CROSS-BRACING SEXUALITIES: HEDGING "QUEER"/ SEXUAL NON-NORMATIVITY IN BEIRUT

By

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Abstract

Based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Beirut, this dissertation traces the (re)production of gendered non-normative sexualities as co-constituted by the local and the global. Several actors emerge as central players in shaping the meanings and politics of 'the sexual' in Beirut today: the Lebanese state and its security apparatus, LGBT-rights NGOs and activists, 'queer' bars, and Syrian refugees. These actors continuously configure the politics of gender and sexual non-normativity and sexual subjectivity in relation to power, profit, space, kinship, and displacement.

Prevalent scholarly approaches to gender and sexual non-normativity in the Middle East (West Asia) have been caught in a debate over local authenticity on the one hand and imperial imposition and mimicry on the other. I argue for a way out of this bind. In line with post-structuralism, I propose 'cross-bracing' as a theoretical structure that captures 'the sexual' as a set of unequal and cross-dependent interactions among dominant forces of the local, regional, and transnational. Cross-bracing reveals the dynamic interactions among these unequal forces as they constitute and are constituted by each other, and through movement, interdependence, and friction. In order to understand how persons and institutions navigate these cross-braced structures, I introduce the concept of 'hedging' sexualities. My interlocutors invest in what appear to be multiple and contradictory gendered and sexual identities, acts, bodily performances, and politics. In doing so, they minimize their risk of losing power as guards of morality (the state apparatus), manage risks of closure and policing (LGBT NGOs) and of raids and lost profits ('queer' bars), and balance building alternative queer kinship networks with the chance of resettlement (gender and sexually non-normative Syrian refugees). As my interlocutors hedge their gendered sexualities, they show us ways to exist in parallel, in contradiction, and in tension.

Based on a feminist queer ethnographic approach, this dissertation contributes 'cross-bracing' and 'hedging' as a novel conceptual framework to theorizations of gender and non-normative sexualities in Beirut, as well as to the field of anthropological studies of gender and sexuality at large.

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Table of contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Figure 1: Protest outside of the Sun Theatre in June 2013 (A. Saleh 2013)[1]

On a hot day in June 2013, I hailed a *sarvees* (shared taxi) to meet up with my friend Ahmad near the Tayouneh roundabout, one of the busiest road intersections in Beirut. One of the roundabout's main roads takes residents from and to Beirut's airport, passing by Burj al-Barajneh Palestinian refugee camp, and through the southern suburbs of Dahyeh, eventually arriving at Beirut's center, but not before passing by Beirut's largest and only public green park, Horsh. Just off the roundabout but still on the busy road is Douwar el-Shams; the Sunflower Theatre, where Ahmad had been all morning preparing for a day-long event to mark the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT).

The IDAHOT event was organized annually by the local LGBT organization HELEM where Ahmad was a volunteer and board member. Although small, the planned screenings and workshops had drawn some media attention after a couple of dozen protesters showed up outside the theatre and stood on the burning sand island in the middle of the busy road, facing a perplexed crowd of IDAHOT attendees (see figure 1). I crossed the street from where the *sarvees* had dropped me off and unintentionally passed by the quiet group of protesting men without realizing I had just passed by a protest. Ahmad and several activists were standing by the theatre's main entrance when I noticed that tension and confusion ran high among them as they tried to make sense of the protesting men standing across from them in the scorching sun. HELEM was no stranger to opposition; the organization had several experiences with

[1] Photo is the author's and had been published previously with my permission on the referenced personal blog

policing from all kinds of formal and informal groups. But this kind of protest was new; there had never been a group of rather quiet protesters standing outside their event with posters and signs. Who were they and what did they want?

A month earlier, Antoine Chakhtoura, the mayor of the Dekwaneh neighboring municipality had unlawfully raided a bar called Ghost, known to be friendly to gay men, Shemales and transwomen. Four Syrian persons were arrested and degraded publicly for their gendered appearance as, according to Chakhtoura, "half men half women" (LBCI Lebanon 2013). The mayor then issued an order to indefinitely close the bar for insulting public morals. HELEM and several civil society organizations strongly denounced Chakhtoura's actions and mobilized a public reaction to his unlawful raid. Was today's protest a retaliation to HELEM's successful mobilization efforts? Would this group of protesting men storm the event?

As Ahmad and I began taking pictures of the protesters from across the street, we realized something was off. Noticing our camera, almost all the protesters hid their faces with the signs they were carrying, but did not leave. The signs were clearly printed at the same place, porting mostly English phrases denouncing homosexuality, defending heterosexual marriage and "children," and demanding that Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code – which punishes an act of "penetration contrary to nature" – be applied (Republic of Lebanon 1943). While some signs made little sense, only stating "*Shaz.. Shawaz..* [deviant.. deviants..]," a large banner read in English "It's Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve," echoing Christian religious phrases voiced against LGBT rights and 'gay marriage' in places like the United States, but seldom used in this manner in Beirut, where a campaign for 'gay marriage' had never been launched as a political issue by any activist group.

Unable to determine the protesters' intentions and wanting to ensure the attendees' safety, HELEM and the Sunflower Theatre called the *darak* (police) and asked them to intervene. A few *darak* officers arrived and allowed the protest to continue, while some of the officers were overheard making homophobic jokes as they stood around contemplating the scene. HELEM was advised to proceed with the day of activities, and the protesters eventually left. Expressing confusion at the entire unfolding of the events, a young woman attendee asked Ahmad and me as we left the theatre at the end of the day: "Why didn't they come in and beat us up?"

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There are several interpretive frames one can use to explain the above story. And as I will show, none of these dominant interpretive frames can quite capture the complex unfolding of the politics of gender and sexual non-normativity in Beirut today, which pushes me to find a new way of approaching this topic.

One dominant interpretive frame would view the above incident as a story about the struggle for gay rights in Lebanon. This is a story told by Western media outlets, international Human Rights organizations, and several academics. In this frame, gender and sexual non-normativity neatly align with fixed gender identities and sexual orientations, presented in the transnational categories of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgender men and women, commonly abbreviated as LGBT (or their derivatives; LGBTQ, LGBTI, etc). The incident would hence appear as a clear clash between a nascent LGBT rights organization (HELEM) represented by the IDAHOT attendees on the one hand, with a mobilized group of local homophobic citizens on the other, likely inspired by a Christian religious discourse given their use of the popular phrase "It's Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." Indeed, one would assume this incident is typical of a shared struggle that LGBT people face globally as they assert themselves as equal citizens in their nations and states, through demands of decriminalization of homosexuality and access to institutions such as marriage.

This frame rests on several principles, including the idea that homosexuality and transsexuality/transgenderism are universal human phenomenon; a kind of shared trans-temporal sameness in gender and sexual difference. This principle makes it possible for academics such as Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe to unite non-normative gender and sexual behavior as diverse as "the male *khanith* of Oman, the female *mustergil* of southern Iraq, and the sworn virgins of the Balkans" under one umbrella, arguing that identities based on (homo)sexuality have existed throughout the "Islamic world's" history (1997, 5–6). A second operating principle not only understands homosexuality as in binary opposition to heterosexuality, but it also views gender identity and sexual orientation as two separate realms of identification. The separation of both categories is seen as a "progressive move enabling more accurate self-identity" as David Valentine explains (2007, 15–16).

Despite insisting on the sameness of a queer struggle worldwide and the existence of LGBT people everywhere, this frame would not miss the centrality of the location in the

above story. Beirut here would be read using a developmental narrative. On the one hand, Beirut appears as the most progressive city in the Arab region and a blooming gay paradise, adding to its status as the "Paris of the Middle East" (Moussawi 2013). Beirut here tells a success story not only of its colonial past but also of its re-emergence from a violent Civil War (1975-1990): it has a democratically elected government, a completely reconstructed downtown, a 'gay' event that clearly conveys progress on personal freedoms and Human Rights, and a number of gay clubs; all earning it a special spotlight in Western gay travelogues (ibid). On the other hand, the same developmental narrative would also present Beirut as 'not yet there' with achieving gay rights, marking it as a dangerously homophobic location, deduced from the occurrence of the above anti-IDAHOT protest. Beirut would become a place where Christian and Muslim sectarian groups dominate the political scene and impose social conservatism; a city whose name is "synonymous with war, chaos, and violence" (Bou Akar 2018, 2). This dual function of the developmental narrative enables a contradictory reading of the same incident as both progress and backwardness concurrently. It ensures that Beirut can never quite liberate itself 'of the Middle East' and just be 'Paris.'

