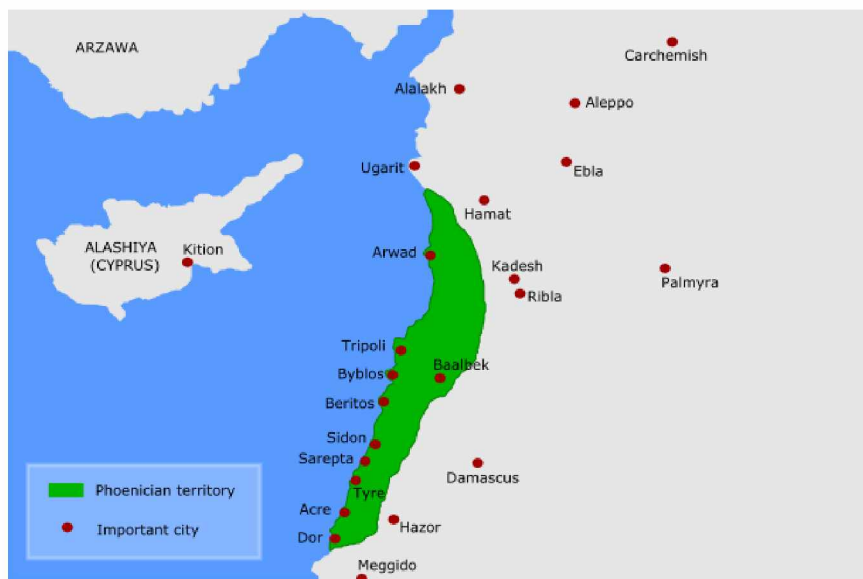


Figure 2. Important Phoenician city-states. From “Map of Phoenicia”, by J. V. D. Crabben, 2012, <https://www.ancient.eu/image/122/map-of-phoenicia>. Copyright 2019 by Ancient History Encyclopedia Limited.

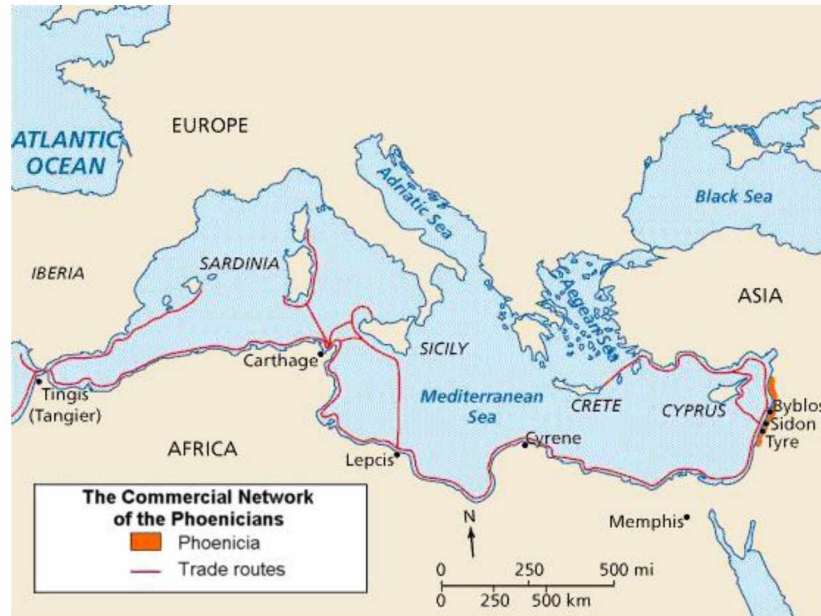


Figure 3. Trade routes and colonies established by the Phoenicians. From “Phoenician Trade Network”, by J. V. D. Crabben, 2012, <https://www.ancient.eu/image/116/phoenician-trade-network>. Copyright 2019 by Ancient History Encyclopedia Limited.

The early Phoenicians were arguably the last inhabitants of the geographical area known today as Lebanon to be an independent power in their own right. Mount Lebanon and the Lebanese coast soon came under the control of the Ancient Egyptians, followed by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians. It was conquered from the Persians by Alexander the Great and his Macedonian army, and taken from them by the Romans. As the Roman Empire crumbled, Lebanon continued to be ruled as a Byzantine province until it was finally captured in the 6th century A.D. by the Arabs, who had recently converted to Islam and were eager to spread their religion as far as possible. This ushered in the current “Arab” phase of Lebanon’s history, with the inhabitants of the region picking up the Arabic language, many aspects of Arab culture, and for much of the population, the religion that the Arabs brought with them.

As Arab supremacy over the Islamic world waned, Lebanon came under Turkish Ottoman rule in the early 1500’s and this lasted until the end of the first World War in 1918.

Despite this long era of Turkish rule, the primary language of Lebanon would continue to be Arabic. After the Ottoman Empire fell, Lebanon went through a brief period of French rule before independence was declared in 1943 and the modern state of Lebanon came to exist.

It is important to note that throughout all of these conquests of Lebanon, the collection of cities and towns along the Lebanese coast were almost always maintained as their own separate province by these imperial powers (Salibi, 1988). As seen in Figure 4, Mount Lebanon acts as a natural barrier delineating this region.

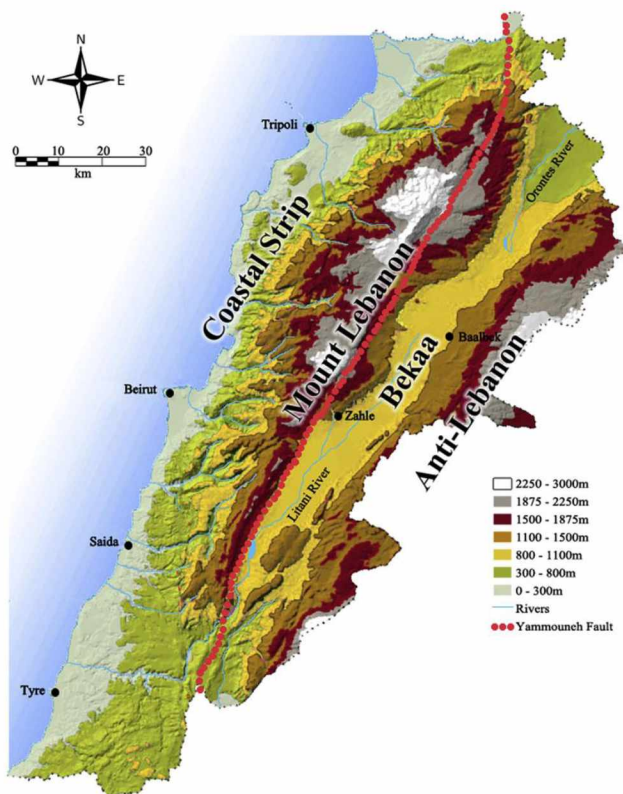


Figure 4. Detailed geographical map of Lebanon. From “Geography of Lebanon”, by S. E. Zaatari, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Geography-of-Lebanon_fig1_318300880. Copyright 2019 by ResearchGate.

It was the shared political and administrative history created by the mountain that served as the basis for Lebanon’s creation as an independent state separate from Syria (Salibi, 1988). Another important consequence of the natural geographical barrier was the migration of

persecuted religious minorities to Lebanon who found safety in the secluded mountain range or on the coast behind it. The most notable of these was the Maronite Church which came to Lebanon from Syria in the 9th century A.D. and eventually became the largest Christian sect in Lebanon as the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon by and large converted to Maronite Catholicism. Other notable groups who made Lebanon their home include the Druze, a Muslim sect considered blasphemous by many mainstream Muslims, as well as Armenians fleeing persecution and genocide in Turkey during the first World War. (Raymond, 2013). As shown in Figure 5, the end result of these migrations was a highly mixed society, both religiously and ethnically, a fact that would come to define the modern history of Lebanon, playing a particularly important role in the Lebanese Civil War.

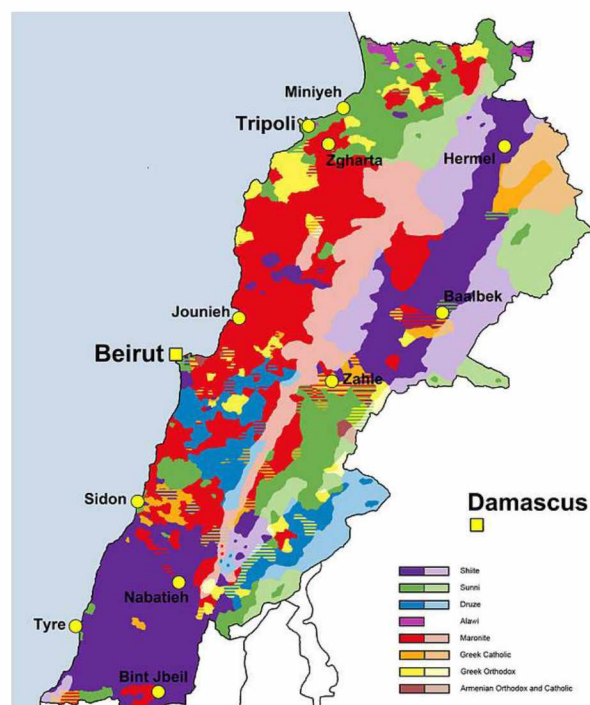


Figure 5. Lebanon's sectarian divide. From "Distribution of Lebanon's Religious Groups", by S. Kondrashov, 2013, <http://www.katagogi.com/LV2009/LebMap.aspx?l=EN>. Copyright 2019 by Sergey Kondrashov.

