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Abstract

The author analyzes the presence of Lebanese organizations on the Web and shows the transnational links between associations from different countries, starting from a case study including France and Canada. The nature and density of these connections are partly attributable to the importance of linguistic, religious and/or political factors.. The graphs indicate that, while there is a real attempt to transcend the divisions in the diaspora cyberspace, the fragmentation of collective dynamics remains important. The most important alliances revolve around a few of individual portals and some institutional websites. However, the weakness of the Lebanese government does not allow its institutions to play a unifying role for the Lebanese diaspora. In fact, economic initiatives are more active than political ones. The connections between websites claiming to be apolitical show the persistence of selective alliances, which reflect the usual Christian/Muslim divide. Transnationality is thereby limited, and the Lebanese Canadian and French organizations are interconnected only through portals that are not representative of the grassroots community dynamics.

Résumé

Cette étude analyse la présence des organisations libanaises sur le web, afin de retracer les liens transnationaux entre les associations de différents pays, à partir des cas français et canadien. La nature et la densité de ces connexions avec des sites de la diaspora mondiale et ceux du pays d'origine s'expliquent notamment par l'importance des facteurs linguistique, religieux et politique. La dimension identitaire et unitaire des connexions selon le contenu des sites analysés permet d'interroger le possible dépassement du référent national au profit de solidarités plus larges, au-delà des clivages traditionnels. La cartographie obtenue propose des pistes de réponse à ces questions. S'il existe une réelle tentative de transcender les clivages dans le cyberespace de la diaspora, la fragmentation des dynamiques collectives demeure importante. Elle est même accentuée sur le web où l'absence d'un site central qui fasse autorité accentue l'impression de fragmentation. De plus, les alliances les plus importantes concernent quelques sites individuels (des portails), ou des sites institutionnels qui peinent à jouer un rôle unificateur. Ainsi, la défaillance du gouvernement libanais ne permet pas aux institutions de jouer un rôle fédérateur pour les Libanais de l'étranger. Au final, les initiatives à vocation économique sont plus actives que les initiatives politiques. Les connexions des sites qui se disent apolitiques montrent qu'ils semblent maintenir des alliances sélectives, reflet des lignes de clivages habituelles (entre chrétiens et musulmans, selon l'orientation politique, etc.). La transnationalité s'en trouve limitée, et les organisations libanaises canadiennes et françaises, partageant pourtant des langues communes, ne sont reliées entre elles que par des sites portails qui ne sont pas issus des dynamiques communautaires du terrain.

Keywords

Mots-clefs

This exploratory study of the Lebanese diaspora Web is primarily an empirical contribution to this field of research, the literature on this issue in the two selected countries (France and Canada) being relatively limited. The lack of factual data, while posing a challenge for the study, can be viewed as an opportunity to reflect on what information and communication technologies (ICT) can offer as a starting point for a research. In this way, the preliminary results presented here take on an heuristic dimension, suggesting hypotheses and new avenues for research. Studies on diasporas and the Web have already demonstrated that an exploration of the Internet can reveal dynamics that are invisible in real life (Berthomière & Hassan, 2009). An understanding of the community structuration of Lebanese populations in different host countries suggests two common characteristics worth testing in this study. First, the secular and religious community sector is extremely fragmented, mirroring internal divisions in Lebanon. Secondly, links with the country of origin remain strong but very diverse in nature (family networks, confessional affiliations, political solidarity, economic ties, etc.). The Lebanese state, despite its will to reach out to the Lebanese diaspora, struggles to play a central and unifying role. By deliberately limiting itself to Lebanese collective organizations in Canada and France, this study aims to analyse community structuration in a precise way. Through the connections among Lebanese organizations on the Web, it will analyse links between the two poles of the diaspora under study, the nature and density of links with institutions in the country of origin, and the role played by the websites of the global diaspora. The study adopts a perspective focused on organisational dynamics, mobilizations and feelings of belonging of the Lebanese diaspora on the web. This leads to an analysis of the signs of *transnationality* on the web, a concept designating the construction of social networks beyond the borders of nation-states (Dumont, 2010).

The corpus was generated from a list of Canadian and French Lebanese organizations, relying on the crawl to suggest links to other websites. The list was initially restricted to specifically Lebanese organizations (groups, churches, political organizations). I chose not to include, *a priori*, websites of all those organizations in which I knew that Lebanese could be active: such as mosques attended by a variety of nationalities, united Arab organizations, or diverse Canadian and French groups. By questioning criteria of national, political (that is, tied to a Lebanese political party) and confessional (specifically Lebanese confessions) affiliation, I wanted to know whether the crawl would reveal broader alliances or whether such alliances would remain invisible on the Web. The final maps should thus show internal connections between Lebanese organizations in the same country, transnational links, the weight of the country of origin, and potential alliances with non-community websites. Drawing on one of the rare studies of transnationalism in the Lebanese diaspora, based on an empirical study between Montreal, Paris and New York (Abdulhady, 2004, 2006), I used this particular angle to select the main websites for analysis. In her research, Dalia Abdulhady arrives at the conclusion that many Lebanese prefer membership and involvement broader than those attached to a sense of belonging strictly tied to the country of origin. The Lebanese she interviewed, while often interested in the country of origin, preferred, as transnational migrants, to move beyond national affiliation and integrate into broader networks.

This article aims to analyse:

- The presence of Lebanese organizations on the Web and the links between them. Is the fragmentation in the Lebanese community sector visible on the ground reflected in the same way on the Web?

- The presence or absence of transnational links between Lebanese organizations in each country, global diaspora sites and sites in the country of origin.

- The nature and density of these connections, particularly the role of linguistic, religious and political factors.

- The aspect of identity and unity in these connections, according to the contents of the websites analysed. Are national referrants set aside in favour of broader solidarity on the web? Is the web a privileged space of construction of a common Lebanese identity, transcending traditional divisions?

The Lebanese diaspora, a diaspora of dispersal

The Lebanese diaspora is generally considered to be one of the largest in the world, relative to the

population of the country of origin. While numbers vary, most serious studies agree that there are as many, or even more, Lebanese in the diaspora as there are in Lebanon: around 3 or 4 million (Verdeil et al., 2007). The history of Lebanon is marked by heavy emigration, which can be traced back to very early times. In the contemporary period, it is considered to have begun in the middle of the 20ᵗʰ century. Even before the country became a republic in 1920, or an independent state within its current borders in 1946, emigration was already significant. In 1900, around 225,000 people – referred to as *Syrians* and *Turks* in the countries where they settled – had emigrated, many from the Mount Lebanon area (Issawi, 1992). Between 1900 and 1914, some 210,000 of these emigrants had arrived in America (Bourgey, 1985). Emigration decreased during the two World Wars and the inter-wars years as it became more difficult to leave, and traditional host countries, such as Canada and the United States, closed their borders. In the 1950s and '60s, emigration gradually increased and diversified: from this point, it consisted of graduates going to the Gulf countries, and students and professionals seeking their fortune in the west. Emigration peaked during the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990). In 2001, a study estimated that a total of 600,000 had emigrated since 1975, including about 250,000 since 1991. In all events, despite their imprecision, the figures cited certainly indicate massive emigration (Verdeil et al., 2007). The Lebanese foreign presence remains difficult to quantify (estimates vary from 3 to 17 million!) because it covers a host of different situations: from first to third generations; descendants of mixed ancestry; figures according to nationality, country of birth, or ethnic origin, etc. (Verdeil et al., 2007).