A second frame would analyze the above incident differently. Popular with decolonial thinkers and academics, and some critical activists, the frame would interpret the IDAHOT event as a misinformed imitation of Western LGBT politics, an alien insertion of Western ideas into a local context, a form of "internalized imperialism" (Altman 1996 quoted in Massad 2015, 223). Under this view, the activists would be seen as "agents of the West" (Makarem 2009) who strive to un-organically "create such a [gay] community" and buy into Western models of organizing political selves along lines of sexual identification (Massad 2015, 224). Importantly, this frame would also view the protesters as borrowers of transnational models of homophobia, politicizing homosexuality in a very specific and foreign frame: a threat to children, a threat to Adam and Eve's natural order, and a threat to heterosexual marriage – hence erasing multiple histories of same-sex desire articulation and their local roots. This frame can show us that the slogans carried by the protesters above appear out of place, for they are displayed in a context in which civil (heterosexual) marriage does not exist, and the only kind of marriage possible is a religious one, governed by 18 different sects in the form of 15 different religion-based personal status laws (Mikdashi 2014).

But while critical of both homophobes and homosexuals, the frame tells a very specific story of the travel of LGBT identities and rights through a West-Rest route (Babayan and Najmabadi 2008), and in a unidirectional line that follows a colonial pathway. The frame would hence risk labeling everyone who was at IDAHOT as a champion of LGBT sexual identities and rights, missing the plethora of ways that people perform their desiring selves in Beirut today even as they participate in the "Gay International" (Massad 2007). It hence casts internal debates and careful political decisions about selective 'queer' (in)visibility as unimportant and inconsequential (Darwich 2010). Additionally, this frame romanticizes the idea that an uncontaminated local authentic reference to gender and sexual non-normativity functions outside of the forces of the Gay International, the internet, the porn industry, and even regimes of policing (Amar 2013), among other traveling ideas and politics of sexuality.

Both frames operate with a set of assumptions that leave the reader with a plethora of unanswered questions about the state's attitude towards gender and sexual non-normativity, about LGBT NGOs' agendas and activist voices, about the conditions of 'gay' bars' existence, and of course about the lives of non-normative Lebanese persons and Syrian refugees in Beirut.

We are presented with irreconcilable questions: If 'gay rights' are progressing in Lebanon, why was the Ghost bar raided by a municipality's mayor and his force? If 'gay rights' are repressed in Lebanon, why was the IDAHOT event allowed to continue by the police? What *is* the Lebanese state apparatus' position on gender and sexual non-normativity?

If 'LGBT' categories are simply imposed and imported labels, why do activists insist on using them knowing that they may be used to discredit them locally and globally as 'fake copies'? What about those who do not use LGBT categories but still somehow find themselves taking part in events such as IDAHOT or groups like HELEM? Surely they must be acutely aware of these discourses, navigating them, and engaging in the debates over their existence as authentic selves, LGBT subjects, or Western agents.

What about the sectarian, economic, geographic, and political dimensions of the story? The above narratives disregard all these dimensions and forms of difference-making. Beirut's post-war geographical set-up includes several neighborhoods that are organized (and imagined) alongside sectarian difference. These are continuously reproduced through the presence of various sectarian political party offices, businesses, religious sites, residents and

influential families, as well as through the sale of land and property, and shifting local check-points. At the same time, many of these same neighborhoods are clearly mixed and carry multiple histories, in turn "redefining what *sectarianism* might mean at each successive historical moment" [emphasis in original] (Bou Akar 2018, 11). For example, Hamra is viewed as a diverse merchant district, while also holding the political offices of the Shi'a Amal party, the residence of Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, as well as the secular Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), and is witness to a long history of Protestant missionaries who first founded what is known today as the American University of Beirut (AUB). At the same time, Hamra was also the home of HELEM's first community center, and a mix of poor Lebanese and Syrian refugee dwellers. The Sunflower Theatre located on the Tayouneh roundabout where IDAHOT took place, as I explained in the beginning of the story, is a very busy crossing point for all kinds of residents in Beirut and outside; does this fact then inform HELEM's choice of its public and closed activities? In addition, if we dig deeper we'll find out that the Ghost bar had been functional for several years in the neighboring and predominantly Christian Dekwaneh municipality before Chakhtoura's raid, and that the raid occurred at a moment when the mayor was attempting to rally support for himself in his municipality (Nammour 2013). Can the geographical location of a bar – or an NGO – determine its vulnerability to policing in Beirut? Why don't other 'gay' bars (such as Bardo in Hamra) get raided?

And finally, why did the protesters hide their faces, and what role do the four arrested Syrians play in Lebanon's sexuality politics? How do we understand the relationship between the large numbers of Syrian refugees, gender and (non)-normative sexuality, and policing in Beirut? Lebanon has gone through years of political deadlock, continues to be faced with Israeli aggression in the south and a raging war to the east in Syria, and has become home to over a million Syrian refugees. The arrest and public shaming of the four Syrians is surely also a story about the interaction between gender and sexual non-normativity with systems of discrimination couched in a rich national and regional history of labor, military, and political relations between the two neighbors.

It is therefore clear that neither frame offers more than a narrow and selective view. Neither starts from the voices of the persons and bodies caught in between these interpretive frames and the power constellations they represent. These questions are too many to answer even in one dissertation. However, they make clear that the story of gender and sexual non-

normativity and its politics requires retelling, and that a new kind of retelling must begin from the lives of those who are placed, by both narratives, at the center of the story – the Lebanese activists, the establishments (the state, NGOs, and bars), and the Syrian refugees.

My dissertation answers this call and offers a new way of understanding gendered non-normative sexualities as a constant 'cross-braced' unequal interaction between the local and the global/transnational. Through combining elements from both frames, revealing their moments of crossing as well as irreconcilable differences, I build a new frame that enables us to see the functionality of power in a new way, using post-structuralist understandings of power (Foucault 1975, 1978) and queer approaches to ethnography (Valentine 2007; Boellstorff 2010; Merabet 2014a). In line with feminist principles (Alcoff 1988; Crenshaw 1991), I bring to focus the persons who navigate these cross-braced frames and show the ways in which they hedge them; perpetually investing in what appear as contradictory choices. In 'hedging,' these actors minimize their risk of losing power as guards of morality (state and police apparatus), manage tensions around competing definitions of community (LGBT NGOs and activists), manage the risk of raids and loss of profit against the costs of excluding or including specific clients ('queer' bars), and balance the building of alternative community relations with the chance of resettlement in the West (gender and sexually non-normative Syrian refugees). As my interlocutors hedge their gendered sexualities and their politics, they show us ways to exist in contradiction, in concurrence, and in friction, hence telling a new story of 'queer'/non-normative life.

As such, my dissertation seeks to answer the following questions: how is 'the sexual' produced as an interaction through the unequal meeting between the local and the global/transnational in Beirut? If we examine this interaction ethnographically through the lives and bodies of persons caught and defined by it, then what can they tell us about the ways in which global and local regimes of power operate? And the ways in which their multiple elements – be it identity politics or homophobic articulations – travel? If existing approaches to theorizing non-normative gendered sexualities are not enough to explain their unfolding in Beirut, then can we find a new approach within post-structuralism and queer studies that adequately accounts for both; past regimes and experiences of colonization as well as current dynamics of post-colonial, and post-Civil War existence?

1.1 Cross-bracing

I offer the metaphor of cross-bracing to capture the process of interaction and production of gendered non-normative sexualities and their politics in Beirut. Cross-bracing captures the dynamic interaction between unequal forces that map themselves onto dominant axes such as 'the local,' 'the regional,' and 'the global' as they constitute and are constituted through each other, and through movement, interdependence, and "friction" (Tsing 2005).

Cross-bracing in building construction is a technique used for increasing the tolerance for pressure and unpredictable movements, including for example unpredictable seismic activity. By creating a cross in between, on top of, or below parallel structures, weight and pressure are re-distributed and travel alongside the structure's various strands. A mixture of tension and relief enhance the structure's potential for tolerating unpredictable movements. This is why cross-bracing is most frequently used as a construction technique in areas prone to earthquakes, but also in suspended structures such as bridges that negotiate daily interruptions from irregular traffic to unpredictable weather conditions.

Figure 2: Cross bracing structure in construction ("Edge Construction Supply" n.d.)