Lebanon's Civil War

The Lebanese civil war is the defining event of the modern history of Lebanon and is important to have a basic understanding of for the purpose of this project. Throughout the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's, a massive Palestinian exodus into Lebanon from Jordan and Israel resulted in the creation of refugee tent cities encircling the capital city of Beirut, and in other places throughout the country. These were in fact more like dangerous and lawless ghettos, rife with poverty and crime. Among the refugees in these makeshift camps were Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) militants who eventually began to use Lebanon as a base of operations for attacks against Israel. This caused massive political division in Lebanon with most Christians seeing the PLO as an existential threat to Lebanon's sovereignty and a potential source for a destructive war with Israel, while most Muslims believed that they should be able to operate freely in Lebanon and enjoy the full political support of the Lebanese government. On another important note the Palestinian migration into Lebanon disrupted a very delicate demographic balance whereby roughly half the country was Christian and the other half Muslim. The Palestinians, most of whom are Muslim, were seen as a demographic threat by the Lebanese Christians who saw themselves as the last remaining Christians in the Middle East with true autonomy and power. (Fisk, 2001; Krayem, 2004).

These demographic and religious tensions continued to escalate until 1975 when they erupted into all out conflict. The predominantly Christian, nominally right-wing "Lebanese Front" coalition of militias was created. Pitted against them, the predominantly Lebanese and Palestinian Muslim, nominally left-wing "Lebanese National Movement" coalition formed. Massacres against civilians on either side ensued; the Israeli and Syrian militaries got involved in the conflict, and Lebanon found itself embroiled in a bloody civil war that lasted for 15 years until 1990 which resulted in the deaths of approximately 120,000 people. (Fisk, 2001; Krayem, 2004).

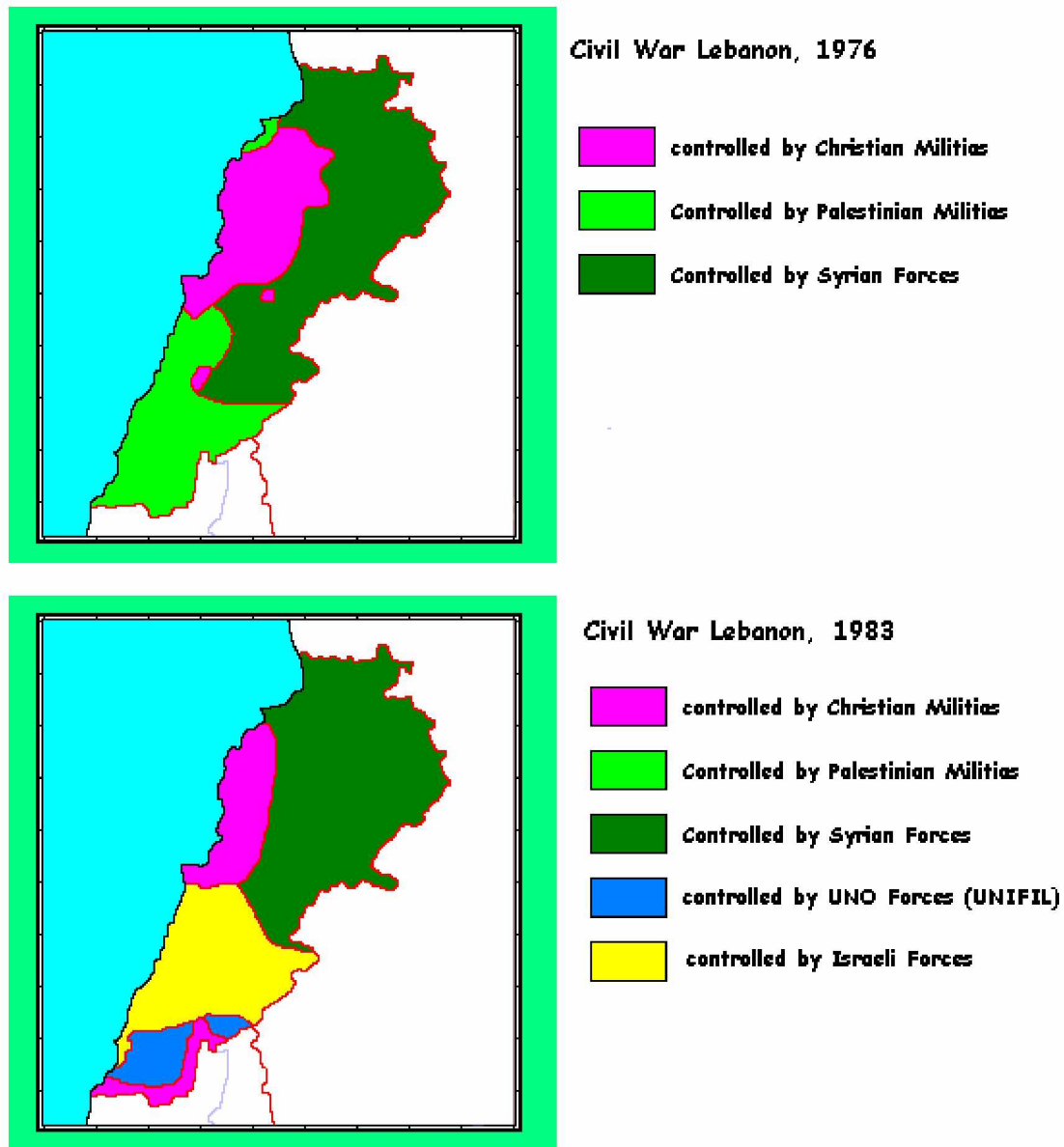


Figure 6. The shifting territories of belligerents in Lebanon's civil war. From "Lebanon Civil War" by M. Merlino, <http://www.mmerlino.com/images/Middleeast.html>. Copyright 2019 by Mark Merlino.

The civil war finally came to an end when a peace treaty, the Taif Agreement, was negotiated by the various belligerents involved in the conflict (named after the city of Taif in Saudi Arabia where it was negotiated and signed). This peace treaty made radical changes to the National Pact, an unwritten agreement made in 1943 between the Christian and Muslim political elite that set some basic principles for the governance of Lebanon.

The National Pact had a few core concepts. Both sides agreed to view Lebanon as an independent state whose Muslim population would not seek unity with neighboring Syria or any larger Arab nation or federation (a popular idea in the 20th century), and whose Christian population would not seek special political ties with France or any other western power. The agreement also established a sect-based formula for the makeup of the parliament, cabinet, the presidency, and the military. The parliament and cabinet were to have a 6:5 ratio in favor of Christians. Furthermore, the office of President (the ultimate executive authority according to the constitution) was reserved for Maronite Christians, as was the position of commander-in-chief of the military. On the other hand, the office of Prime Minister was reserved for Sunni Muslims, and the position of Parliament House Speaker was reserved for Shia Muslims. This was all based on a census taken in 1932 that gave Christians a slight majority of the population in Lebanon, with the Maronites constituting the largest sect within that majority. (Krayem, 2004).

If the National Pact represented the beginning of Christian political dominance over Lebanon, the Taif Agreement symbolized the end of it. Although the peace treaty made no mention of winners or losers, and no side in the conflict openly claimed victory or defeat, the stipulations of the treaty made it clear which side felt compelled to sue for peace. The president of Lebanon, a position reserved for Maronite Christians, lost most of its executive powers and became a largely ceremonial role, no longer wielding full control over the military and cabinet. The prime minister on the other hand, a position reserved for Sunni Muslims, went from a largely ceremonial role to the most powerful executive in the country. In addition to this, the Lebanese parliament went from having a 6:5 ratio in favor of Christians, to a 1:1 equal split between Muslims and Christians. Perhaps most interestingly for the topic of this project, and for reasons that will become clear in the next section, the Taif Agreement also mandated the

inclusion of a new article in the Lebanese constitution: one that unequivocally proclaims Lebanon to be an Arab nation. (Krayem, 2004).

Phoenicianism

While the Taif Agreement was signed by the majority of belligerents in the war and signalled more or less the end of the war, a few parties did refuse to sign and were soon run out of the country by the Syrian military, whose presence in Lebanon had been mandated by the Taif Agreement in order to “keep the peace” (they ended up acting as an instrument of control, repression, and influence by the Syrian government over Lebanon until international political pressure and popular protests forced them to leave in 2005).

In the midst of the civil war, a political ideology that had been developing in Lebanon throughout the 20th century became quite popular with many Christians. The modern Lebanese state, declared in 1943, was not truly independent of the whims of regional and international powers, but it was the first time since the era of the Phoenicians that the Lebanese were, at least nominally, an independent people. This fact was not lost on some people and resulted in the development of Phoenicianism. This was the idea that Lebanon has been, since prehistoric times, inhabited by the same people (genetically) all the way back to the Phoenicians, and that the modern Lebanese were in fact not Arabs and had to protect themselves from the demographic threat of the Arabs. It was argued that the inhabitants of Lebanon had adopted the Arabic language, but had never intermarried with the Arabs, and were thus not ethnic Arabs themselves, but simply Arabic speakers. (Kaufman, 2004). Practically, in the context of the civil war when this ideology became popular, what this meant was that the Palestinian refugees and PLO militants, the Syrian military, and anyone else not from Lebanon (not of supposed Phoenician heritage) was not welcome in Lebanon and was to be treated as a hostile intruder. This ideology was intellectually spearheaded by Said Akl, a famous Lebanese professor, poet,

and philosopher (who tried to resurrect the Phoenician alphabet, teaching it to his university students and writing poetry with it) and militarily spearheaded by Etienne Sakr and his Guardians of the Cedars (GOTC) organization - one of the few political parties/militias to refuse the signing of the Taif Agreement. While both Akl and Sakr have become synonymous with Phoenicianism, Akl died of old age in Lebanon in 2014 and was mourned openly by many and had his funeral covered by most news stations in Lebanon, while Sakr (who is still alive) lives in exile in Cyprus and has been sentenced to death in absentia by Lebanese courts (“Centenarian Lebanese poet, writer Said Akl dies”, 2014; Kaufman, 2004).