The concept of "diaspora" has been the focus of much study and discussion by social scientists. Different definitions have been proposed to distinguish a diaspora from other forms of immigrant community. Originally, diaspora was associated with the history of the Jewish people and was characterized by forced dispersal and emigration of groups, in which the memory of trauma cemented a long history of exile (Berthomière & Hassan, 2009). The term later broadened and was used to analyse different populations living outside their homeland. Diaspora can be characterized by four aspects: memory and consciousness of a shared condition; organized transmission of this collective memory; a multiplicity of

decentralized centres of cultural expression; and the economic and cultural means of maintaining a multinational network of links among these centres (Helly, 2006)[1]. The age and broad dispersal of emigrant communities originating from the Lebanese region explains the frequent use of the concept of diaspora to characterize it, both in academic studies and common use. "Beyond their multiple affiliations, Lebanese living outside Lebanon maintain strong links to their country of origin, constituting a true diaspora, unified by cultural traits and common reference to a land of origin, which lingers despite distance and dispersal" (Verdeil et al., 2007). While numerous writers who have studied the Lebanese immigrant population have elected to use this term, their work has also stressed its heterogeneity and internal fragmentation. One of the questions raised relates to identity and shared memory, which take different forms within this diaspora, reflecting internal cleavages in Lebanon. Following the civil war, the Lebanese nation-state remained vulnerable to and challenged by internal divisions. This reality is reflected in the lack of unified political demands coming from Lebanese living overseas attempting to influence events in their country of origin. According to Michael Humphrey, a specialist in Lebanese immigration in Australia and the diaspora more generally, Lebanese who are permanently settled in western countries face a problem at the organizational level. The lack of unity in the political scene and community sector of Lebanese living abroad, in contrast to other groups who mobilise in a unified way, leads him to conclude that the Lebanese diaspora is primarily a "diaspora of dispersal" (Humphrey, 2004).

A diaspora of dispersal, fragmented and divided; but nevertheless "connected migrants" (Diminescu, 2005). "The internet has become, for a number of ethnic minorities, a means of community representation and a way of participating in public debate" (Rigoni, 2010). Moreover, the dynamic created by the internet can sometimes

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1. Diaspora was first defined simply by a dispersed membership living outside the original centre who develop strong ties with their country of origin. A second definition emerging from the experience of Black Americans developed in the 1970s, influencing political struggles around minorities and state responsibility for minorities. In parallel, a third use of the term came into currency, broader and more positive, defining diaspora in terms of mobility and transnational networks. Thus it is no longer so much links to the country of origin, as links among the dispersed communities which characterize diasporas (Helly, 2006).

help to palliate the difficulty of uniting a diaspora or of arriving at common demands when the political regime is fragmented (Ben David, 2010). While the structuration of the Lebanese community is fragmented, we can observe the development of unified associations in the diaspora, which attempt to transcend divisions. In parallel, traditional solidarities are maintained throughout the diaspora, and their organizations remain the most popular: churches, groups tied to villages of origin, groupings formed out of political movements, etc. The hypothesis that unifed organizations are more visible and predominant on the Web than on the ground as a result of the transnational nature of this space is worth testing by identifying the specificity of relations that form on the Web.

Lebanese presence in Canada and France: history, profile and literature review

With very different histories and home to Lebanese communities of very different profiles, Canada and France are nevertheless interesting to compare in the context of research on diaspora cyberspace. Like the rest of North America, Canada was an historical destination for migrants leaving the Lebanese region (at the time referred to as *Bilad el Cham* and part of the Ottoman Empire) at the end of the 19th century. The establishment of chains of migration and community networks facilitated the arrival of new migrants during the following periods, up to the present. Canada represents an historical destination for the Lebanese, who occupy a significant place in the Canadian mosaic and are prominent relative to other non-European minorities, particularly in Quebec. While Lebanese immigration to France is just as old, it is numerically weak. The country became a destination of choice for Lebanese during the civil war (1975–1990), rivalling North American host cities. However, Lebanese remain a minority within a minority in France; they are very few relative to the total number of migrants in the country, and particularly in comparison to Arabs from the Maghreb. They enjoy a positive image, are not very visible and do not represent a central issue for France.

Canada and particularly Quebec: preferred destinations for Lebanese

In Canada, where the Lebanese population represents a non-negligible component of the country's ethnic diversity, historical studies of this minority are rare (Abu-Laban, 1981, 1992; Aboud, 2002, 2003; Jabbra, 1984; Asal, 2011) and there are few studies of changes to the composition of the diaspora (Abou, 1977; Chamoun, 1998; Fortin, 2000). The most recent examine Arabs in general, Christian or Muslim, including Lebanese (Abu-Laban, 1995; Le Gall, 2001; Castel, 2002; Lebnan, 2005; Eid, 2007; Asal, 2011). According to the 2001 census of the Canadian population, close to 144,000 people of Lebanese origin were living in Canada; this rose to 165,000 in 2006.[2] The Lebanese are the sixth largest non-European ethnic group in the country, with a much more rapid growth rate than that of the population as a whole (Lindsay, 2001). In Quebec, where a significant part of the Lebanese population is concentrated, Lebanon ranked as the fourth birth country of the immigrant population (after Italy, France and Haiti) up to 2001, and seventh during the past decade (ICC, 2011). Unlike France, where the Lebanese form a tiny minority of immigrants from the Arab world, in Canada they represent 38% of those claiming Arab ethnicity. However, with the recent massive influx from the Maghreb, this may soon change.