Figure 3: Construction cranes in Mar Mkhayel residential neighborhood in Beirut

In Beirut, a city still bustling with a wave of mass construction projects even today, a familiar sight of cross-bracing are the decks which construction workers use to support themselves on while manipulating the building, as well as yellow self-structuring cranes decorating the city's skylines and signaling the most recent construction boom in the city. For a more flexible rendering of this metaphor, we can imagine a pair of scissors: friction is necessarily produced when the two ledges cross in and out, and we see its effects once something, like a piece of paper, passes through their main point of crossing.

Yet, power is not only located at the moment of crossing or intersection, and as Foucault (1975) reminds us, friction is not its only kind of interaction. Rather, power can be productive even through its oppressive or disciplinary mechanisms, so much so it renders the very structure it operates in invisible. Gravity and weight – forms of power – move across the poles and braces in a structure, even if the standing structure appears as static to the eye. Hence, while friction only captures two elements rubbing against each other and their moment of meeting, cross-bracing captures not only the structure in which friction occurs,

but also multitude forms of power travel, resistance, and support that constitute the entire interaction.

In this sense, the local and the global are always shaped by an entire cluster of non-static power-relations, some internal some external, whose mission is to produce, sustain, dilute or reaffirm their difference – and/or cause them to cross and produce friction as Anna Tsing has theorized in her ethnographic study of friction (2005). I argue in this dissertation that while friction accompanies the production of local and global ideas about gender and sexuality, it is not the only *type* of interaction occurring even when it is often the only dynamic we can see. The global and the local may rub against one another, may cross-"contaminate" (Tsing 2015), clash, or exist concurrently, as I explore in detail in chapter 2.

Further, I differentiate cross-bracing from intersectionality in the following way. Intersectionality as proposed by Kimberle Crenchaw (1991) demonstrates that it is impossible for us to understand the ways in which race operates without gender, or gender without race. She argues that both of these systems of power are interdependent, and collaborate in producing inequality. To only examine one without the other means to witness an incomplete process that risks ignoring collaborative forms of oppression against Black women in particular. Losing sight of the intersection of gender and race is what makes White feminism susceptible to complicity with systems of racism that benefit from Black women's oppression (ibid). Intersectionality is therefore interested in the exact moment of crossing and the bodies and persons defined by this crossing as such. It relies on feminist identity politics that use the system's structural categories of race and gender in order to demonstrate oppressive difference and claim justice. In this approach, to contest oppressive power, one must hold attention to it at the exact moment of crossing.

In applying intersectionality to queer studies, Jasbir Puar argues that intersectionality overprivileges the subject as a locus of identitarian intersection and often misses other elements – beyond visibly intersecting ones – that are critical to the function of power. Instead, an "assemblage" puts together forces that may even appear as unconnected at first sight such as "spatial, temporal, and corporeal convergences," thereby offering a temporally-specific reading of the function of power (2007, 205). Hence, Puar proposes "queerness as assemblage" as a concept that "resists queerness-as-sexual-identity" and moves away from a queer/non-queer binary (2007, 205).

Building on both Crenchaw and Puar, I propose gendered and sexual non-normativity as a process of unequal cross-bracing of concurrent powers and (f)actors. Cross-bracing as I propose, does not ignore the central moments of crossing, but rather also demonstrates the structures in which the crossing occurs, which much like figure 2 shows, can include a multiplicity of pathways in which unequal crossings happen. Hence cross-bracing is in line with post-structuralist approaches that question how the components of a crossing are created to begin with; from the ledges to the supporting crosses to knots and bolts. I am therefore interested in a multiplicity of interactions and intersections, and I pay attention to power's "spatial, temporal, and corporeal convergences" (Puar 2007, 205). But as opposed to an assemblage, a cross-brace has outlined potential paths through which power can travel, hence rendering some frictions predictable and not only momentary or hazardous (see chapter 2) while concomitantly adjusting to unpredictable flows of power (see chapters 2 and 4).

1.2 Hedging

How do various persons navigate the cross-bracing structures I just described? As a feminist ethnographer, I am still primarily concerned with the 'subjects' of these crossing powers, and the ways in which certain bodies are not only caught in these dynamic structures, but also how they function in relation to them – reproducing them, subverting them, navigating them, and even escaping them. Therefore, I echo a particular kind of feminist critique of post-structuralism for the latter's erasure of the subject as one without agency, or as simply an effect of its surrounding structures of power (Alcoff 1988). In sexuality studies, the field of Lesbian and Gay Studies has been based on theorizing from the position of gay and lesbian subjects (Lewin and Leap 1996, 2002, 2009). In line with post-structuralism, queer theorists have warned that such an emphasis on identity-based categories and politics inherently reproduces the homosexuality-heterosexuality binary (Fuss 1991). Queer feminist ethnography, as I explore in the methodology section, has long tried to bridge this analytical difference by maintaining interest in "subject specific" concerns (Lewin and Leap 2009, 7) while also focusing on how they are created by system of power. Therefore, in line with queer feminist ethnography, I develop a term that centralizes my interlocutors' experiences in my theorization of gendered non-normative sexualities in Beirut.

I use the term 'hedging' to describe the various navigational strategies that sexually non-normative persons use when negotiating their identities and gendered self-presentations, in and across sectarian, securitized, and classed geographies. In U.S. popular English speech,

hedging can refer to the saying "hedging one's bets" which means using a strategy to reduce the risk of loss by investing in contradictory choices.[2] Likewise, in finance, "hedging is an investment technique designed to offset a potential loss on one investment by purchasing a second investment that you expect to perform in the opposite way" ("Hedging" 2011). Applying this to Beirut, my interlocutors use various strategies to navigate the state, NGOs, Human Rights discourses, police and security regimes and decrease the risk of arrest, detention, and harassment, *while* still presenting themselves – or elements of themselves – in ways they deem as authentic, and increasing their chances at survival and joy.

Although not used explicitly, the process of hedging in relation to identity negotiation has been described in several historical accounts of late 19th century Ottoman empire, wherein people navigated two different hegemonic discourses of power: that of the Ottoman administration, and rising independent nationalism (Blumi 2011). Specifically, Alexander Vezenkov (2011) details how Bulgarian notables served in Ottoman courts and held significant positions in the Ottoman administration, yet at the same time, they were also often leading figures of Bulgarian nationalist movements that fought against the Ottomans. Using these contradictory hegemonic systems to maintain one's power or privilege, or to ensure that one is safe at all outcomes, is what I refer to as "hedging." Vezenkov elaborates: "There was a parallel between the attempts of both the Ottoman authorities and the Bulgarian revolutionaries to use the existing social hierarchies for their own purposes" (2011, 153). The fact that these negotiations exist concurrently is central to the use of hedging by my interlocutors, and corresponds with the structure of cross-bracing that I explored above.[3]

The concept also echoes the notion of strategic essentialism as it was initially developed by postcolonial theorist Gyatari Chakravorty Spivak (1985); that is, taking specific political positionalities, based on essentializing elements of an identity, through which one can then temporarily achieve one's interests as a minority. Strategic essentialism, or identifying strategically, is but one possible outcome of hedging. Through hedging, one can embody multiple and contradictory positionalities at the same time, in interactions that can be as short as a verbal exchange. Take the example of Nancy, a Syrian transwoman whom I quote in chapter 3 on methodology. The day I interviewed Nancy, she explained how she identifies herself in Beirut's streets (as "straight" and as a "man"), and in the NGO center (as

[2] I thank and credit my supervisor Hadley Z. Renkin for pointing out this specific cultural use in the U.S. context.
[3] I credit Miloš Jovanović for suggesting the term "hedging" and pointing me to this literature.

"trans") while using the same exact attire and self presentation. She also used to present herself as a "Ladyboy" in her Syrian neighborhood before becoming a displaced refugee in Lebanon. She uses a hedging strategy, and evaluates what looks, attire, and self presentation can allow her to pass as both "trans" and "straight," while still not undermining her own perception of herself as a "woman."

The flexibility of a hedging strategy, which allows for quick repositioning in negotiation with surrounding factors, is especially functional for my refugee interlocutors who navigate a new terrain and are caught in a perpetual state of uncertainty and abjection. But it is also applicable to the ways activists negotiate transnational LGBT politics, Western funding, regional discourses on sexual non-normativity, and local policing regimes. Hedging also captures the ways in which the state chooses which non-normativities to punish and which to ignore, and the ways in which bars calculate their profit and risk of losses through changing definitions of respectable and profitable gendered sexualities.