This is largely due to the GOTC’s actions during the war under the command of Sakr, as well as Sakr’s actions following the signing of the Taif Agreement by the other militias involved in the fighting. As explained by Fisk (2001), the GOTC was infamous for brutality - torture, mutilation, and civilian massacre was their forte. The party’s slogan was “It is the duty of each Lebanese to kill one Palestinian” and their solution for the Palestinian refugees was to march them en masse to the Syrian border at gunpoint. Sakr himself was infamous for regularly and openly calling for violence against civilians, on one occasion saying not to feel remorse for Palestinian women and children caught up in the war, as “they are communists who will bear new communists”. GOTC fighters would often chain prisoners to cars and drag them along the road until they were killed, many times cutting off their ears as trophies before killing them, and generally engaged in torture as regular operating procedure. When the Taif Agreement was signed and Sakr’s militia was no longer able to operate in Beirut and Mount Lebanon due to the heavy military presence of the Syrian army, Sakr moved to southern Lebanon in order to help the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army (SLA) against the Iranian-backed Shia militant group Hezbollah. It was because of this that Lebanese courts sentenced Sakr to death, since he breached the terms of a general pardon given out to all militia leaders in the Taif Agreement on the condition that they immediately ended all military activity, in addition to cooperating with

what the post-Taif Lebanese government deemed an enemy state (Nisan, 2003). He (along with many SLA operatives) fled to Israel in the year 2000 when the Israeli military officially pulled out of Lebanon. He eventually settled in Cyprus and continues to speak out against Syria, Hezbollah, and the Palestinians via the GOTC website and other media channels, and continues to call for embracing a Phoenicianist identity in Lebanon. Despite Sakr's best efforts, however, Phoenicianism is no longer a mainstream political belief in Lebanon. No political party officially endorses it, and there is no significant grassroots political or social movement championing the cause (nor is there significant political or social pressure to allow Sakr to return to Lebanon or to allow his party to operate freely in the country).

Genetics and DNA

When Phoenicianism rose to prominence in the 1970's, the field of genetics was still in its infancy - the Human Genome Project, for example, was only launched in 1990, after the Lebanese civil war had concluded, and it was more than a decade afterwards that the human genome was fully sequenced (Mandal, 2012). Phoenicianism never presented scientific arguments, but relied on language and culture-based artefacts that could supposedly be traced to the Phoenicians. For example, it was claimed that certain words in the Lebanese dialect that did not appear in other Arabic dialects came from the language that the Phoenicians spoke. With the rapid rise of genetics research in the 1990's and early 2000's, and specifically research into human DNA, many of the previously unfalsifiable claims made by proponents of Phoenicianism could now be tested. A number of genetic analyses have been conducted since the early 2000's indicating that Lebanon's population does in fact retain some non-negligible genetic lineage that can be traced back to the Phoenicians. These studies mainly focused on a genetic marker that showed up in coastal Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian populations, which also appeared in Malta, North Africa, and other places that the Phoenicians settled. The most significant and conclusive study so far came in 2017. According to "Continuity and Admixture in

the Last Five Millennia of Levantine History...” published in the *American Journal of Human Genetics*, the Lebanese of today share 93% of their DNA with the ancient Phoenicians. This was discovered by comparing the DNA of the preserved Phoenician remains from burial sites in the city of Sidon who were alive around 3,700 years ago to those of Lebanese living today. “We show that present-day Lebanese derive most of their ancestry from a Canaanite-related population, which therefore implies substantial genetic continuity in the Levant since at least the Bronze Age” (Haber et al., 2017). Also found was that there was no significant difference in the DNA of modern Lebanese Christians and Muslims - “the Lebanese genome is not widely varied. As a whole, the Lebanese people have more genetic overlap with the Canaanites from Sidon than do other modern Middle Eastern populations such as the Jordanians, Syrians, or Palestinians.” (Abed, 2017). This indicates that most Maronites in Lebanon are descended from local converts rather than immigrants from Syria (the Maronite Church originated in Syria and fled to Lebanon to avoid persecution) and that Lebanese Muslims are likewise local converts to the religion, rather than recent arrivals who came with the initial Arab-Muslim invasions and remained (both of these claims often made in accusatory fashion by one community against the other).

Literature Review

Science is regularly politicized and incorporated into political rhetoric, often very effectively. When these DNA studies are conducted by trusted scientists, published in prestigious journals, and reported by western media, are those who believe in a Phoenician-nationalist, anti-Arab identity for Lebanon using it in their rhetoric? Many would argue that they would be well served to do so. To understand why this is, we must first understand what is meant by rhetoric, and specifically, what is meant by *ethos*.

Aristotle defines Rhetoric as a counterpart of Dialectic, both of them being important in endeavors to “criticize or uphold an argument, to defend [...] or accuse.” (Aristotle, trans. 1926, 1.1.1). He explains that a good system of laws will be as comprehensive as possible so as to leave as little work as possible for judges, but that even the best system will still have cases where debate must be had (and thus where rhetoric is important). According to Aristotle, the master rhetorician creates “artificial proofs” such as character testimony and emotional appeal in order to argue their case (Aristotle, trans. 1926, 1.1.8). “It belongs to Rhetoric to discover the real and apparent means of persuasion.” (Aristotle, trans. 1926, 1.1.14). There are three kinds of proofs defined by Aristotle. “The first depends upon the moral character of the speaker, the second upon putting the hearer into a certain frame of mind, the third upon the speech itself, in so far as it proves or seems to prove” (Aristotle, trans. 1926, 1.2.3). These three types of proofs are also known as *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, respectively.

Ethos plays a special role in this study because we are discussing the use of science in order to bolster the rhetorical power of a certain ideology. *Ethos* as a mode of persuasion is meant to inspire confidence in the speaker, as stated by Aristotle, “The orator persuades by moral character [...] in such a manner as to render him worthy of confidence.” (Aristotle, trans. 1926, 1.2.4). It is hard to think of something more capable of inspiring confidence today than to claim scientific backing for your argument. Lessl (2012) states in “Rhetorical Darwinism” that science is now seen as something unquestionably positive, an inherent good with “widely sanctioned public value” (p. 71). He argues that in the early stages of the scientific revolution, science’s devotion to empiricism gave it a unique public authority and a “priestly *ethos*” (p. 71) because of its perception as being selfless, as something dedicated to the common good (and thus intimately linked to religion). This perception of a “priestly *ethos*” provided a friendly environment for the scientific revolution to continue through into the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, with various advancements and paradigm shifts until the ultimate paradigm shift

where *scientific ethos* came to displace/replace/supersede religious ethos rather than work in lockstep with it. This happened with Charles Darwin and the evolutionary biology described in “On the Origin of Species” and its rapid acceptance by the scientific community. “The apparent triumph of evolutionary biology [...] signaled a similar naturalistic [as opposed to supernaturalistic] hegemony that was overtaking historical understanding more generally. This is the decisive symbolic move that sets evolutionism off from its Enlightenment and positivist antecedents. Formerly, the unbounded authority that was claimed for science in the governance of human affairs stood upon assertions about the universal applicability of its methods [...] with evolutionism, scientism was now tied up with evolutionary fact, and this meant that biological science itself had become the ground of a scientific myth.” (pp. 211-212). This ushered in the beginning of a scientific ethos that stands on its own, not reliant on the whims of power brokers from religion or politics. The actual form that this kind of rhetoric takes is described by Gross (2002) who conducted an analysis of a large sample of scientific literature spanning from the 17th to the 20th century. Scientific discourse includes claims of expertise in the scientific field being discussed, observations that are described as being empirical-based (derived from tangible evidence rather than pure rationalism/logic), and the use of mathematical equations, tables, and figures to present data, in addition to jargon-heavy sentences that are often complex if not impossible to understand without the requisite expertise. Scientific discourse also often contains an efficient system for navigating information, including citations, headers, page numbers, and abstracts, particularly studies conducted in the 20th century onward. Our study will operate using “scientific ethos” or “scientific rhetoric” to describe discourse that contains the above features in order to confer credibility (as described by Lessl) upon the speaker/writer.

Ethno-nationalist movements have often used scientific ethos in order to encourage violence against others. The most infamous example of this was of course the racial hygiene movement in Germany in the first half of the 20th century. Lessl discusses this, pointing out that

there are many different forms of scientific/evolutionary based ethos, and that the social Darwinism of Germany during this period, that which had completely undermined the belief in free will and the dignity and value of the human being "is not our evolutionism." (p. 251). If the scientific ethos of evolutionary biology is a spectrum that contains many different forms, what form does it take when applied to Phoenicianism in the context of post-civil war Lebanon?

While Lessl's argument is based on the premise that science in the modern era tends to have a very powerful ethos that can be used to persuade and shape the identity of others, Condit (1999) argues that the supposedly wide-ranging effects of science (and specifically genetics) on how identity is formed today is largely unsubstantiated. She conducted a textual analysis on media from 1900 to 1995 and found that there was no evidence of an increase of people assuming reductionist or biologically deterministic views as a result of the increasing role of science and genetics in our everyday lives. This includes views that would be commonly associated with genetic or ancestry based rhetoric such as pro-eugenics views, an essentialist view of identity (the idea that your identity is largely determined at birth), or any race-based construction of identity. Condit's findings present an opposite view to the one described by Lessl where science is argued to have a powerful ethos that can (and will) be used in rhetoric in order to shape identity. This study will hopefully shed some more light on this discussion.

RQ1: What are the rhetorical or communicative themes involved in the discussion of Phoenicianism in modern day Lebanon?

RQ2: To what degree is scientific ethos present in Phoenicianist rhetoric? Is it a minor detail or the main component of the rhetoric or somewhere in between?

RQ3: If scientific ethos exists in Phoenicianist rhetoric, is it growing to be a more influential part of that network over time, or does it get smaller, or not change at all?