The first migrants from the Arab region to arrive in America at the turn of the 20th century often worked as peddlars or shopkeepers. The process of institutional development of the community began with the preservation of religious traditions; the majority of migrants being Christian, churches played a major role. Next, diverse organizations developed, including press (Aboud, 2003; Asal, 2011). During the 1975–1990 civil war, the number of Lebanese migrants admitted to Canada exploded, reaching a peak of around 12,000 entries in 1990 and 1991. Lebanese immigration diversified in terms of religious affiliation, qualification and education (Abu-Laban, 1992). In 1991, Muslims in Quebec represented 21% of the total number of Lebanese; of these, 60% were Shiite (Castel, 2002). The number of Muslims has continued to increase: in 2001, about 30% of people of Lebanese origin in Canada said they were Muslim. In addition, only 6% of the

2. Table « Ethnic origin of population of Canada », 2006 Census – 20% Sample Data, Statistics Canada.

Lebanese population said they had no religious affiliation, compared to 17% of the population as a whole (Lindsay, 2001).[3]

During the civil war, special measures were in place to facilitate the entry of Lebanese immigrants to Canada. Networks of older Lebanese migrants played a leading role in the acceptance of this huge wave of new migrants: they pressured officials in the host country and contributed to the settlement and integration of their compatriots. Canada helped by providing subsidies to organizations, but families, churches and community associations carried the brunt (Aboud, 2002). Quebec also played a significant role in accepting Lebanese. Justified by French language policies, measures to facilitate Lebanese admission were adopted in 1976 (Aboud, 2002, Abu-Laban, 1992). Montreal, the historic destination of Lebanese immigration, still has the greatest Lebanese presence in Canada (in 2001, it harboured 30% of the total number of Canadians of Lebanese origin). While the possibility of living in French partly explains why Lebanese were attracted to Quebec, linguistic and historic factors played an even more important role in their choice of France.

Lebanese immigrants in France, a minority within a minority

The Lebanese in France are estimated at between 35,000 and 150,000 people (Abdulkarim, 1996). Estimates are more difficult in France because we only have access to figures by country of birth (35,000 in the last census).[4] Studies of this group are even more rare in France than they are in Canada. Since Hattab's thesis in the 1980s (Hattab, 1985), an article by Kemp (1992) and the work of Abdulkarim (1996), which offers a general portrait of the Lebanese population in France, only two authors have published more recent works: Nasser (2010), on the Lebanese community in Marseille, and Abdelhady (2004), who analyses the Lebanese diaspora from a comparative perspective (France, Canada, and the United States). Although immigration to France began at the end of the 19th century with the arrival of intellectuals and white collar workers, the Lebanese were not numerous (3000 in the 1920s). During the civil war, western Europe accepted a number of Lebanese migrants fleeing the war, and France was their preferred destination. As in Canada, the Lebanese benefited from administrative measures facilitating a massive immigration to France (Abdulkarim, 1993). Half of these immigrants settled in Île de France. The efforts of Paris to encourage the use of French in Lebanon itself, the fact that the Ninth Summit of the Francophonie was held in Beirut in 2002, and the influence of the French language, strengthened by a French community in Lebanon of around 10,000 (Gérard, 2001), are indicative of the importance of the language to the diaspora settled in France. While the Lebanese are numerically a minority relative to other migrants, they are also in a socio-economic minority. Of Lebanese people working in France, 81% counted among the heads of industry and trade, liberal professionals and upper management (Hattab, 1985). The majority of Lebanese in France are professionals and artisans, followed by engineers and doctors (Abdulkarim, 1993). The Lebanese enjoy a positive image in France, particularly in contrast to the majority of Arabs, from the Maghreb, whose history is very different and more conflictual. Lebanese are perceived as exemplary migrants: economically integrated, entrepreneurs, shopkeepers and intellectuals; workers and self-employed. In fact, the Lebanese are barely visible: they have their own institutions, and their political demands remain low key (Kemp, 1992).

The Lebanese presence is heavily structured by associations of a confessional, cultural and solidarity nature (Abdulkarim, 1993). As in Canada, this network allows older immigrants to host new-comers and respond to the cultural needs of migrants in France. However, the Christians, longer settled and more numerous, benefit more from these networks than do Muslims. Figures on religious composition are non-existant in France, so once again we can only estimate. In the 1980s, the Lebanese in France were composed of 65% Christian and 35% Muslim (Hattab, 1985). The Christians' cultural and religious networks developed out of the older presence of this minority in France (Abdulkarim, 1993). Lebanese Muslims, like their co-religionists, are seldom found

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3. Figures from the 2006 Census are partial and certain data is not presented, including religious confessions. Figures from the 2011 Census are due to be published during the winter of 2012, but all estimates agree that the number of Muslims in general has considerably increased.

4. The most recent census gives the figure of 35 000 for Lebanese-born people in France. Table «Immigrants by country of birth,» Insee, 2007 Census, primary use.

in the mosques. This is in part due to the fact that mosques are limited to a few neighbourhoods with a high concentration of Muslims (where there are few Lebanese). In addition, as Liliane Nasser notes in her study of Marseille, Lebanese Muslims express alienation from the "ghettoized" Islam of France (Nasser, 2010). The issue of places of worship is even more acute for the few Shiite Muslims, who represent a tiny minority of Muslims in the country.

Fragmented community sector and many isolated organizations

General analysis of base map

The corpus as constituted includes close to 100 websites. The base map consists of a main component of websites connected to each other, a cluster of about twenty websites completely isolated from each other, and four smaller clusters with websites linked to each other.