1.3 Queer versus Non-Normative

To practice queer politics according to Michael Warner (Warner 1991), is to be resistant to any regime that imposes exclusionary normalization. The queer perspective in its original form in U.S. sexuality political movements and academia, came as a response to the AIDS/HIV crisis and years of identity-based LGBT politics. It strives not only to question the boundaries of coherent identities, but also for breaking the heterosexual(ity)/homosexual(ity) binary and destabilizing its reproduction (Sedgwick 1990, Butler 1993, Berlant & Freeman 1992). Hence, identifying as 'queer' as opposed to 'lesbian' or 'gay,' Warner argues, "has the effect of pointing out a wide field of normalization, rather than simple intolerance, as the site of violence" (1991, 16). Intellectually then, to adopt a 'queer' perspective is to point to regimes of normalization (and specifically to the reproduction of heteronormativity) in the study of the sexual.

The power of the term 'queer' is locally rooted in its history as a slur, and a term in opposition to an assumed 'normal.' Today, and through its activist and academic travels, 'queer' has gained certain respectability as an acknowledged field of inquiry but also as an ambiguous identity category. While some activists in Beirut do self identify as queer, the term remains shared among small groups of people, and is not popularized in the media in the same intensity as terms such as LGBT and their Arabic translations. If one were to be true to

the reclamation move that 'queer' has accomplished in its own English-speaking American context; then a slur term such as *shaz* [deviant, or irregular] or *luti* [belonging to the people of Lot] would be a closer translation of 'queer.' And while some activists have indeed tried to reclaim these terms in the movement's early years, the visible above-ground movement today is mostly led by those who use the term Gay and acronyms such as LGBT or LGBTI, or less often LGBTQ (Rizk and Makarem 2015).

In this sense, a simple parallel translation between Queer and *shaz* or *luti* accomplishes little, and erases the crucial difference in the development of the terms' usages in the respective political movements. While queer and queer theory responded to the shortcomings of identity politics and the urgent HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s in the U.S., organized sexuality-based activism took shape in Beirut starting in 2001 and included at least a decade of debates over political strategies. As I examine in the history of sexual activism in chapter 5, factors such as activism against the U.S. war on Iraq in 2003, the Israeli war on Beirut in 2006, and the Syrian revolution-turned-civil war in 2011 with the ensuing refugee crisis, have all shaped the choices of political strategies and activism.[4] The strategies adopted oscillated between an identity politics approach that opposed sectarian identitarian politics, a civil "laique" [secular] movement, underground feminist and women's 'queer' activism, and a localized version of transnational LGBT politics. Debates over these strategies have led to several splits in the groups, some of whom continued to establish NGOs modeled after transnational LGBT politics, while others created small underground community groups and worked to build alternative networks outside the sectarian system. What this fragmented history shows is that unifying the politics of the sexual in Beirut under a 'queer' term for politics would be an incomplete translation; a mismatch that erases the local setting informing these politics.

I have addressed the debate over the politics of travel of such categories and theories in the above sections, and I have clarified that my position is one that engages with the field of sexuality studies and queer theory, while continuously keeping in mind its local epistemology. Therefore, I specifically apply some of queer theory's main tenets in my methodology, namely rendering the normative strange, and diluting boundaries between various categories (see chapter 3). I use the term 'queer' when referring to the theory itself and analytical approaches that employ it, as well as to interlocutors who use it as self-

[4] Other formative events include the 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafeeq al-Hariri and the Cedar Revolution in 2005, as well as the political battle over division of power in 2008.

identification. This is an effort in deliberately differentiating the theory and its analytical uses, from the use of 'queer' as an umbrella term that unifies gender and sexual non-normativity everywhere (persons, acts, identities) under a specific English word with a specific history of violence and marginalization.

Therefore, I find it more analytically useful, accurate, and challenging to use the term 'non-normative' when looking for an umbrella term that would describe those who are placed on the periphery, policed, and/or otherized by the state apparatus, sectarian geographies, asylum systems, INGOs, and bars. In addition, and in line with queer theory, 'non-normativity' forces the question of what is normative in every context I apply it to: what is the state's propagated version of the normative? What is a normative gender and class presentation at a bar in Beirut? What is understood as a Syrian refugee's normative sexual practice? What is a normative self-presentation at an NGO, at a detention center, or in the street? What 'non-normativity' accomplishes is a necessary interruption in the process of studying the sexual as a traveling field: it insists on holding 'queer' to its epistemological origin, while engaging with its theoretical underpinnings and examining their (in)applicability. Therefore, such a term is actually in line with queer decolonial approaches, as it acknowledges the colonial route, holds its terms in constant tension, and still considers the works of the modern heterosexual/homosexual binary in structuring 'the sexual' in Beirut.

1.4 Middle East Studies and West Asia

I use "West Asia" to refer to the region most frequently labeled as the "Middle East" – see for example (Koshy 2003) quoted in (Spivak 2003, 1). Much in the same way I use "non-normativity" instead of "queer," this simple replacement is an attempt to disrupt taken-for-granted names that emerged from a brutal colonial history and still operate with a neo-imperial trajectory today. Therefore, the unfamiliarity and sense of interruption which the term may cause the reader to experience is purposeful. I use "Middle East" only when referring to "Middle East Studies" as an established academic area of studies.

1.5 Dissertation map

Each analytical chapter in this dissertation presents a model of cross-bracing in which dominant discourses of power meet, intersect and brace to reproduce each other. Each chapter also tells the story of actors who hedge these contradictory discourses to their benefit, altering them along the way. Together, the analytical chapters offer a new model for conceptualizing

gender and sexual non-normativities in Beirut, one that relies on revealing the inter-dependent crossings, and the processes of hedging their power.

In chapter 2 (theoretical framework) I argue that studying 'the sexual' ethnographically in the West Asia region necessitates first an examination of the field's own epistemological origin in Western-located academic theories of sexuality and a critical reflection on the implications of doing such research today. The question of how to move between the crosses of Western-located knowledge, in a context of post-colonial unequal relations, and intersections of meanings and politics between the global and the local, is in fact a main preoccupation for knowledge production in West Asia and beyond. Therefore, I first discuss my research's conditions of possibility and ask how does one begin to study 'sexuality' in West Asia and conceptualize 'the sexual' itself? In building this position, I thus hedge Western-based theories of sexuality on the one hand and post-colonial/decolonial approaches on the other. In bracing the various approaches against each other, and in a frame of local-transnational travel, I propose a new analytical frame of studying gender and sexual non-normativity.

In chapter 3 (methodology), I introduce my use of feminist queer ethnography as a method for researching the politics of non-normative genders and sexualities in Beirut. I argue that my field site necessitated the creation of a research method that combines subject-specific concerns with a queer theoretical approach. In doing so, I adopt two key tenets of feminist queer theory: first, shifting the lens from the non-normative subject to the system that produces them as a strange internal other, and second, the consistent disruption of the researcher-subject relation that reveals moments of mutual construction without losing sight of unequal power relations between the two. The consistent effort of rendering the normative strange, or 'queering,' facilitates the capture of the interlocutors' own theorizations of their environments and sexualities in ways that can be missed by classical ethnographic methods.

In chapter 4 (the state apparatus), the post-colonial and post-Civil War state apparatus navigates a debate over gender and sexual non-normativity as a moral vice or a human right, at a tenuous moment of refugee influx and anxiety over borders and security. Multiple local, regional, and transnational discourses are mapped alongside a binary conception of tradition versus modernity causing a predictable friction. The state apparatus is caught in what appears as a contradictory role: to police or allow sexual non-normativity? I argue that the state apparatus hedges multiple contradictory positions, and through its hedging of when and who

to police, the state and its organs reproduce their rule and monopoly over violence, and the power to name permissible and punishable gender and sexual non-normativity.

In chapter 5 (NGOs), I demonstrate that a key factor shaping sexuality politics in Beirut is the ongoing NGOization of gender and sexual activism beginning in 2006 and intensifying with the Syrian refugee crisis. The multiplication of NGOs is creating new kinds of professional sexual activism and turning community members away from 'members' and into 'volunteers' and 'service recipients.' This process occurs at the tenuous point of meeting between local ideas about gender and sexual non-normativity and the global flow of NGOized LGBT politics. It thus creates frictions and debates on reconciling local practices such as *Shakher* (a form of witty and rude verbal mockery) that are associated with feminine gay men, Shemales, Ladyboys, and transwomen's community building on the one hand, and with professionalized LGBT identities and narratives of respectable political correctness on the other. Through telling the story of interactions in HELEM's community space, I argue that the push for the creation of respectable sexualities and professional sexual politics often clashes with the persistence of local practices such as *Shakher*. Therefore, I also argue that NGOization/professionalization is a space-dependant, incomplete, and fragmented process.