Methodology

We attempt to answer these questions by looking at conversations on the Oroom forum, a website targeted towards people from Lebanon, dedicated mainly to discussion of Lebanese politics. We arrived at our data set through a long process that initially involved a Twitter data search, followed by a Google domain search, which led us to discovering the Oroom website and the wealth of data contained within its forums.

With Twitter, we arrived at our final data set by searching for the key terms “phoenicia” and/or “phoenician” paired with “lebanon” and/or “lebanese” while excluding all terms that were muddying up the data with unrelated Tweets - things about Phoenix, Arizona, for example, whose residents are sometimes referred to as Phoenicians. We then used a Python-based script in order to iterate over all of the related Tweets and put them into an Excel spreadsheet. The Twitter data was problematic for many reasons. First of all, after narrowing our search terms to exclude useless data, we ended up with a very small sample size, indicating that Twitter was not really the platform that this conversation is happening on. Secondly, not only was the data set small, but the data points themselves were too short to be of any real use for qualitative research analysis. Twitter’s audience and character limit was proving to be a real stumbling block for finding relevant, interesting, and useful data with regards to this topic.

In response to this, we moved on to an advanced Google domain search in order to potentially build a data set comprised of web domains. Here, we again used the terms “phoenicia” and/or “phoenician” paired with “lebanon” and/or “lebanese” in addition to iterating new searches with extra search terms such as “civil war”, “identity” and so on. We got many interesting search results and websites, including a lot of the genetics studies and news sources we ended up using in this project. However, after collecting the domain names associated with all of these search terms and checking for relationships between them, we found very few

cross-linking between the various domains, indicating a general discontinuity around this topic online. It was from this data set, however, that we came to discover an interesting domain: Oroom.org.

“Oroom” is a web forum that belongs to the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), a political party in Lebanon. It is short for “Orange Room”, orange being the party’s official color. The forum contains sub-sections to discuss a wide range of topics, from political issues to social issues, to sports, technology, and so on. While Lebanon has a myriad of political parties, most with some form of web presence, the Oroom seems to be the only one with a discussion-based format rather than a one-way informational format. The sheer number of posts on this forum and the fact that messages were not limited by a character count indicated that this website would not have the same problems we had on Twitter, where data was too shallow, nor would we have the problem we had with our domain search, where there was very little relationship between data points. A search for keywords related to the topic (“phoenician”, “phoenicianism”, “DNA”, etc...) on the website yielded 18 separate discussion threads, indicating that Oroom would indeed provide the data necessary to help us answer our research questions. The posts within these threads formed our initial data set.

In order to reach our final data set that we used to answer our research questions we cleaned the data by excluding the following: posts written in Arabic or French, bantering posts unrelated to the topic, posts that were jokes, funny images, incomprehensible, meta (related to the goings on of the forum) or otherwise useless for the purpose of this study. While posts in Arabic are understood by the author of this project and could have been included, they were left out for purposes of scope - excluding Arabic posts acted as a natural delineation for creating a more manageable data set considering the time frame in which this project had to be completed, and the amount of time it would take to translate all Arabic posts to English. The

drawbacks of doing this are outlined later on in this project. In all, there were 2,393 posts in the data set before applying the filtering parameters outlined above. After applying our filtering parameters, the number of posts came down to 1,336. The largest number of posts to be filtered out were those where forum members were bantering with each other, whether it was friendly (jokes, compliments, and so forth) or unfriendly (insults, trolling, asking for forum moderators to intervene). The second and third largest, respectively, were posts written in Arabic and posts written in French. The cleaned data was coded using Owen (1984) in order to identify the themes present in the posts. This method of analysis examines how participants use discourse to define their own themes. This involves looking for three things in communicative data: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence occurs when a participant uses different discourses with the same meaning in their post. One example of this is a post that discusses the multitude of religions in Lebanon, as well as the multitude of ethnicities. These are different discourses but both can be reference to one particular theme the poster is trying to get across which could be defined as “multiculturalism in Lebanon”. The second way to identify themes is by repetition. This refers to the repeated use of a particular discourse multiple times by the participant. If the Lebanese civil war is mentioned 4 or 5 times throughout a post, for example, it would be coded with the “civil war” theme. The final method for identifying a theme is forcefulness. This refers to the participant conveying a theme with a certain degree of self awareness. Using the “multiculturalism in Lebanon” theme as an example again, this could be a post where the poster clearly signals the idea they are attempting to convey by saying something like “Lebanon’s multicultural identity is important to this topic because...”. Of course, a single post could contain all three of these: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. A single post could also have multiple themes, each identified by the same or separate or overlapping discourses. Figure 7 contains a sample of posts and the themes they were coded with using this method.

Username	Date	Message	Themes				
Robin Hood	Nov 28, 2012	Scientific research have lead to the conclusion that Lebanese are in fact the descendents of Phoenicians, which means, we are not really Arab. So my question is, since Phoenician is our true identity, shouldn't we try to revive the Phoenician language? That doesn't mean you should forget Arabic, we can learn both language or create a mixed language reflection more adequatly our identity and our culture.	genetics important	language	science ethos	identity	phoenicianism
Jorje	Feb 18, 2016	You're Arab in the eyes of everyone in the world because you look like one and you speak like one. I'll continue having my laughs at this thread.	lebanon is arab	identity determined by others			
Weezy	Feb 20, 2016	Lebanon is an Arab state and no one here can do anything about it. Stop wasting your time	lebanon is arab				
CitizenOfTheRepublic	Feb 22, 2016	Clearly Americans are subjects of her majesty the queen, after all they speak English. Brazilians are Portuguese too don't you know...	language	lebanon not arab	language is not identity		

Figure 7. Data sample. Sample of posts from the data set with themes coded using Owen (1984).

Another important aspect of Owen (1984) that played a role in coding for these themes was the idea that communication and identity is not a rigid, stationary construct, but something that is constantly changing as people reevaluate and redefine what communication and identity means to them as they are exposed to different rhetoric at different times. Great care was taken not to assume themes for certain posters who appear in multiple threads over varying periods of time. It was assumed that participants' opinions were subject to change over the course of their discussion with other participants and over the course of time in general. This does not necessarily mean that their opinions would completely change, but that at the very least the nuances with which they believed and voiced their opinions could shift, if even slightly (regardless of whether there was a positive-to-negative opinion change, negative-to-positive opinion change, or no opinion change at all). The fact that our coding was post-based rather than poster-based was due to this line of thinking: we wanted to capture opinion change and rhetoric adjustment, if it existed. Finally, an important technical detail: in identifying the themes present in posts, the context in which the post was written was considered important. For example, a brief post agreeing with or quoting another post would often adopt similar themes from that post (or the opposite in the case of disagreement) even if there wasn't an explicit mention of those themes. The last sample post on Figure 7 is a good example of this. While the

post does not explicitly contain some of themes it is coded for, these themes can be derived from the context in which the post is made (arguing against the idea that speaking a language confers an ethnic or national identity).

After all posts were read and coded with themes, a qualitative analysis of themes was written up. This includes what communicative discourses the theme represents, as well as some common or interesting examples of arguments which contained those themes. This qualitative analysis write-up was done for themes that appear in at least 20 posts in the data set. The only exception to the 20 post requirement is when a theme that appears less frequently is so closely related to one of the major themes that it could be considered a sub-theme of it, and can be used to provide a better qualitative analysis of that major theme. After the qualitative analysis of themes described above, we were able to answer our first research question. In order to answer our second and third research questions having to do with the presence of genetics-inspired scientific ethos in Phoenicianist rhetoric and if the presence of scientific ethos in the rhetoric has grown larger and more dominant over time, a network analysis of our data set was conducted (this also provided additional qualitative analysis for our first research question). Specifically, we ran a network analysis on the Phoenicianist network in order to observe the presence of scientific ethos, and if it became a larger part of the network from one time period to another. This network analysis is based on Network Theory, which is focused on understanding the relationship between actors in a system. In Network Theory, it is the connections between things that define what a system is. In this context, the discussion of Phoenician identity on the Oroom forum is a system, and we are interested in understanding the connections between posters and themes in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the system. In order to do this in practice, we need to create a model of the system. For this project, this was done using the UCINET and NetDraw programs. Using this software, we are able to visualize the network that is formed by our data (the network that is created by the posters and the themes

attached to them) and come to conclusions about our network. All networks are comprised of nodes (the actors or things involved in the network) and ties (relationships between actors or things in the network). In our network visualizations, the nodes are the posters and themes, and a tie between the two implies that the poster made a post containing that theme. Once a network is modeled, the nodes and ties between them give rise to an overall structure that can be described as the topology of the network, which in itself can tell us a lot about the network.

There are four distinct topologies that can appear when mapping out a network. The first is a scattered/fragmented network. This is a network with very little apparent relationship between different nodes. The second is the hub-and-spoke network, where one node acts as the central hub for most others. The third type of network is the multi-hub small-world network, which is essentially comprised of multiple hub-and-spoke networks. The fourth and final network topology is the core/periphery network. This is the most mature type of network where a number of large nodes have a multitude of connections with one other (Krebs & Holley, 2002).