http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=map&map=61&section=29
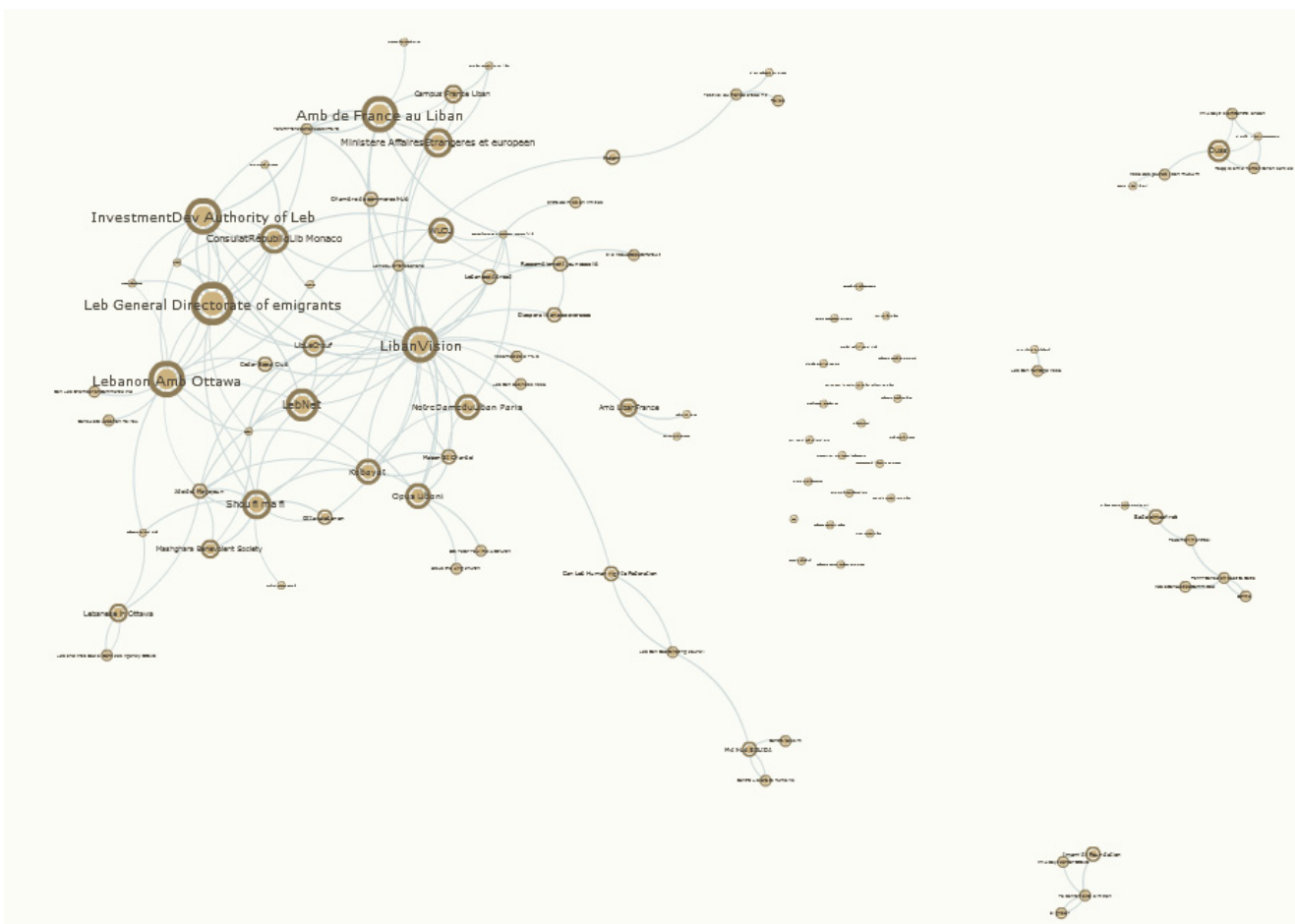
The main componant can be identified as a community which is not dominated by one or two large, influential websites but rather consists of a multiplicity of medium websites connected among themselves. Thus, there is no real hub or central authority. The most connected websites are diaspora portals like *Liban vision* (which functions more like a hub, with outgoing links to 22

websites, though its degree of influence is equally important with 8 websites leading towards it); directories of links like *LebNet* (often cited by other websites); and smaller hubs with less than a dozen outgoing links, like *Web Libanais fran-cophone* (a media portal of the diaspora), *Leb411* (a media portal in Alberta) or *Beyrouth sur Seine* (an inter-professional group). The other websites

that are most connected are institutional websites, which for the most part function as *authorities*, and are characterized by incoming links: the Lebanese Embassy in Ottawa, the French Embassy in Lebanon, the Emigrant Branch of the Lebanese Foreign Affairs Ministry and the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL). Many websites play a bridge role, linking two or three websites to this main component of the map. An analysis of the large cluster shows that the isolated websites have few commonalities. Besides the fact that there is only one portal (all the others are located in the main component) in each graph obtained by categorization, nothing distinguishes these websites from others in the corpus (they can be any language, origin, confessional or political affiliation, etc.). The four small clusters, each composed of from two to six websites, share the feature of being linked to a religious organization. The smallest cluster links a church site to an organization's site (St. Nicholas Church to the Lebanese Canadian Heritage Association (LCHA)). The other three clusters include Shiite organizations. We will examine this point in greater detail below; it indicates that the Shiite websites are more isolated than other religiously affiliated websites.

Overall, the base map shows a relatively low density of connections, and appears to confirm the fragmentation of the Lebanese community sector. It also shows that institutional websites and portals dedicated to the Lebanese diaspora assume positions as poles of attraction, confirming that only organizations without specific affiliation are capable of creating community, even if only in a limited way. These websites enable a kind of transnationalism by acting as bridges: Canadian and French organizations are linked only via these websites; there are no direct links between them (with just one exception: the Lebanese Canadian Coordinating Council (LCCC) and the Mouvement franco-libanais Solida, at the bottom of the main component).

The linguistic dimension

In Lebanon, 45% of the population speaks French and 28% is bilingual. 40% of the population speaks English, and 73% of those who are Arab/French bilingual also speak English. These numbers show both the importance of French and its fragility. It is viewed in Lebanon as "the language of culture *par excellence*, of dawning modernity and great

humanism", and is the second language, both formally and for the purposes of adminstration (Corm, 2001; Gérard, 2001). Websites which use only one language represent 64% of the corpus. Of these, 33 websites are exclusively francophone, 26 anglophone and 4 arabophone. For the most part, Arab is used in addition to French and/or English (11 English-Arabic, 2 French-Arabic, 6 English-French-Arabic; all websites that use more than three languages include Arabic). The francophone diaspora websites have a unifying effect. *Liban Vision,* an explicitly francophone, unilingual portal*,* is the most striking example (it is the most connected website of the corpus, with 22 outgoing links and 8 incoming). Paradoxically, its insistence on French makes it one of the only bridge sites in the corpus, connected to Lebanese, French and Canadian websites. As noted above, transnational links between Canada and France are rare. However, in addition to diaspora portals and institutions, *Liban vision* cites both French organizations (Maison St-Charbel, Notre Dame du Liban, and l'Association médicale franco-libanaise) and Canadian organizations (Cedar Social Club, Leb411, and the Lebanese Canadian Business Association). Its founder, Jean Michel Druart, a French man married to a Lebanese woman, highlights the transnational nature of his site: "This is a website about Lebanon, created by a Frenchman and hosted in Canada."[5] *Liban vision* is mostly linked to francophone websites, but it also has links to exclusively anglophone websites (like *Leb Bet, Leb411*, and the World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU)). The Emigrant Branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, connected to 13 websites in the corpus, is exclusively Arabic. The other institutions and portals that are most connected, found in the centre of the component, can be exclusively anglophone, like *Shou fi ma fi*, *Leb Net, Leb 411* and WLCU; exclusively francophone like *Liban vision*, the *Web libanais francophone* and the French Embassy in Lebanon; or multilingual like *Liban le Chouf*, *Kobayat* and *Jdeide Marjayoun*.

In sum, the linguistic composition of the Lebanese diaspora Web reflects, above all, the diaspora's establishment in the host countries, very few websites being exclusively in the language of origin, Arabic (4% of the entire corpus).