In Chapter 6 (bars), I examine Beirut's bustling 'gay' party scene. The presence of such a scene is frequently explained using contradictory discourses about Beirut's progressiveness as the "Paris of the Middle East" on the one hand and its innate homophobia as a Middle Eastern state on the other (Moussawi 2013). Yet, when applying a queer political economy lens, an entire economy of cross-braced relations unfolds. Beiruti bar owners and 'queer' party holders navigate – *hedge* – a web of cross-braced relations between profit, sectarian geography and (il)legality. In order to preserve their dependency on each other for profit and security, three bars create a temporary 'bar deal' that divides clients into categories of Shemale and non-Shemale. Through instrumentalizing classed gender respectability for profit, the bar deal actually influences the meanings and practices of gendered respectability and acceptable – profitable – gendered sexual non-normativity.

In chapter 7 (Syrian refugees), ideas about proper asylum profiles used by international humanitarian NGOs and Western governments who propagate an ideal savable brown queer, clash with existing self identification practices and gendered sexual non-normativity as practiced by a newly arriving group: Syrian refugees. At the same time, the same ideas that meet in friction, begin to exist concurrently as evidenced by the refugees'

efforts to resuscitate alternative motherhood and queer kinship structures in their navigation of war and displacement. Two systems that operate as opposites in one moment ("LGBTI" identities and alternative motherhood), co-exist in another (displacement in Beirut).

The contradictory, concurrent, and clashing crossings of each set of navigations in these four analytical chapters captures not simply the loci of intersection and friction, but the process of constructing the dominant braces themselves and how they are made-to-be-read as elements that are always in tension even when they're not. Cross-bracing sexualities reveals that friction is temporal and often spatially bound, and that the same elements and axes of power that reproduce sexualities, can often exist concurrently; but in perpetually unequal contexts of power. The metaphor's shortcoming is that it assumes the frictious parts are equal and hence appears to equalize global forces with local ones. This is neither my analytical intention nor argument, and I will account for the inequality of forces in my analysis.

Chapter 2: Theorizing Non-Normative Gendered Sexualities in Beirut

How do we study the sexual in a place like Beirut, today? In answering this question, I position my dissertation at multiple crossings between the fields of gender and sexuality studies, queer anthropology, and Middle East Studies. A theoretical translation of my question then becomes: how do we ethnographically capture an unfolding story of 'the sexual' in Beirut, in light of the tensions that emerge from using Western-originating frames of knowledge in a post-colonial setting imbued with the transnational travel of ideas and bodies? It is immediately apparent that we must ask what is 'sexuality' or 'the sexual' first and interrogate our categories of analysis. Studying the sexual ethnographically in Beirut therefore necessitates first an examination of sexuality studies' own epistemological origin in Western-located academic theories and a critical reflection on the implications of doing such research and theorizing today.[5]

In this spirit, I first turn to the field of sexuality studies – beginning with works that have historicized sexuality in Europe in part 1. Doing so will locate the concept of sexuality itself in its own epistemological moments of inception as a product of European modernity. In line with several authors I posit that we must read the history of European sexuality alongside Europe's colonial endeavors in West Asia. Doing so reveals the co-construction – however unequal – of ideas about a respectful self and deviant otherness, and the racial and medical technologies of dividing subjects and bodies into these binaries, both in the metropole and the colony. Following post-colonial approaches, I then briefly reflect on the role of current imperial relations in the propagation of a particular kind of identity-based sexuality. My critical review concludes with an analysis of the emergence of Gay and Lesbian Studies in the U.S. and Queer Theory as influential frameworks for the study of sexuality.

After tracing sexuality historically and arriving at the emergence of sexuality studies, I discuss how the concept of the sexual has served as a locus for a range of debates over the kinds of interactions possible between the local and global today. In particular, I focus on the imagined re-articulations of this interaction as a homogenizing unidirectional process, as an imperial one following colonial routes, and as a frictious one continuously re-translating terms and bodies. I draw on contributions from globalization studies as well as several queer

[5] I thank Miloš Jovanović for his critical review of this chapter and insightful engagement with my theoretical framework.

ethnographic accounts to bridge my understanding of the relationship between the local and the global, structure and person, and the place of 'the sexual' in it. In so doing, I argue for the inadequacy of these approaches to theorizing contemporary non-normative sexual desires and desiring persons in Beirut and West Asia. Instead, in part 3, I return to my concepts of cross-bracing and hedging that I outlined in the introduction to demonstrate how they may be useful analytical tools for the study of the sexual.

2.1 Conceptualizing Sexuality: European Histories and Colonial Legacies

What is sexuality? A primary way to begin to understand this question as it relates to the field of sexuality studies is through examining it from the perspective of debates over sexual identity. A key preoccupation of sexuality studies has been answering the question of what is the 'source' of homosexuality, and how it emerged as an identity category. Post-structuralist and constructionist approaches to theorizing sexuality place the emergence of the notion of sexuality as well as the homo- and hetero- sexual identity in Western Europe in the 17th century (McIntosh 1996) or 18th and 19th centuries (Foucault 1978) where certain sexual acts no longer indicated only the breaking of religio-legal codes, but rather became indicators of a specific type of a deviant person and social subgroup (Foucault 1978). These approaches aim to offer a situated history of modern European homosexual identity that is in opposition to essentialist views of homosexuality – the latter of which understands homosexuality as a trans-cultural and trans-historical phenomenon.

In this perspective, historians argue that modernity's obsession with taxonomy led to the organizing of sexual deviancy into several categories through which people have been policed using legal, criminal and medical systems (Foucault 1978; Somerville 1994; Weeks 1995). Deviancy was not only institutionalized through classification, but it was also created as the antithesis of bourgeois notions of proper reproductive heterosexual mores and behaviors that people applied to each other, through the invention of morally dubious figures such as the masturbating child, the hysterical woman, and the pervert (Foucault 1978). This process propagated disciplined social and bodily conduct practiced by the modern subject and hence led to the establishment of the category of the heterosexual as the normal subject (Foucault 1975; Katz 1990; Chauncey 1995; Groneman 1995).

But the invention of deviancy did not have the same story outside of Europe. Several authors have argued for the centrality of colonialism in the crafting of the concept of sexuality and associated ideas about non-normativity and deviance. In writing the first extensive history of same-sex desire in the Arab world and in the modern period, Joseph Massad (2007) follows the Foucauldian framework of deconstructive analysis by tracing how power is produced through discourse that categorizes the non-normative. For Massad, sexuality is not simply produced by modernity as Michel Foucault has argued, but it is chiefly a "products [sic] of the colonial experience" (ibid, 7). Building on works examining various elements of colonialism by academics such as Edward Said (1978), Massad traces the production of a narrative of a decadent Orient lacking culture and civilization and plagued by Islam and backwardness. European Orientalist narratives further instrumentalized ideas about 'local' sexual practices and desires and used them as primary evidence of deviancy in the Orient. These ideas were further supported through the birth of the field of anthropology as a method of knowledge acquisition and knowledge making, which was premised upon using the unequal relationship between the European researcher and the researched to gain access to, and produce knowledge on the Orient and otherize it in the process (Asad 1973).

Massad argues that these Orientalist narratives were then adopted by several intellectuals in the Nahda (renaissance) era of Arab self-reinvention in the 19th and 20th centuries, who sought to understand the reasons behind the Islamic civilization's decline from its glory and develop a recipe for the future of the Arab region. Internalizing European Orientalist narratives, and believing that sexual deviance was behind the Arabs' stagnation, those intellectuals sought to cleanse Arab history of all evidence of such sexual decadence in what was a crucial effort of self-reinvention through revising history. Sexuality played a central role in this process of re-invention; Massad claims that the Arab Nahda "developed to a considerable extent around the repudiation not only of men's love for boys but also of all sexual desires it identified as part of the Arab past" (2007, 1), which was a necessary step for cementing the link between sexuality and modernity, deviance and civilization. The parting with this Arab past was hence a self-conscious response to transnational Orientalist discourses that used sexual deviance as a marker of inferiority. If one can cleanse deviant sexual acts and desires, one can restore a glorious past and become a leading civilization again.