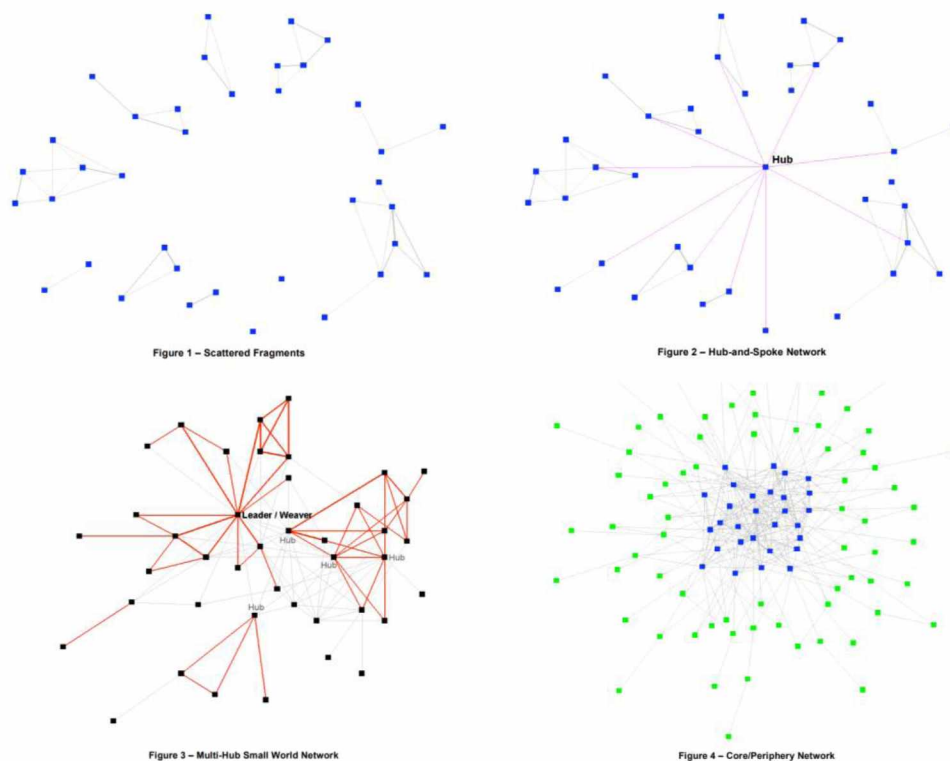


Figure 8. The four topologies of a network. From “Building smart communities through network weaving”, by V. Krebs & J. Holley, 2002, <http://www.orgnet.com/BuildingNetworks.pdf>. Copyright 2006 by Valdis Krebs & June Holley.

An important component of networks is the “network weaver”, influential figures who sometimes appear in the early phases of a network and can sometimes act as the “hub” in the hub-and-spoke network, helping build the network and evolve it along these four stages. As networks move through each of these stages, they become more resilient and less reliant on individual network weavers. “Resilience is the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks.” (Walker, Holling, Carpenter, & Kinzig, p. 2). In the context of this study, the ability to “absorb disturbance” for scientific ethos in the Phoenicianist network basically refers to the ability of scientific ethos to remain an important part of Phoenicianist rhetoric (if it ends up being a big part of it at all) in spite of opposing rhetoric from within the ideology or outside of it. Analyzing the topology of the Phoenicianist network over time gives us the answer

to this, as we will be able to see if the connections between Phoenicianism and scientific ethos increase, decrease, or remain the same over time by observing the relationships between the nodes representing these themes. As for our research question having to do with the proportion of Phoenicianist rhetoric that contains scientific ethos, this will be instantly apparent to us after coding the data through simple spreadsheet functions on Excel.

Discussion

We will answer the first research question by describing the main themes and sub-themes present in our data set, describing the discourses that those themes represent, and providing a qualitative analysis of that theme in the context of the data set as a whole.

language	247	1
politics	206	2
history	158	3
identity	149	4
phoenicianism	133	5
anti-arab	97	6
religion	89	7
culture	70	8
anti-phoenician	70	8
genetics important	54	10
science ethos	54	10
lebanon is arab	51	11

Figure 9. Popular themes. Themes that appeared in at least 50 posts ordered from most prevalent to least prevalent.

Language

Showing up as a theme in 247 out of 1,336 posts, language was the most prominent topic in our data set. Regardless of what people believed, it was widely accepted that the strongest and most obvious argument in favor of an Arab identity is that the official language of Lebanon is Arabic, and that most Lebanese people speak a dialect of Arabic as their native

tongue. There were multiple arguments against this, the most prominent of which the argument that language is not an indicator of ethnicity, nationality, or more broadly, identity. Many posters pointed out that Americans don't consider themselves English despite speaking the language, nor do Brazilians consider themselves Portuguese, nor do Cameroonians consider themselves French. Not many seemed to be convinced by this argument, not even those making them, since the largest sub-theme for "language" was discussion among Phoenicianist posters on how the Phoenician language and alphabet could be reintroduced in Lebanon (Israel's resurrection of Hebrew often used as a source of inspiration). This has historical precedent in Phoenicianism. The intellectual father of the ideology, Said Akl, was preoccupied with creating a modern Phoenician language based on the ancient Phoenician alphabet that could be taught and eventually adopted in Lebanon, since he saw the Arabic language as the main reason why Lebanon was unable to escape the "Arab" identity label. He ended up creating a latinized version of spoken Lebanese Arabic that employed the use of some Phoenician letters and wrote a number of poems, books (Figure 10), newspapers (Figure 11) and plays with it.

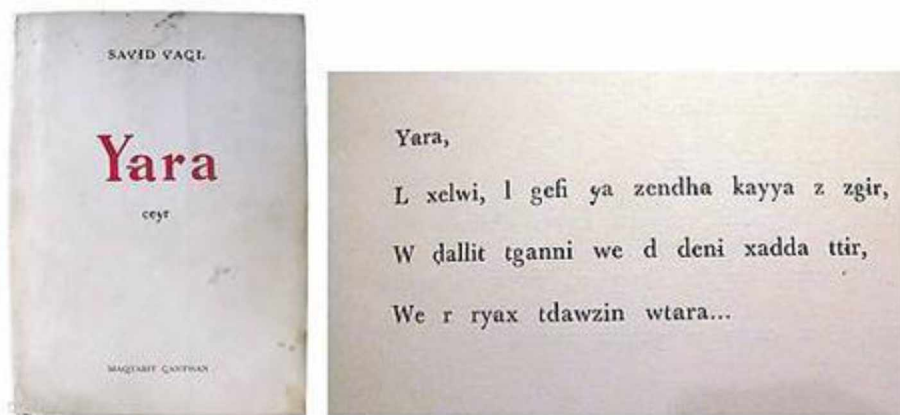


Figure 10. Samples from Said Akl's book "Yara" written in his neo-Phoenician alphabet. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Yara-said-akl.jpg>.



Figure 11. Front page of Said AKI’s newspaper “Lebnaan” written in his neo-Phoenician alphabet. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lebnaan_Newspaper_issue_686.jpg.

He taught his university students this language and hoped that it would soon overtake standard Arabic as the primary language in Lebanon. Based on our data, the preoccupation with displacing Arabic as the primary language in Lebanon seems to continue among Phoenicianists. Out of the 18 threads from which we pulled our data, 4 of them were created for either learning, discussing, or re-introducing the Phoenician language in Lebanon, making it the most common discussion starter from the list of threads we pulled data from (see Figure 12).

1	Are we Arabs by origin or Phoenicians
2	Should a Neo-Phoenician language be taught at school?
3	Phoenicians on PBS
4	Are Lebanese Arabs?
5	The United Phoenician Party ?!!!
6	Maltese (lebanese???)
7	Phoenicians! Who Remember Our Great Ancestors?
8	The Phoenician Language
9	HELP: Organization of the Young Phoenicians
10	Lebanon: a phoenician nation??
11	Modern version of Phoenician boat to spread Lebanese spirit
12	Who are the Lebanese? -- Marcel Ghanem is NOT Phoenician.
13	Why is the Phoenician history so neglected in Lebanon?
14	Should a neo-Phoenician language be introduced in Lebanon?
15	The Phoenician Heritage
16	We are not Arabs
17	DEEP INTO PHOENICIAN PAGANISM
18	is Canaanites/Phoenicians a Paternal ancestry or a cultural phase ? are Lebanese Semitic or not ?

Figure 12. List of discussion threads discussing Phoenicianism. Those related to language highlighted in blue.

Posters in these threads discussed linguistics, Akl's proto-Phoenician work, and other topics related to language. This indicated that Phoenicianist posters were themselves not entirely convinced by the "Arabic language does not mean Arab identity" argument, and like Akl, saw the displacement of the Arabic language in Lebanon as imperative for the success of Phoenicianism.

Identity

In terms of people's views on what constitutes the Lebanese identity, there were three key themes (or perhaps, "sides") that came through in the posts: "Lebanon is Arab", "Lebanon is Phoenician", and "Lebanon is Lebanese". "Identity" itself was the 4th most recurring theme overall, showing up in 149 out of 1,336 posts. The topic of this project and the data that was gathered as a consequence means that all of the data has to do with identity somehow, but the "identity" theme outlined here mostly refers to a self-awareness within the post, by the poster, that they were discussing identity. This manifested itself in multiple ways. For example, many of

the posts discussed how coming up with an identity that was palpable to most Lebanese would be a good way to nation-build and move past previous civil strife and political instability, a way to build a bridge between Lebanon's various religions, sects, and other groups that are often at odds with one another. Others stated that identity was a complex topic that covered not only nationality or ethnicity, but the individual, the various multidimensional communities they are a part of, and the wider world. These posts often used words and phrases that indicated a western education, specifically of the social science or liberal arts variety (the relatively high occurrence of this happening perhaps a result of our data set only using posts written in English). Further posts discussed how identity was a choice, that individuals were free to decide their own identity, and that it did not matter what others thought. "If you consider yourself Phoenician or Arab, then you are, and if you don't, then you're not" was an idea that came up often in these posts, as well as arguments against them stating that identity is how others view you, not how you view yourself (and this is why the concept has power and is worth discussing in the first place). Many of these sub-themes were more likely to show up in posts that espoused a specific identity. For example, many posts arguing in favor of a Phoenician identity pointed out that an identity not based on religion could help end sectarian and religious conflict in the country. The "Lebanon is Lebanese" posters, on the other hand, were more likely to describe identity as multivariable and complex.