5. Interview with the founder of Libanvision.com in an article which appeared in "La Revue du Liban", n° 3872, 23–30 November 2002. http://www.rdl.com.lb/2002/q4/3872/ne-manquezpas4.html

Moreover, it is interesting to consider Canada (a French-English bilingual country) and France in order to analyse potential connections between poles of the diaspora sharing the same language. It turns out that the portals and institutions linking the diaspora rely on an almost equal use of

English and French. French is used by 57% of the websites in the corpus and English by 60%. This enables connections between all websites on the map, language not posing an obstacle to inter-comprehension on the Web.
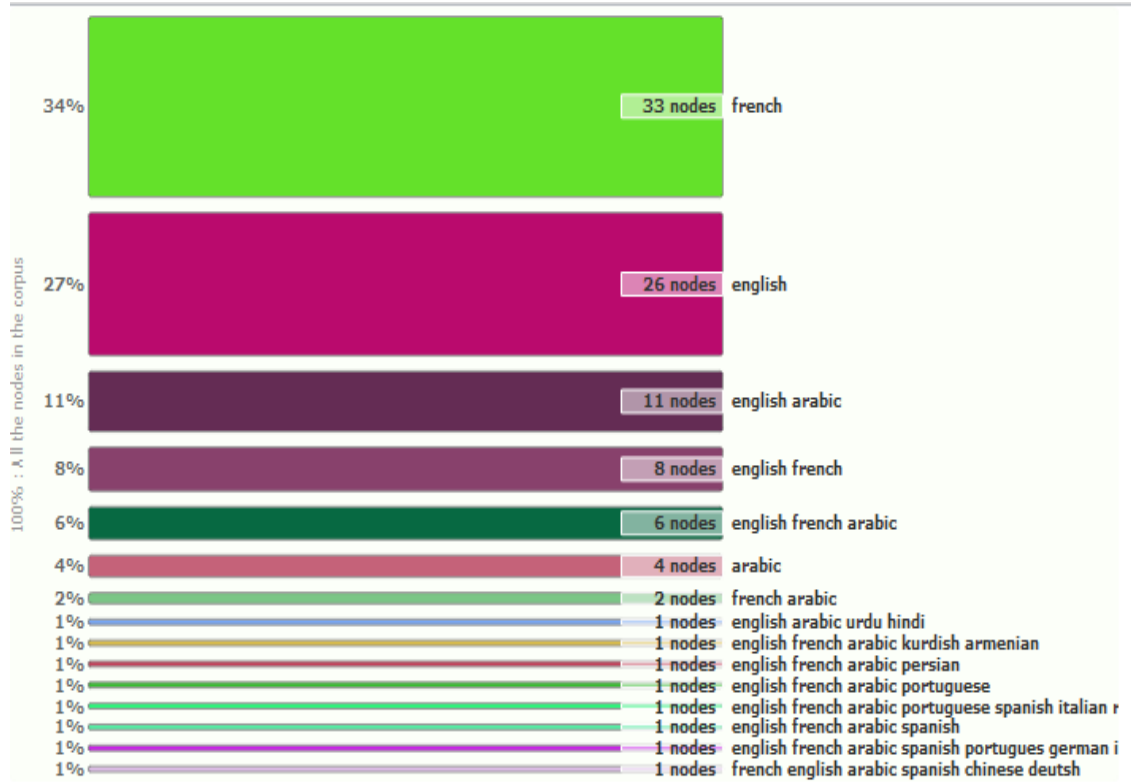

Religious affiliations

The structuration of the Lebanese community, in general and in the diaspora, is heavily shaped by religious institutions; it is thus necessary to analyse this dimension. Looking exclusively at institutions whose main mission is related to worship, 18% of the websites referenced were identified as religious. This seems rather low, given that, on the ground, attending religious institutions is more central. Of these institutions, 33% are Christian and 61% Shiite. However, if religious institutions are combined with other organizations (cultural, community, social) with a religious affiliation, there are the same number of Christian websites and Shiite websites. Christian-affiliated websites (in red) are connected to each other on the edge of the main component; they are also linked to portals in the centre through bridge sites (websites with no religious affiliation, notably portals and institutions, are indicated in pink).

St. Nicholas Church is linked to the LCHA, in a separate cluster. This link is historical in nature. The majority of the first *Syrian* migrants to Canada were Orthodox and, in 1933, they founded the first secular organization, called the Syrian Canadian Association (SCA). In 2005, the SCA became the Lebanese Canadian Heritage Association (LCHA). The organization remains close to the historic Orthodox church, St. Nicholas, some of whose members are descended from the founders of the SCA (Asal, 2011).

While Lebanese Christians are more numerous than Muslims (and thus Shiites) in both Canada and France, the predominance of Shia-affiliated websites in the corpus is striking. This is all the more striking because, linked to each other or isolated, Shia-affiliated websites have no presence in the main component, whereas the Christian websites, just as connected to each other, are more integrated into the entire map. For the most part, websites identified as Shiite are located in
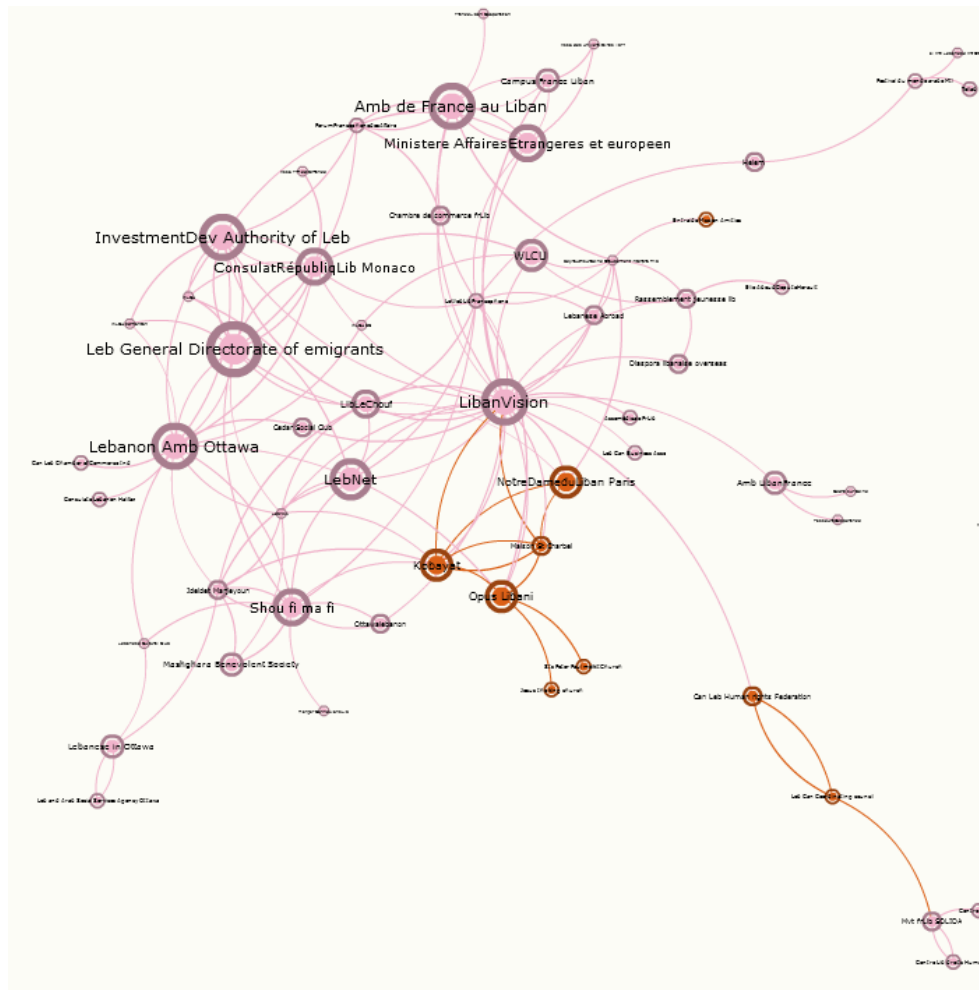
two clusters; separated from each other (at top and bottom of the map), but connected internally. The first is composed of six websites whose centre, which acts as an authority, is a portal of the Shiite Muslim diaspora (*Duas*). It is surrounded by Canadian Shiite organizations: the Association des Jeunes Libanais Musulmans, which acts as a bridge to the Centre Islamique Libanais (CIL) of Montréal; the Al Mahdi Islamic Center and the Ahlul-Bayt Islamic Center school (ABIC), both located in London, Ontario; and the Al Haqq Islamic Humanitarian Service in Kitchener, Ontario. The second cluster is composed of four websites, all Shiite but transnational: Y*a Zahra – mawqi almizan* based in Lebanon; *Al Ghadir,* which is a religious Lebanese Shiite website based in France; the Imam Ali Foundation, based in London, but dedicated to the Shiite diaspora; and the Ahlul Bayt Center in Ottawa. *Sada el Machrek*, which has ties to the Canadian Shiite community, is in another cluster