Europe's colonialism was also central to creating heterosexual citizens back in the metropole. While Orientalist imagery and writings frequently projected sexual fantasies onto the Orient as a site of sexual permissiveness (Said 1978), in response, Occidentalist writings began to project anxieties of religious conservatism and policing of sexuality onto the European colonizers (Boone 2014, 15). Homoerotics in West Asian colonies were subject of much scandalous surprise for Western travelers and colonizers who used them to cite the colonies' moral corruption, and hence, mark them as in need of a violent civilizing mission. Sexuality became a terrain through which biopolitical and necropolitical technologies of sexual violence and control were first developed in the colonies, including in Africa (Mbembe 2003), before being exported to the metropole for disciplining European citizenry.

The role of the developing European medical and psychological establishments in defining sexual deviancy and creating sexual identities was also instrumental in not only broadening the meaning of modern European sexuality itself to include desire, but also in creating the very figure of the deviant homosexual in Europe, and subsequently the decadent Arab in West Asia. Both, Darwinian theories of natural selection and female choice, as well as Kraft-Ebing's theory of hereditary degeneration linked homosexuality to a type of a person with deviant genes rather than only a set of acts that cause deviancy (Jann 1994; Oosterhuis 2000). Meanwhile in West Asia, the prevalence of social Darwinism in the 19th century also gave pseudo-scientific answers to the invented problem of Arab decadence and decline in civilization (Massad 2007). Therefore, this development was central to the coupling of deviancy with homosexuality in the form of a person, who would later come to bear that deviant identity.[6]

More so, as Ann Stoler argues, the very categories of race and racial difference became "ordering mechanisms that shared their emergence with the bourgeois order of the early nineteenth century [in Europe]" (1995, 9). Overall, European colonialism classified humans into different races for the purpose of domination (Quijano 2000) as gender was crafted as a binary system of identity in service to the colonial regime. Decolonial theorists such as Maria Lugones argues that European modernity's science has normalized a binary sexual difference, the same way it has naturalized the idea of racial categorization (2008, 7). In turn, gendered categories were mapped onto sexual difference, hence limiting the wide

[6] In Lebanon specifically, the Lebanese Society of Psychiatrists and the Lebanese Psychological Association officially removed homosexuality from their list of disorders and mental illnesses in 2013 following a similar decision by the World Health Organization only in 1992. See for example (Nasr and Zeidan 2015).

variety of indigenous gender roles into a binary relation of domination between males and females including among Native Americans in the U.S. The linkage between sex and gender was instrumental for the production of inferior women and superior men within the same society, with lasting effects: "to think the scope of the gender system of Eurocentered global capitalism it is necessary to understand the extent to which the very process of narrowing of the concept of gender to the control of sex, its resources, and products constitutes gender domination" (ibid, 12).

Lugones thus points at the collaboration between colonized men and colonizers in pushing colonized women of color to a subjugated inferior status using global capitalism (ibid). Similar dynamics took place in Lebanon with respect to French colonialism. For example, in early and middle of 19th century Lebanon, Akram Khater (2001) traces how French colonization created anxieties about gender roles through peasant women's public work in the booming business of silk thread production, answering high French demand for silk. The French established a sexist system of labour in which women were paid a quarter of men's income for the same work, effectively allowing the exploitation of women's labor, while at the same time changing the social dynamics that had seen peasant women becoming autonomous income earners (ibid). Notions of binary gender-difference were primary instruments for profit-making under French colonization of Lebanon.

Although the majority of the colonized West Asian (and North African) states gained independence in the middle of the 20th century, their post-colonial realities are imbued with colonial legacies and modern imperial relations, as post-colonial academics have shown (Fanon 1965; Said 1978; Abu-Lughod 2013). For Lebanon, these legacies mean, among others, the persistence of French laws that police non-normative sexual acts and behaviors, some unchanged since independence in 1943 (see chapter 4). But the post-colonial condition has also meant susceptibility to persistent imperial intervention in the region whether from previous occupying European powers or by the modern U.S. Empire, in which a particular understanding of gender and sexuality plays a central role (Abu-Lughod 2013). Increasingly, a specific idea of sexual orientation and gender identity as a measurement of development and adherence to Human Rights is being propagated by the U.S. and the European Union. Locating homophobia in 'other' post-colonial areas is hence used to, once again, justify an imperial civilizing mission using old colonial models (Puar 2007; Mikdashi and Puar 2016).

The particular version of gender and sexual identity entailed in these interactions is based on the development of gay liberation social movements in the 20th century in the U.S. and parts of Western Europe.[7] In that context, a 'fixed' gay and lesbian identity became a ground from which to make political claims in the U.S. in response to heightened persecution from the 1950s and 1960s (Epstein 1999; Seidman 2010). Widely traced to the Stonewall Riots in New York in 1969, the movement initially addressed various issues such as police brutality, then gradually organized around identity politics as it followed several social movement models that also used identities to make political claims. Importantly, the movement then developed a claim to the centrality of visible gay/lesbian identity to political emancipation (D'Emilio 1993) and the necessity of "coming out" as a member of a disadvantaged minority to achieve liberation (Epstein 1999). In this sense, social justice and sexual liberation movements pushed for a reliance on a mainstream conceptualization of identity that saw it as basis for oppression and liberation, as fixed, definable, and visible. Academically, Gay and Lesbian Studies emerged as a field that adopted the same position, arguing for the study of sexual minorities in order to fight their invisibilization and oppression under the heteronormative order (Lewin and Leap 1996, 2002, 2009).

Several critiques of the Gay and Lesbian movement emerged – including internally (Epstein 1999) – most notable of which has come from queer activism and politics. Queer Theory traces its origins to a new wave of sexual political activism in the 1990s in the U.S. and particularly as a reaction to the HIV/AIDS crisis that had very tangible effects on LGBT communities. At the heart of the queer critique of identity politics is the latter's presumed treatment of sexual identity as a fixed, stable, and boarded category when making political claims, which reifies gender and sexuality categories (Gamson 1995) making them seem stable and natural (Butler 1993) and therefore exclusionary because of their privileging of a specific white, middle-class, and male form of sexuality and casting it as universal (Warner 1991; Berlant and Freeman 1992; Manalansan IV 1997).

With the growing academic debates and studies of sexuality, and their exploration in contexts outside of Western Europe and the U.S., further critiques of queer theory, identity politics, and conceptions of sexuality have been elaborated, particularly from post-socialist (Renkin 2009, 2014) and post-colonial locations as well as from decolonial perspectives and

[7] While similar developments occurred elsewhere at the same time, with important distinctions between movements in Germany, Russia, Soviet Union, etc – see for example (McLellan 2011) – the connections between modern U.S. imperialism and Lebanon's post-French-colonial condition remain the principle dynamic in my focus.

critiques of empire. In the next section I turn to these debates as they relate directly to my study. 'The sexual' as I see it is continuously braced between historical contingencies (persistent legacies of modernity and colonization) and an unequal travel of concepts, ideas, capital, and bodies across the globe enabled by capitalism's hegemony as an economic system. Hence I move forward from 'what is the sexual,' to 'how do we study the sexual' as an unequal interaction between the local and the global, specifically in a location like Beirut?

2.2 Between the Local and the Global?

2.2.1 View 1: East versus West; Between Imperial Fantasies and Decolonial Futures

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the emergence of the U.S. as a leading neoliberal global power, a particular view on the travel of ideas and concepts has gained popularity in globalization studies. This view posits that concepts, material, and people travel using dominant paths from centers of power in the 'West' to the periphery in the 'East' eventually creating a homogenous planet or a so-called "global village" (Kung 2004). For example, Francis Fukuyama's influential "The End of History" (1992) celebrated what he saw as the definite spread of Western neoliberal democracy to the rest of the world. Although some of those proponents, such as Samuel Huntington (1993), argue in "The Clash of Civilizations" that the West will clash with the different 'Rest' and that this homogenizing process will not be as smooth as envisioned, they maintain a clear definition of the West as the center and source of knowledge, democracy, development, and travel, while the Rest as – willing or unwilling – recipients. Proponents of this view take for granted that travel routes have historical contingencies often based on centuries of colonization; the effect of which is to naturalize the spread of liberal market values and policies as logical and fateful progress.