Lebanon is Phoenician

With 133 posts arguing in favor of Phoenicianism, this was the most popular of the three identities that came up in our data set. Of course, we were specifically looking for threads discussing this topic, so it is not a stretch to think that people who feel this way were more likely to participate in said threads. Moreover, the fact that this is the official forum for a Christian political party (with mostly Christian voters) and that we excluded all posts written in Arabic should again make clear that this is not a random or representative sample of the Lebanese

population and should not be treated as such. That said, it is useful for exploring how this ideology is communicated today by one of the main protagonist groups on the website. Those espousing Phoenicianism and the idea of a Phoenician identity for Lebanon by and large also saw genetics and ancestry as being fundamental to identity. Almost all references to genetics studies or the use of science to argue for a particular identity came from proponents of Phoenicianism. Posts that explicitly did this were tagged with a “science ethos” theme. These posts sometimes provoked other posters to deem them as racist, bigoted, or ultra-right wing. On that note, mention of the civil war and the role of Phoenicianism in it, as well as the prominent political figures involved in that topic were rarely mentioned (by Phoenicianists or their opponents).

The most often used argument against Phoenicianism in our data was that identity is not something you choose, but something that exists in how others perceive you. Therefore, they say, the Lebanese are Arabs because they are considered to be so by most of the outside world. It is important to note that there was quite a bit of nuance when it came to Phoenicianism. One poster, the most extreme case, claimed full Phoenician heritage (supposedly based on a DNA test he took) and used racial epithets to describe Arabs. On the other end of the spectrum you had some posters saying that Lebanon’s Phoenician past was an important part of the Lebanese identity but not the most important or currently relevant, or that the connection was geographic as opposed to genetic. These posts were often tagged with a softer “pro-Phoenician” theme (which showed up 17 times) as opposed to “Phoenicianism”.

Lebanon is Arab

The second most prominent identity that showed up in the data set was the idea that Lebanon was politically, culturally, and socially a part of the larger Arab world, and that the Lebanese themselves can be considered Arabs. There was quite a bit of diversity in terms of what this meant exactly and how it was argued. Many posters brought up the fact that

Lebanon's official language, according to the Lebanese constitution, is Arabic and that most of the Lebanese population have Arabic as their first language, thus making them Arabs. As stated previously, this was met by considerable pushback with people pointing out that Americans, Australians, and Irish people speak English but are not considered "English" in the sense that someone from England would be. Others discussed the fact that Lebanon was a founding member of the Arab League, and thus was in political and technical terms, an Arab state. Another argument was that Lebanon shared the socially conservative culture of other Arab states. This was met with arguments that social conservatism is not at all unique to Lebanon and the Middle East but is also characteristic of, for example, South America, and many other places around the world. The least popular argument by far in favor of an Arab identity was a shared ancestry with other Arabs. Very few people argued that the original inhabitants of Lebanon were totally displaced by Arab conquest, or that an "Arab" identity indicated a genetic grouping. In fact, proponents of an Arab identity almost never discussed ancestry or genetics at all and rarely employed the use of scientific ethos in their arguments.

Lebanon is Lebanese

The third identity that came up in a lot of posts was the idea that the Lebanese are an ethnic and/or cultural group unto themselves. This group had by far the greatest opinion variance. Many of these posts could be described as having a negative opinion of Arabs, or an aversion to being perceived as Arab by westerners. This was often brought up as a practical matter, for example when visiting or working in Europe and North America, in the sense that "Arab" has negative associations in those contexts that could lead to negative economic or social repercussions. Lebanon's perception by eastern cultures was rarely, if ever, brought up, likely because there is very little Lebanese migration to the Far East. These themes were also noted in Phoenicianist posts, but in contrast most of the "Lebanon is Lebanese" posters viewed identity as a cultural or national label rather than a genetic one and thus did not seem to care all

that much about genetics. Posts expressing a dislike for Arabs or of being perceived as Arab were labelled with the **anti-Arab** theme and are prevalent in both “Lebanon is Phoenician” and “Lebanon is Lebanese” posts. As for Phoenician ancestry specifically, many of these posters saw this part of Lebanon’s history as important, but not something that an identity could be formed around. This identity group also contained a lot of the right-wing nationalist sentiment seen in Phoenicianism (Lebanon is unique, mentioned in the Bible, intellectually superior to the Arabs, and so forth), but also contained a lot of left-wing ideas (seeing Phoenicianism and Arabism both as imperialist or right-wing ideologies, stressing Lebanon’s more liberal or progressive character as compared to other Arab countries). Due to the myriad of ideas that fall under the label of this theme, a lot of the posters that appear to be in the pro-Phoenician or pro-Arab category occasionally show up here as well. One example of this was Phoenicianist posters seeing Phoenician nationalism and Lebanese nationalism as interchangeable and communicating as much (knowingly or unknowingly). Another example would be someone believing that both Arab and Lebanese identities could coexist within the same people, or seeing Lebanese culture as a subset or category of a larger overarching Arab identity.

Politics, history, religion, and culture

The 2nd, 3rd, 7th, and 8th most frequent themes present in our data set, respectively, and more or less evenly interspersed throughout the posts with no particularly strong correlation with one of the three identities, these themes seem to be the main building blocks of identity for people in our network apart from language, which was discussed separately due to its remarkably high frequency and unique history with Phoenicianism.

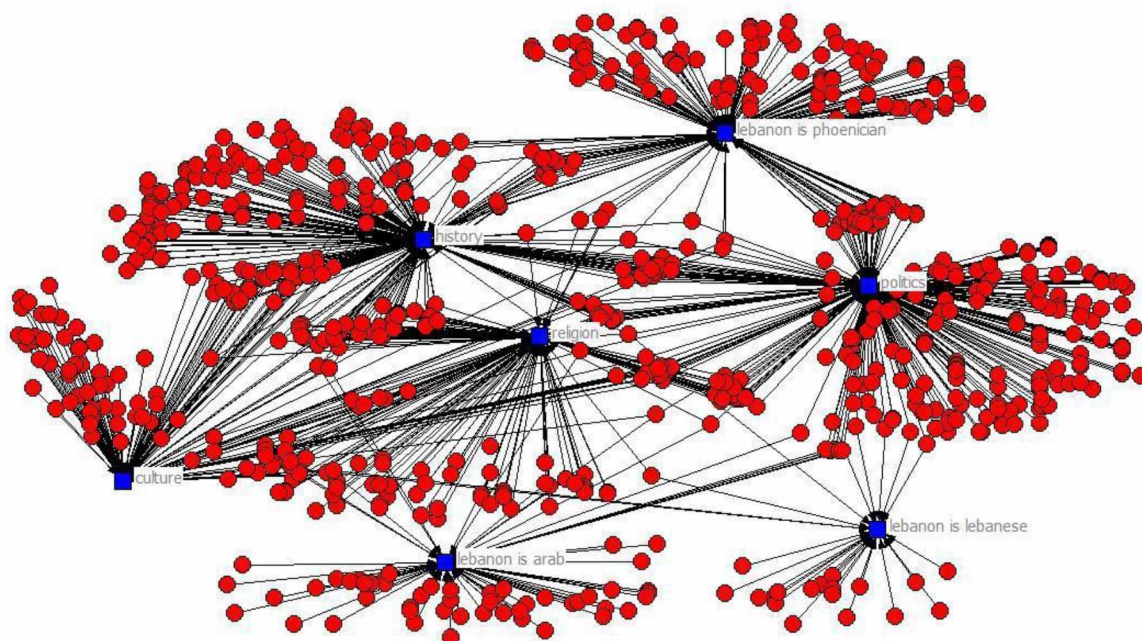


Figure 13. Politics, history, religion, and culture in the Lebanese identity network.

As we can see from the network map of themes (blue nodes) and posters (orange nodes) on Figure 13, all three of the identities espoused in our data set heavily referenced these four themes. This can be seen by looking at the “Lebanon is Arab”, “Lebanon is Lebanese”, and “Lebanon is Phoenician” nodes on the network map, and seeing the multitude of connections (ties) they have with the aforementioned themes. This means that posters arguing for any one of these identities were often using politics, history, religion, and culture in order to make their point. With politics, for example, Phoenicianist posters often attributed Lebanon’s failing government and economic ills on the country’s close ties with the Arab world. The Arabs, they argued, were deliberately sabotaging and taking advantage of Lebanon for their own benefit. On the other hand, those in favor of an Arab identity for Lebanon accused Phoenicianism of being a western plot to divide the Arab world and isolate Lebanon from its neighbors, thus making it easier to control. As for history, posters stressed different parts of it depending on what they were arguing for. Phoenicianists constantly referred to the Phoenician trade routes, colonies

and trading posts throughout North Africa, as well as the spread of the Phoenician alphabet to Europe, characterizing this period of time as when Lebanon was most influential. Pro-Arab posters on the other hand often referenced Lebanon's late 19th and early 20th century history such as the rebellions against the Ottoman Empire (like other Arab countries had) as well as the role of Lebanese intellectuals in several of the regional political movements occurring at the time (the establishment of the Arab League, pan-Arabism, pan-Syrianism, Ba'athism, and so on). Along similar lines, when it came to culture, posters stressed different aspects of it in order to suit the identity they were arguing for. Posters who viewed "Lebanon as Arab", for example, brought up Lebanon's consumption of Egyptian cinema, the similarity of Lebanese food to Syrian and Jordanian food, and Lebanon's central role in Arabic literature. On the other hand, people who viewed "Lebanon as Lebanese" or "Lebanon as Phoenician" did the opposite, bringing up all the ways in which Lebanese culture was different to that of neighboring Arab countries and more similar to, for example, Greek culture.