cited in its capacity as a newspaper (linked to the Montreal Shiite community centre *Al Hidaya*) by a Montreal-based politically-oriented organization (*Tadamon*).

The predominance of Shia-affiliated websites is particularly striking because there are no Sunni organizations in the corpus (apart from an organization linked to the Lebanese Sunni political party, Hariri's Future party). The invisibility of Sunnis in our corpus, despite the crawls carried out, can be explained by the fact that Lebanese make up only one nationality among many others in the Sunni mosques and Islamic organizations in the host country. Sunnis make up the majority of Muslims in Canada (and the rest of the world), and there is no reason for Lebanese Sunnis to organize separately when they can share places of worship with other believers, especially Arabs. Moreover, even if a Sunni mosque were predominantly attended by Lebanese, this fact would not necessarily be reflected on its website. In contrast,

Arab-speaking Shiite Muslims in Canada are primarily Lebanese (there are some Iraqis and other Shiite Arabs, but not many), while Iranian Shiites have their own organizations and appear to be less religious.[6] In fact, studies of Muslims in general and of Lebanese Muslims in particular are lacking. In 2005, there were about 42 Sunni and 4 Shiite places of worship in Montreal, including several informal places. The oldest mosque in Quebec, a Sunni mosque called the the Islamic Centre of Quebec, is not often frequented by Lebanese Muslims (Gagnon, 2005), and thus is not in our corpus. Given the abundance of Muslim places of worship, their instability and the lack of permanent structure, it is extremely difficult to determine which mosques are most attended by Lebanese Muslims in Montreal. Only one Montreal mosque promotes itself as Lebanese: the CIL, located in the cluster of six Shiite websites, is dedicated to Lebanese Shiite Muslims (Lebnan, 2005). Only one Druze organization appears in the corpus, a Canadian organization (the Druze Association of Edmonton), which seems to have no connection to any other organization.

There are fewer Shiites in France than in Canada. This is clearly reflected on the Web: 38% of the Shiite websites in the corpus are Canadian Lebanese, while only 8% are French Lebanese. More generally, 38% of all Shiite websites in the corpus (whether Lebanese, Arab or other) are based in Ontario, 31% in Quebec and, again, 8% in France. Overall, the corpus includes few religious institutions based in France (only three; two Christian and one Shiite). This is partly due to the fact that there are fewer Lebanese in France, but it also reflects the much greater difficulty of establishing religious centres, especially Muslim centres, in France than in Canada. As noted above, it would be difficult for Sunnis to build their own places of worship and they can pray in predominantly Maghrebian Sunni religious

centres, even if that is not always their first choice (Nasser, 2010).

The classification of websites by religious affiliation shows that religion can obscure nationality. This explains the absence of Sunni websites. The visibility of Eastern Christian minority churches in the general map, on the other hand, is due to their age and the fact that they are connected to the generalist portals. The linguistic factor associating Christians and francophones furthermore explains the fact that Christian websites cite and are cited by French-language portals. It is also worth noting that religious websites are connected among themselves; this is true of both Christians and Shiites (which are connected only to each other, within the clusters). There are no links between Christians and Muslims on the Web.

Confusion of religious and political issues

Religiously-affiliated websites represent 22% of the corpus (combining Shiite, Druze, Masonic and Christian websites). Most religious organizations define themselves as apolitical, though their orientations can sometimes be guessed from the texts and issues they prioritize. The religious and the political are deeply intertwined in Lebanon. While this is not systematic, and confessional and political party lines are not identical, electoral divisions and the political system are based on rules that meld the religious with the political. Broadly speaking, the Lebanese political field is currently divided into two camps; these are not frozen, but continue to shift (evidence that they are political and not religious). They took shape at the beginning of 2005 with the departure of Syrian troops from Lebanon and a re-alignment of political alliances. They are:

- The March 14th coalition: created after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, it unites the Future party, a major Parliamentary block which remains tied to the Hariri family and is mainly Sunni, and the Lebanese Forces, a Christian party currently led by Samir Geagea. The main Druze party, led by Walid Joumblatt, was part of this coalition until 2009.

- The March 8th coalition: composed mainly of Hezbollah, the Shiite party led by Hassan Nasrallah, and including the Amal movement (also Shiite) and a major Christian

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6. «Practising Iranian Muslims attend mosques and Islamic institutions established by the greater Muslim community of Canada as well as several Shiite mosques built specifically for this community. Some are independant and others maintain relations with the Iranian government. Compared to other communities coming from majority-Muslim countries, the Iranian community is generally more secular. A recent study conducted by researchers at York University shows that, compared to Pakistanis, Afghanis, and Palestinians, more than 80% of Iranian-Canadians say that they are non-practising.» Saeed Rahnema, «Iraniens», L'Encyclopédie Canadienne, 2011.

political party, General Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement.