Despite the outdated view, Huntington and Fukuyama's binary Western-centric understanding of globalization (as one take on the local-global interaction) remain both a celebrated fantasy in much of U.S. and Western European political ideology and policy, and an anxiety in places that are considered part of the periphery like West Asia. Despite ample evidence that the centers of power are seldom interested in democratizing as much as in domination through forcing liberal market policies, the fantasy of righteous democracy-

spreading remains salient.[8] Increasingly, as I briefly explored above, a particular version of women's rights and LGBT rights (and sometimes intersex rights, and sex workers rights) have become a central part of the exported and globalized democratic agenda practiced by the U.S. and the European Union. The fantasy has its reverberations in Europe itself, wherein Eastern European post-socialist states are measured for progress against their Western European counterparts (Butterfield 2013; Kahlina 2013), trapping them in narratives of failure and cultural difference (Renkin 2007).

The same Western fantasy of democratization is re-articulated as a local and regional anxiety over tradition and authenticity in West Asian countries. In this context, the anxiety over the global sweeping away of all that is local, different, and non-Western, is mapped alongside experiences of violent colonial erasure as well as more recent armed intervention in the name of democracy-spreading.[9] Through this fantasy/anxiety, ideas and values are seen as stacked into two opposing ends: global, liberal, Western, modern, and imperial on one end, versus local, traditional, and undeveloped on the other.

Policies and opinions about the sexually non-normative, gender roles, deviancy and morality, are instrumentalized in reproducing this binary through fantasies of global liberation and local oppression. This is evident for example in U.S.-led discourse on liberating Afghan and Iraqi Muslim women from their veils and oppressors (Kandiyoti 2007), a gesture through which illegal military occupation and violent wars are justified (Abu-Lughod 2013). It is also evident in the example of Lebanese Shi'a community's rejection of sex education proposed by the UN during the post-war rebuilding process. Azza Baydoun writes that this rejection was "more related to the source of the material [the UN] and the identities of those who support and promote it, than to the actual substance of the program" (Baydoun 2008, 97). Both reactions are hence part of the fantasy/ anxiety that a particular type of globalization will create a certain homogeneous Western-based sameness everywhere akin to previous violence of Empire and colonization, erasing local values, identities, and ways of life.

[8] When opportunities for democratizing authoritarian systems present themselves, such as in the Arab Revolts or the Arab Spring of 2011, Western nations manage to forfeit the democratic fantasy by supporting secular dictators to preserve their national and market interests. This was the case with the U.S. contributing to the suppression of the Egyptian revolt in 2011, supporting several monarchies such as Saudi Arabia, and selectively ignoring Palestinian elections that democratically brought Hamas into power in 2006, etc.

[9] Including active support for the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestine, the occupation of Afghanistan since 2001, the illegal Iraqi occupation since 2003, and the proxy war in Syria from 2011.

Often anxieties over this inevitable sameness extend to the realm of policing non-normativity, a factor that cannot be understated in the story of the politics of the sexual. As Paul Amar (2013) notes in the context of postcolonial Egypt, the local state security forces and national policing of 'deviancy' have been instrumental for shaping the sexual and the non-normative, and have done so through hypervisibilizing certain non-normative persons for public punishment. In analyzing the controversial Queen Boat incident in Cairo in which 52 persons were arrested for "debauchery" and disrespecting religion, Amar contextualizes the incident as follows: "Police and press identified a particular set of queer subjects with globalism, hypervisibilizing them in a wave of moral panic" (ibid, 71). To Amar, it was Egypt's security archipelago that "had acted, since at least the 1980s, to generate these 'globalizing sexuality' subjects as their other" leading to identifying sexually non-normative men as outcomes of negative non-national, non-local, "globalism" meriting national-level policing (ibid, 75). This explains Egypt's turning of those arrested from a civil trial to a military one, and labeling the incident as one against national security. The same incident was an alarm bell for activists in Lebanon who mobilized as a group in its aftermath (Makarem 2011 - see chapter 5).

In sexuality studies, a similar fantasy of inevitable sameness is also reflected in some works that not only hope for the eventual visibility of a particular form of homosexuality across the globe, but claim it has always been there. For example, Murray and Roscoe (1997) and Samar Habib (2007) argue that denying the existence of identities based on sexualities outside of the modern West is itself a form of sexual U.S. exceptionalism that cannot allow the imagining of sexual identities elsewhere. Such a claim favors sameness over difference and erases the genealogy and geopolitics involved in building such supposed sexual identities today. As I noted in the introduction, Murray and Roscoe (1997) in particular are not interested in reading non-normative sexual selves in West Asia alongside the modern history of the production of the Western homosexual (as a process inextricably linked to modernity, colonialism, and the production of modern taxonomic selves and others explored earlier). Rather, they take non-normative sexual acts and desires (in the shape of an identity) as existing across centuries of human relations, in effect applying a Western fantasy of worldwide homosexuality globally.

From another angle, in their emphasis on the Western origin of LGBT categories, several authors see their emergence outside of Western Europe and the U.S. solely as an

imperial imposition. They argue that a historical process such as colonialism has lasting effects for the ways we study sexuality today, in that we take categories such as a race, gender, and sex for granted as structuring mechanisms that lead our studies. More specifically, Greg Thomas warns us that "the cultural categories of sex and sexuality can function in a way that routinely erases the history of race and empire from their critical frame of reference" (Thomas 2007, 4) thereby clearly revealing the field of sexuality studies as mapped "on an imperial landscape" (Stoler 1995, 5). In a similar vein, Joseph Massad opens a critique of the very construct of the field of "Queer Middle East Studies" as a direct product of modernity, enabled only by the persistent existence of imperial relations (2015, 214). He argues that the "modern European category of sexuality" is "a historically and culturally specific epistemological and ontological category and is not universal or necessarily universalizable" (ibid, 213-216).

Massad's point is not that same-sex desires and non-binary gender identities have not existed – indeed he chronicles many local forms of non-normative homoerotic practices and persons in his first book "Desiring Arabs" (2007). Rather, his point is both that a resurgent interest in the question of 'the sexual' academically, as well as the morphing of select elements and conditions of being into a modern analytical framework of [identity-based] sexuality, are only possible due to the persistence of unequal imperial relations that impose the homo-hetero binary on the rest of the world through contemporary avenues of coloniality. One such contemporary channel of imposition is what Massad calls the "Gay International." A foundational view on theorizing the sexual in what Massad terms the "Arab World" at large, the Gay International has direct relevance to my interlocutors today, not only as bodies at the heart of this debate, but also through their own debate with Massad himself over the meaning of their identities (Massad 2007).

Massad defines The Gay International as a set of "missionary tasks, the discourses that produce them, and the organizations that represent them," these include European and U.S. entities such as International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), Human Rights Watch (HRW), as well as local organizations that adopt the discourse of international gay rights such as HELEM (2007, 161). Proud; an LGBT organization in Beirut whose mission is to help Syrian refugees seek asylum in Europe on the basis of "LGBTI" identities I explore in chapter 7, would fall under Massad's Gay International umbrella as well, whilst feminist queer underground

groups such as Meem and Dammeh would only partially fit his framework, given their insistence on underground presence and selective funding policies.

Massad's critique is twofold. First, he not only sees the Gay International's "incitement to discourse" as resulting in creating "homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they did not exist" but that it also "represses same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology" (ibid, 163) – a claim that I challenge in chapter 7. Second, he argues that those who constitute part of the Gay International and follow its lines of political logic, do create a stricter divide between heterosexuality and homosexuality, thereby not only erasing local practices that do not correspond to either end of the binary, but leading to an inevitable heterosexualization of the world.

Massad has been extensively critiqued for his conceptualizing of the Gay International and its political functions. To the detriment of theorizations of contemporary desire in the region and the lives of persons who use these labels, the majority of his critics center their arguments on emphasizing the plurality of the "West" and thus question his "erasing of difference" through selectively flattening the politics of international organizations and sexuality discourses (Traub 2008, 5). The dominant critique is that he assumes a linear and coherent path of conceptual and political travel from West to Rest, thereby reifying the West and Arab world as two separate coherent entities with a unidirectional top-bottom neo-colonial interaction that unreflectively produces Gays and Lesbians (Babayan and Najmabadi 2008).

Another critique directly tackles Massad's dismissal of local LGBT organizations and identities, and comes in the form of a debate between Massad and HELEM's Executive Director at the time, Ghassan Makarem. Makarem objected to Massad suggesting that HELEM's members are "agents of the West" (2009), a claim that Massad replied to by stating he is not criticizing "gays, or homosexuals, or people who have same sex contact" but the Gay International (Massad 2009). In this reply, Massad is clearly creating a divide between a formal type of political organizing on the one end and personal sexual desires and lives on the other.