Multicultural Lebanon

Lebanon's multitude of religions, sects, ethnicities, the multitude of languages that are spoken in the country, the high immigrant and refugee populations, and anything else representing diversity in Lebanon was used as a talking point by all sides involved in the discussion in order to argue for their position. For example, people in the "Lebanon is Lebanese" camp brought up the Lebanese-Armenian population that constitute around 5% of the population of Lebanon. They do not share ancestry with the rest of the Lebanese, having only arrived in Lebanon in the early 20th century. This excluded them from the genetics-based identity of Phoenicianism. They do not speak Arabic either, which also leaves them out of the Arab identity. People argued that Phoenicianism and Arabism both excluded this essential part of the Lebanese population, whereas a generalized "Lebanese" identity did not. Phoenicianists, on the other hand, discussed the potential for their ideology to smooth over all of the differences

that fragmented the Lebanese population. This argument was mainly used in the context of religion. The differences between Muslims and Christians, between Sunnis and Shiites, Maronites and Orthodox, all could be overcome through the adoption of a secular nationalist identity as represented by Phoenicianism, they said. Finally, those who believed in the Arab identity for Lebanon argued that Phoenicianism was fundamentally a Christian/Maronite political ideology that excluded Muslims and reminded people of atrocities committed in the name of Phoenicianism during the civil war. This was one of the few contexts in which the civil war was brought up in discussions in the data set.

Scientific ethos

Almost all uses of scientific ethos in posts came from those arguing in favor of a Phoenician identity. This rhetoric was genetics-based and often used scientific jargon having to do with DNA (haplogroups, mitochondrial vs. Y-DNA, and so forth). Studies in academic journals, documentaries on the Discovery Channel, and other sources perceived as scientific and trustworthy were often cited by those employing Phoenicianist arguments and used as proof that Lebanon was a Phoenician nation. These arguments revealed another theme that was very often paired with Phoenicianism: **genetics is important**. This theme appeared 70 times, only slightly less than the science ethos theme which appeared in 85 posts. This theme references a belief that genetics is the single determinant of identity, and that scientific proof of genetic continuity since Phoenician times until the modern day was the ultimate argument for a Phoenician identity. Posts with this theme believed that the case was closed as far as the discussion of identity was concerned due to DNA studies showing some evidence for this continuity. So significant was this theme to some Phoenicianist posters that many of them even took DNA tests in order to determine just how much Phoenician DNA they had, or were requesting information on how they could get a DNA test done. DNA tests results were often discussed at length, and again, often using scientific jargon that would require quite a bit of

reading to follow and truly understand. The network map below shows just how interrelated Phoenicianism, scientific ethos, and a genetics-based view of identity really are:

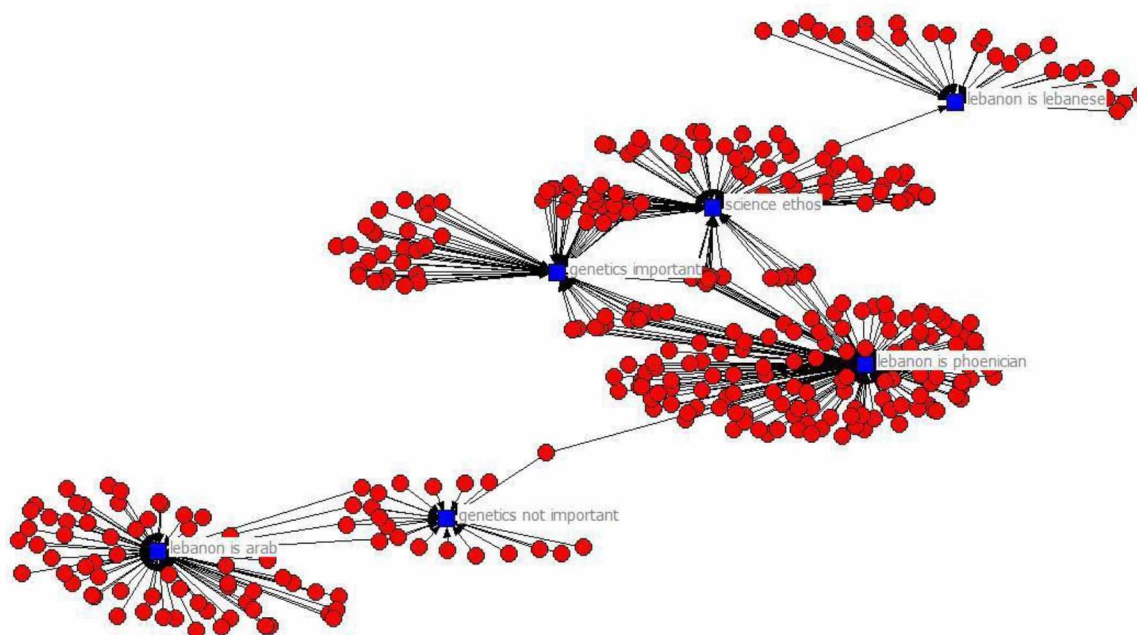


Figure 14. Scientific ethos and genetics in the Lebanese identity network.

As we can see in Figure 14, the “Lebanon is Arab” and “Lebanon is Lebanese” themes have only one connection between the two of them with the “science ethos” and “genetics important” themes. People who held these views (represented by the orange nodes) essentially never used genetics or science based rhetoric to argue their point. In fact, the genetics-based view was challenged so often by the others that a **genetics is not important** theme was identified. These posts often referred to the “genetics is important” arguments as racist or bigoted, or described genetics/DNA testing as unreliable or bogus science. They also argued that identity was shaped by language, culture, religion, and other things, not genetics. Thus, it did not matter if the Lebanese could trace their ancestry back to the Phoenicians as that had no bearing on identity. The network map in Figure 14 also answers our second research question about the prevalence of scientific ethos in Phoenicianist rhetoric. While a large chunk of

Phoenicianist posts contain the use of scientific ethos, and the other two identities we have recognized essentially do not use scientific ethos at all, it is not the overwhelming form of rhetoric for Phoenicianists, nor is it found in the majority of their posts. It is less important than language to Phoenicianist posters (see Figure 15), and about as important as politics, history, and culture.

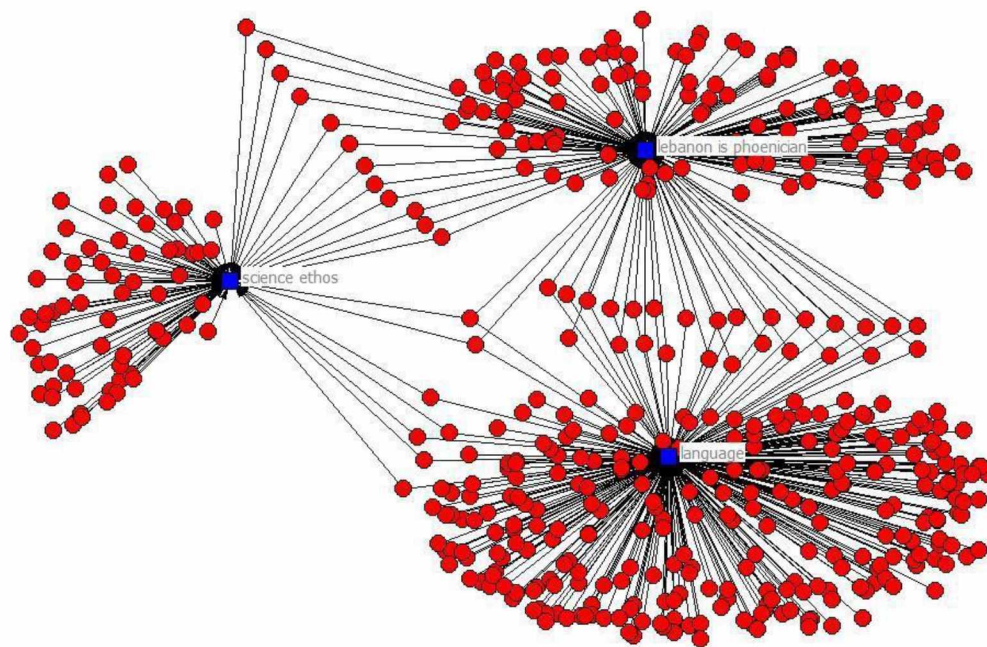


Figure 15. Language vs scientific ethos in the Phoenicianist network.

The above sections describe the most recurring and largest communicative and rhetorical themes that appear in our data set. In order to answer our final research question we had to look at how the Phoenicianist network changed through time in order to assess whether scientific ethos became a larger or smaller part of the network, or whether it remained the same. We are essentially looking at the resilience of the scientific ethos rhetoric: are there more ties between Phoenicianist rhetoric and scientific ethos over time, thus making it a more entrenched part of the ideology? We combined the “Lebanon is Phoenician” and “pro-Phoenician” themes into one general “Phoenicianism” theme (pro-Phoenician was used to refer to positivity towards

topics regarding Phoenician history, culture, and genetics without openly using Phoenicianist rhetoric). As well, we included the “genetics important” theme as a part of this network due to its strong connection to Phoenicianist rhetoric. We created two network maps: one encompassing all data for these themes from 2004 to 2009, and another encompassing all data from 2012 to 2018.