Many of the diaspora organizations are clearly partisans of one of these movements: the Lebanese Forces Student Association of North America, the Future Movement of Ottawa, the Imam Ali Foundation and *Ya Zahra Mawqi almizan* (supporting the Iranian government), the Canadian Lebanese Human Rights Federation, the LCCC (openly pro-Aoun) and the Free Patriotic Movement-COLCO (Council of Lebanese Canadian Organisations). Many other parties have student or partisan branches in France and Canada but, having only Facebook or a page in the party's website, they are not included in the corpus. Two confessional organizations tied to the two main Christian political parties in Lebanon (Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement and the Lebanese Forces) are in an isolated cluster, with no links to churches. These two parties are opponents in the Lebanese political spectrum, so it is possible that churches refrain from identifying with either of them to avoid dividing believers.

In total, 17% of the websites in the corpus have political goals and are active for one or more causes. In this subgroup, some websites are explicitly aligned with Lebanese political parties, others promote human rights (the *Centre Nassim*, the *Centre Libanais des droits humains* and *SOLIDA*, which support victims of torture and prisoners) or voting rights in Lebanese elections for Lebanese living abroad (*Lebanese Abroad*), and some are run by groups active for causes linked to the Middle East, particularly Palestine (*Canadian for Justice and Peace in the Middle East* (CJPME), *Tadamon*, *Canadian Arab Federation* (CAF), *Adala*). These political websites do not have many connections to Lebanese community websites, not even through portals, but they are linked to each other. The graph according to publisher type shows an internal density of 5.1% for all "political" websites, and the graph according to religious/political orientation shows an internal density of 7% among websites categorized as "political Arab/Human Rights" (which represent 10% of the entire corpus).

There is a remarkable difference between the visibility of ties to Michel Aoun's party and the complete absence of any reference to Hezbollah, though both entities are part of the March 8th coalition. Familiarity with the Lebanese community scene in the two countries leads to the conclusion

that support for the Shiite party is concealed. The generally negative image of Hezbollah in the west, as well as the fact that Canada placed the organization on its list of terrorist organizations, explains the absence of public support, which in Canada would raise legal questions. Israel's attack on Lebanon in 2006 exposed the difficulty that Lebanese Shiites or anyone else face in expressing any kind of rational discourse around Hezbollah, which is greatly demonized.[7] The mobilization against the 2006 war was much greater in Canada than in France; particularly in Montreal, where there is a very large Lebanese presence (notably Shiite). A Montreal-based, Canadian-Lebanese family, on holiday in Lebanon, was decimated in a bombing, provoking an emotional response.[8] In France, there were two parallel protests, one in support of and one in opposition to Hezbollah; each bringing together about one thousand people.[9] The over-representation of Shiite organizations on the Lebanese diaspora Web contrasts sharply with the total absence of any visible political affiliation. Only two Shiite websites in the corpus are politicized, even pro-Iranian; one based in London and another in Lebanon. Moreover, the Shiite websites are extremely isolated in comparison to the Christian websites. Apart from *Tadamon*, Shi'a-affiliated websites are not linked to any non-Shiite websites. *Tadamon* is a Canadian collective established as a solidarity project between Montreal and Beirut, later broadening its scope to the entire Middle East. It plays a bridging role between the Shia-affiliated newspaper *Sada el Machrek* and other Canadian groups politically active on the Middle East and especially Palestine (*CJPME*, *Canadian Boat for Gaza* and *Adala*). These websites are found in the same cluster, on the right side of the map.

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7. During the largest protest against the war on Lebanon, which took place on 6 August 2006 in Montreal with some 20 000 participants, Hezbollah flags were banned by the Lebanese organizers and their allies. Several people nevertheless displayed them, a fact which was virulently criticized and caused a scandal in the media, when, for example, the famous Quebec cinematographer Pierre Falardeau was photographed with the yellow flag. «Drapeau du Hezbollah: Falardeau s'explique" (Hezbollah flag: Falardeau explains). La Presse, 13 August 2006.

8. The al Akhras family lost nine members, seven of whom were Lebanese Canadians from Montreal. «Borough denies moment of silence for Montreal family killed in Lebanon," *Canadian Press*, 9 August 2006.

9. «Une diaspora inquiète et mobilisée», *La Croix*, 11 August 2006.

Other politically oriented organizations are generally unified, pan-Arab, pro-Palestinian or human rights groups. While my research (Asal, 2011) and that of Dalia Abdulahady (2006) show that numerous Lebanese are active in pan-Arabic organizations in Canada, the United States and France, this is nowhere apparent on the Web. The fact that these unified organizations aim to transcend national divisions could explain why this referent is repressed and hence why they are isolated on the map. However, some of these organizations include Lebanese groups, which makes the absence of connections surprising. This is the case with the Canadian Arab Federation, the oldest and most unified Arab Canadian organization. It stands alone in the large cluster of websites that are not connected to each other. Nevertheless, it could have acted as a hub since it cites so many Arab (including Lebanese) organizations, particularly because some of the websites in the corpus are member organizations of CAF (Al Hidaya Association, Al-Huda Lebanese Muslim Society and Adala). CAF's links to other groups are not visible on the Web because its website lists member organizations – or organizations which have endorsed a statement on a specific issue – without including their websites adresses. Another, more technical, reason explaining the absence of links: CAF's weekly bulletins, announcing a host of activities of various groups, and including their websites, are documents for download, which cannot be crawled. At the same time, the CAF member organizations which are part of our corpus do not cite CAF because they have for the most part very minimal websites, with a few pages of information (for example, *Adala* and *Al Huda* have no outgoing links). This example shows the limits of an analysis of connections between websites. While the links that do exist are significant, a lack of links does not necessarily mean that an organization is isolated, but could merely reflect the fact that they do not cite organizations with whom they work on the ground, or do so in a way that is impossible to crawl.

Transcending traditional cleavages and the role of the country of origin

The majority of websites in the corpus do not advertise their political orientation (82% do not identify as "political") and 60% have neither political orientation nor religious affiliation (of these, 18% are institutional websites). It seems, as hypothesized, that religious and/or political affiliation is not predominant in Lebanese cyberspace since the diaspora attempts to transcend cleavages from the country of origin. The most connected websites in the corpus are portals, which do not wear their political affiliations openly and whose religious affiliations are also kept in the background. Transnationalism seems possible only through these websites, from a desire for communication and connection within the diaspora. The French language, though it remains primarily associated with Lebanese Christians, seems to offer a means of transcending internal divisions. In any case, it is the absence of religious and particularly political identification which makes these links possible. These websites are the most connected ones in the centre of the main component.

However, the absence of political affiliation cannot be ascribed exclusively to transcending cleavages (for example, in the case of Shia-affiliated websites). Moreover, websites which claim to be apolitical sometimes appear to have leanings, though their allegiance is not explicit. Even the portal websites, by definition informative and inclusive, sometimes seem to favour a certain reading of Lebanse politics. *Liban vision*, for example, "always encourages freedom of expression which fosters unity and strong relations among everyone, Lebanese or otherwise, who share with strength and conviction that unique relation to the world which is '*Libanité*'".[10] However, the insistence on the Lebanese francophone world tilts the site towards more links with francophone media, including Lebanese media such as *Orient Le Jour*, which reflects a specific orientation (historically close to French-speaking Lebanese Christians, today the newspaper is aligned with the March 14th coalition). Moreover, of all the websites to which *Liban vision* is linked in the corpus obtained, the only websites with a religious or political affiliation are Christian (*Maison St Charbel, Notre Dame du Liban, Opus Libani*, etc.). The other diaspora portals, directories and media websites, which are located in the main component of the graph – *Chou fi ma fi* (12 websites connected), the *Web Libanais Francophone* (11), *Liban le Chouf* (9), *Kobayat* (9) and *Jdeide Marjayoun* (9) – also claim to be apolitical.

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10. http://www.libanvision.com

Graph by publisher type: portals which show no affiliation (yellow);
non-affiliated organizational websites (red);
and institutional websites for all Lebanese (purple).

http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=94&map=61&nodeattribute=4&section=29

However, *Kobayat*, a website dedicated to promoting and networking a village by the same name, is clearly Christian; and *Liban le Chouf* offers a window on a majority Druze area, though this is not explicitly stated.

The institutional websites, found on the left side of the main component, are among the most connected websites in the graph, especially among each other (they have an internal density of 13%). The fact that their main connections are with each other or with portals, and that they are hardly linked to Lebanese community websites, raises the question of their capacity to create links between the different poles of the diaspora and the country of origin. As the list of activities of these websites indicates (in the map indicating all the tags by activity), diplomatic institutions (Lebanese foreign institutions, the French Embassy in Lebanon) and websites with an economic mission (Chamber of Commerce, Business Association, IDAL, *Forum francophone des Affaires*) predominate. These websites most often act as *authorities*, but none with sufficient strength to assume a central place in the graph. The most connected websites are the Emigrant Branch in Lebanon (10 incoming links, 3 outgoing), the Lebanese Embassy in Ottawa (8 and 7), IDAL (8 and 4) and the French Embassy in Lebanon (8 and 3).

Lebanon began to take an interest in its huge diaspora in the 1960s. The first sign of this interest was the establishment of the Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU), which nevertheless does not seem to have gained prominence in the local landscapes of associations in countries where migrants are settled (especially Canada; see Asal, 2011). In 1969, the Lebanese government created a department for emigration affairs within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1993, this body was transformed into an emigration ministry, only to disappear in 2000 and re-emerge as a branch of Foreign Affairs. As is apparent on the Web, this branch currently has a predominantly economic mission, given the importance of financial resources from expatriate Lebanese (as tourists and investors). The second function of this body is cultural, relying on the activities of the WLCU, with branches in many cities and countries were the diaspora resides. Its third function is to provide information and foster peace: to transcend internal cleavages within the diaspora, respond to the demands of migrants wishing to communicate with an official body of the Lebanese government, and address the needs of Lebanese returning to the country (Kiwan, 2005). Expatriates are an economic as well as a political issue; hence the demand of the website *Lebanese Abroad* (voting rights for Lebanese living abroad). While the government appears uninterested in meeting this demand, it has expressed interest in creating an "emigrant card" and in once again transforming the emigration branch into a ministry, though neither idea has been implemented (Kiwan, 2008). The WLCU, which should hold a more central place in the graph, has not been able to achieve its goal of becoming a platform for Lebanese diaspora culture. The Web accurately reflects the weak influence of this body. It enjoyed a certain flowering prior to 1975, but was rent by a multitude of cleavages in the 1990s. The government bodies contributing to its influence seem also to have been responsible for its current paralysis and the fact that, eaten away by these cleavages, the WLCU has become "confessionnalised" (Kiwan, 2008). This crisis explains the WLCU's limited importance in the graph: although it was supposed to have helped unite and develop links among Lebanese diaspora organizations, it is mainly linked to information portals and to institutions.

Conclusion

While there is a real attempt to transcend cleavages in diaspora cyberspace, considerable fragmentation is nevertheless apparent, deeply rooted in Lebanese reality and traditional political and religious dynamics. Websites claiming to be apolitical are connected in ways which appear to maintain selective alliances, reflecting the usual cleavages (between Christians and Muslims, according to political orientation, etc.). This is demonstrated by the isolation of Shiite websites, which form their own community, and the absence of connections between portals aiming to be unified and Muslim websites. Transnationalism is limited, and French and Canadian Lebanese organizations, though sharing common languages, are connected only through portal websites, which are not based on grassroots community dynamics. Moreover, the absence of a central website acting as an authority or hub heightens the sense of fragmentation. The failure of the Lebanese government, regularly shaken by political crises, prevents its institutions from playing a unifying role among Lebanese abroad. The defeat of the Lebanese Cultural Union is the most significant example. It seems that the most active initiatives are those with an economic mission, both governmental and non-governmental. This study confirms the absence of any common mobilization in the diaspora: not even basic demands such as voting rights for migrants abroad are shared. The internal fragmentation of the Lebanese community sector appears to have been accentuated by the Web analysis: some alliances which exist on the ground are not visible in the graphs and the most significant connections involve individual websites (like the portal *Liban vision*) or institutional websites which have a difficult time playing a unifying role beyond their diplomatic mandate (like the Emigrant Branch). Finally, many Lebanese in the diaspora are involved in broader solidarity initiatives in which the referent "Lebanese" disappears altogether (as reflected in the absence of Sunnis from our corpus; or Lebanese in pan-Arab or political organizations, for example).

A second step – including social networks in the corpus and analysing them – should show other connections among the diaspora. Broadening the study to encompass the entire global diaspora would moreover allow a greater number of transnational links to be identified on the Web,

via websites that are not necessarily connected to Lebanese organizations associated with a particular country.

Acronyms of Organisations

CAF : Canadian Arab Federation

CJPME : *Canadian for Justice and Peace in the Middle East*

CIL : *Centre Islamique Libanais,* Montréal

COLCO : *Council of Lebanese Canadian Organisations – Free Patriotic Movement*

IDAL : *Investment Development Authority of Lebanon*

LCHA : *Lebanese Canadian Heritage Association*

LCCC : *Lebanese Canadian coodinating council-*

SOLIDA : *Mouvement Franco-Libanais SOLIDA*

WLCU : *World Lebanese Cultural Union / Union Culturelle Libanaise Mondiale.*

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