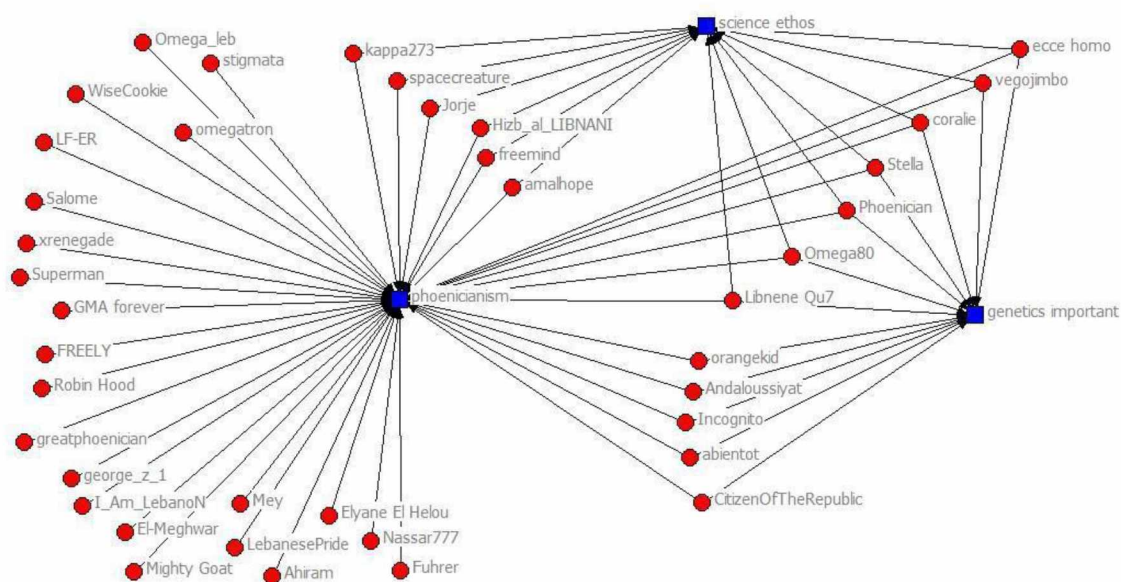


Figure 16. Phoenicianism network from 2004 to 2009.

Figure 16 represents the network from 2004 until 2009. Orange nodes represent individual posters while the blue nodes represent themes. This network is comprised of 61 posts and 40 posters. 7 of the posters wrote posts that conveyed all three of the themes. There are 6 posters who espouse Phoenicianism and use scientific ethos in their rhetoric. Let us compare this to another network snapshot, one from 2012 to 2018, as seen in Figure 17.

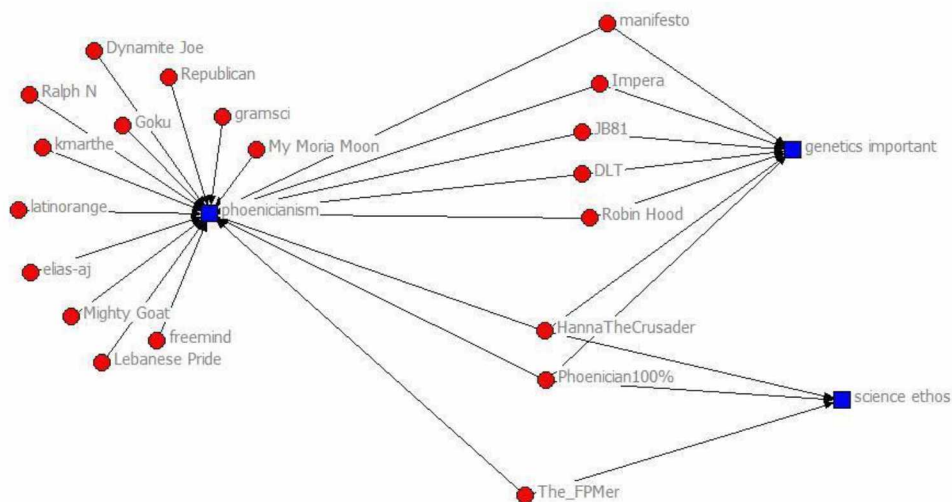


Figure 17. Phoenicianism network from 2012 to 2018.

The number of posters in this network is 20, exactly half of the previous network. Despite the lower number of posters, this network uses data from 113 posts, roughly two times that of the previous network. This was largely due to one specific poster making a large number of posts. When this poster is removed from the count, the number of posters is 19 and the number of posts is 41, about 1/3rd less than the number of posts from the previous network. As for the relationship between the Phoenicianism and scientific ethos, we can see in this network that there are three posters who use scientific rhetoric in arguing for a Phoenician identity. This corresponds with the lower number of people discussing Phoenicianism in general over the time period in this network, indicating no change in the influence of scientific ethos upon the network. What this means is that despite the publishing of several DNA studies between the time period of the first network to the second one (including the most substantial one yet published in 2017, referenced earlier in this paper), scientific ethos doesn't grow to become a more substantial part of the Phoenicianist network.

Conclusion

These results indicate that those who use scientific ethos have already been doing so since the early 2000's when smaller and less conclusive studies were published, and that those who do not use scientific ethos will not be convinced to do so as more studies are published. Another possibility is that Phoenicianist posters took these studies for granted. The descent from Phoenicians claim was one made decades ago, and could have been accepted as fact by some Phoenicianists long before genetics research advanced to this point. To these people, the studies may even seem useless, or pointing out the obvious.

Going back to the discussion of Lessl vs. Condit, our results also seem to replicate what Condit found in her research, as opposed to showing Lessl's scientific ethos as an overwhelming rhetorical tool that would come to dominate identity construction. Indeed, just like with Condit's study, our study finds that there is no increase over time of genetic essentialist belief; in fact, we observed that network to become smaller over time, even after a significant DNA study should have bolstered that network due to its findings being in agreement with the people in that network. However, as science in the modern age seems to advance almost incessantly, research into the social impacts of science needs to keep pace. In the case of genetics, the use of gene manipulation in order to not only eliminate disease, but to also choose physical characteristics poses further challenges to the socially constructed view of identity and is possibly the next realm in which the biological vs socially constructed debate will take place.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this project is the fact that the forum posts written in French and Arabic were not coded and included in our final analysis due to time constraints. Not only did this reduce the amount of available data that we were able to analyze, but it also could have potentially excluded certain themes that would not appear in posts written in English. After all,

people who choose to/can only write in Arabic or French could have done so due to having a different socioeconomic background than other posters (expensive private schools in Lebanon teach English, government-run public schools do not) or could even indicate religious, social, philosophical, or political leanings that discourage the use of the English language (extremely relevant for this topic). The exclusion of these groups means that our network did not encompass everyone who was involved in this discussion on the forum. On a similar note, another limitation that will always exist with network mapping and analysis is that the data we gather is based on our limited understanding of what the network might look like before any actual analysis is conducted and knowledge is gained. It is almost a certainty that there were some Phoenicianism related discussions on the Oroom that were missed by this study simply due to them not showing up in response to the search terms that we used to gather our data. This means that our network mapping does not necessarily give a full picture of the whole system, but only a part of it. Another limitation was the low interrater reliability when it came to coding for themes in the forum posts for our data set. This was done by one person and thus could have resulted in certain patterns and themes not being picked up on that would have been if more people were involved in the coding process, or conversely, the perception of specific patterns and themes where there were none. Another weakness in this research was the fact that, due to time constraints, dichotomies were often used to describe opposing viewpoints where labeling things along a spectrum would have led to better qualitative analysis despite being more time consuming. While our analysis did note that, for example, there were “extreme” cases of Phoenicianism that included ultra-right wing and racial rhetoric and milder cases that saw Phoenician history as an important part of the overall Lebanese identity, it would have been nice if these nuances could have been reflected in the names of themes and thus able to be visualized with our network mapping. Finally, it must be mentioned that the author of this project is from Lebanon and thus may have a biased view of many topics discussed in this project. The events of the civil war, the choice of data to include in the data set, and the analysis of this data

could all possibly include unintended biases on part of the author due to views that may diverge from the views of others (Lebanese or otherwise).

Future Research

While the Oroom had very lax moderation that allowed for open discussion of most topics, including views that opposed the political party that the website was for (a Maronite Christian party allied with Hezbollah and the Syrian government), it is still likely that the sample was heavily biased towards this party's constituency. Future research could look at this topic on another platform that had a different demographic balance than the one on the Oroom. On the other hand, the insight into this website that was gained as a result of this study could be used to generate a more complete network for another analysis of the same website.

Moving beyond Phoenicianism, there are other similarly anti-Arab identity-based ideologies in other Middle Eastern countries that have found a hospitable environment with their respective Christian populations. There is a strong belief among the Coptic Christians of Egypt, for example, that they descend directly from the Ancient Egyptians and are not related genetically to their Muslim countrymen. In Iraq and Syria, many Christians claim direct descent to the Assyrians, Babylonians, and so forth. Like Phoenicianism, it is likely that recent political, social, economic, or scientific changes could have an impact on the rhetoric (or other communicative aspects) of these ideologies that is worth examining. It would be interesting, for example, to observe anti-Arab rhetoric in Iraqi and Syrian Christian (and Kurdish) populations throughout the rise and fall of ISIS during the Syrian civil war.

Another topic that was briefly touched on in this study was the problem of finding a platform from which to pull our data. A lot has been made in recent years about the potential for social media to cause political upheaval in the developing world, by serving as a platform for

free and open discussion. In the case of this study however, it was an internet forum, an ancient (by internet standards) platform that contained the type of rich data that we were looking for in this research. A deeper look into whether this topic is simply an outlier (perhaps too niche of a topic to appear outside of text-heavy platforms) or whether this would be something we see with other research topics would be interesting.

A purely rhetoric-based study on Said Akl and his attempts to create a Phoenician identity in Lebanon could serve as interesting research into failed rhetoric. The question of why his neo-Phoenicianist language never caught on, or why the majority of the Lebanese population did not adopt the identity he was attempting to create is an interesting one because of the way demographics come into play in this particular topic. The heyday of Phoenicianism in the 1970's, where it was widely accepted by large swathes of the Christian population, and its decline in the subsequent decades corresponds with a general decline of the Christian population in Lebanon. A study which begins with this demographic decline as the hypothesis for failed rhetoric could shed light on how environmental conditions can affect the ability of rhetoricians to precipitate social movements.

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