Such a clear division, however theoretically important, does not exist in such a neatly separated form in organizations such as HELEM or Proud, or even Meem, Nasawiyya, and Dammeh, as my ethnographic research will show. The persons who are part of these groups

and organizations build a complex relationship between their own sexual desires, acts, multiple identities and their activist selves. I demonstrate this for example in chapter 5, where although ideas about respectable 'LGBT' sexual selves clash with 'politically incorrect' forms of community building such as the local practice of *Shakher* (a form of witty and rude communication), the clash does not lead to erasure, or the establishment of simple Western-modeled LGBT selves. Rather, these ideas exist simultaneously; the same persons who criticize *Shakher* as disrespectful engage with it at times, and the same persons who criticize respectable LGBT identities also employ them when it is beneficial for them. Therefore, for the Beirut context, it is not analytically useful to separate the organizations from the persons who enter them, use them, and shape them politically. As I will argue, cross-bracing enables us to see these messy workings and the interlocutors' hedging of them.

The above 'West to East' approach has been extensively critiqued for not only an oversimplified definition of the local and global, but also for a limited conceptualization of the interaction between the two. In understanding the methods and politics of travel and interaction in a perpetually unequal world, several authors have proposed a variety of concepts and articulations of interaction that offer a complex perspective on these relationships. As I explain below, such concepts are crucially relevant to studying non-normative sexualities in Beirut, yet they remain inadequate tools for this endeavor.

2.2.2 View 2: East and West 'Negotiate' Queer Theory

Is it indeed inevitable to use a Western-originating framework of sexuality in historicizing, conceptualizing, and analyzing desire? In a globalized world in which ideas and bodies are constantly moving and interacting, several scholars do not see 'uncontaminated' knowledge production as possible. Rather, gender and sexually non-normative people engage in processes of "fusing global, transnational imaginaries with local, national visions of identity, community, and politics" (Renkin 2014, 7). In this view, sexuality studies is always co-produced in interaction with the Western academy, however unequal. In introducing the edited volume *Islamicate Sexualities* as a contribution lying at the cross section between Queer Theory and "Middle East Studies," Valerie Traub contends that the tension emerging from using Western located modern-day sexual concepts (such as "Lesbian" and "heteronormativity") while historicizing desire is necessary for knowledge production on

what she and the volume's editors vaguely term "Islamicate sexualities" (2008). The tension for the authors and the field alike, lies in the risk of reproducing European or Western centrism while writing a local history (Chakrabarty 2000). Despite this risk, which the authors acknowledge but do not adequately account for, Traub argues the new field can use the concepts as tools in historicizing the centrality of sexuality regionally, and at once challenge the terms and broaden them (2008). Following Chakrabarty (2000), she agrees with his stance that "Western European historicism is simultaneously inadequate *and indispensable* [to writing Indian history]," and sees the new research area of historicizing "Islamicate sexualities" to be lying at the heart of the same conundrum (Traub 2008, 28).

For example, in demonstrating this theoretical approach in re-reading the past as queer, Afsaneh Najmabadi analyzes the inapplicability of the types vs. acts binary in Qajar Iran (1785-1925), where medicine and religious rulings organized sexuality through a hierarchy of sacred sexual body parts, and acts and desires were judged through unacceptable "excess" (Najmabadi 2008, 276 - 279). In breaking the types vs. acts conceptual binary, Najmabadi argues that the regulation of sexuality did not in fact lead to the creation of sexual "types" as Foucault (1978) argues for modern Europe's sexual history examined earlier. Rather, it was an emphasis on "heteronormalizing" the nation through "gender homosociality" that effectively assigned same-sex practices to the realm of the abnormal (Najmabadi 2008, 277–278). Najmabdai then uses Western-located Queer Theory's concepts – heternomativity, homosociality – to map part of a history of desire and sexuality in Qajar Iran. In so doing she challenges a Foucauldian historical narrative using Queer Theory's own tools. The issue, however, with this volume is that it often leaves the link between Islam and sexuality assumed and un-interrogated, as exemplified by the choice of "Islamicate" as a concept that is never engaged with in the volume, neither is the connection between Islam and sexuality made clear.

Traub follows this debate by questioning both positions' necessary reliance on selective unearthing and re-telling of sexual histories in order to reveal "the epistemic privileging of the West" (Traub 2008, 8). Understanding Massad's emphasis on modern geopolitical circumstances as leading to a profoundly unequal West-to-Rest interaction, Traub calls for finding positions from within queer studies that move away from centering their claims on the political tension between local/authentic sexuality and a globalized/foreign one (ibid). I contend that both positions have shortcomings. While Massad

ignores the lived experiences of persons caught in these processes as I explained in the previous section, Traub risks underestimating the Gay International as one key force that does indeed shape sexuality politics in the region.

A new set of authors have instead focused on the location and type of interactions between the local and the global; the particular and the universal, centralizing gender and sexuality as key loci of these negotiations. What do these 'negotiations' look like exactly? Anna Tsing's influential ethnography of global connection proposes the idea that power and culture are produced through the constant interaction – "friction" – between particulars and universals, or what she terms as a process of "awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (2005, 4). She argues that universalisms are not specific to dominant discourses but rather are employed by resistant actors too, and across a variety of different collaborations, which she later argues leads to "contamination" (Tsing 2015). For example, in fighting for Indonesian forests, various actors from students to villagers to activists create connections across their different priorities, hence establishing the possibility for a global interaction. The interaction remains alive, in part due to the "friction" produced from the meeting of these differences. Universals hence can be made up of particular elements (or locally contingent ones) that can then be universalized differently and unequally. Tsing explains: "Friction gives purchase to universals, allowing them to spread as frameworks for the practice of power. But engaged universals are never fully successful in being everywhere the same because of this same friction" (2005, 10). Therefore, in her reading, friction explains both the spread and inapplicability of ideas that travel and become universalized (or globalized). This never-ending collaboration and unequal interaction causes "contamination," or in Tsing's words: "transformation through encounter" (2015, 28). In fact, all interactive elements have already arrived to the site of encounter pre-contaminated through previous historical encounters. In this sense, there is never a truly pure origin, or an original idea that travels from West to East or emerges in the local and becomes globalized, as these elements are constantly interacting in friction.

This view, which de-emphasizes the sources of contamination and the infrastructure in which friction occurs – or indeed, argues against isolating one trajectory of contamination due to the impossibility of its purity – poses an irreconcilable problem for decolonial thinking. As I examined earlier, decolonial approaches argue for the opposite; the necessity to name the paths of power and see the systemic reproduction of inequality. The risk at hand is

the leveling of inequality across processes that have always favored one set of ideas and actors over another, such as modern imperial relations that are based on colonial projects and pasts. The powerful contribution of decolonial theorizing is that it *does* isolate this trajectory, the process, product, or actors and shows the power of interaction as a system, as a project, and not as a half-hazardous, unpredictable endeavor, or in Tsing's words, as a set of "uneven and awkward links" (2005, 4). Where Tsing starts "in the middle" (2005, 2), decolonialism looks at the end product and tries to trace its history to the origin and how it got there. In this sense, my project is once more caught between an argument for decolonial purity, and another for the impossibility of decontamination. This tension itself pushes me to find a way out of this bind. Cross-bracing, in its emphasis on the multiplicity of braced structures and pathways of power, shows us that there is a variety of ways in which the interaction between the local and the global occurs, and that friction is not its only manifestation. In this sense, friction is but *one type* of possible interaction between the local and the global, and cross-bracing allows us to see the structures (however permeable) in which power travels and in which friction itself occurs.[10]

Queer studies, including queer ethnographies, offer several concepts and reformulations of the interaction between local and global that try to move away from the binary of pure origins and contaminated realities. For example, in his ethnographic study of sexuality in Indonesia Tom Boellstorff (2005) proposes "dubbing culture" as a methodological metaphor that aims to question the boundary of an "authentic" culture. He argues that "in dubbing culture, two elements are held together in productive tension without the expectation that they will ever resolve into one – just as it is known from the outset that the speaker's lips will never be in sync with the spoken word in a dubbed film" (Boellstorff 2005, 5). In this sense, there is an explicit admission that terms and identities such as 'gay' arrive externally, but also, that they are not so simply made into matching copies on the ground. Thus, Boellstorff disagrees with the idea that the local and global can be dissolved into each other in the figure of a gay (transnational) Indonesian (national) (ibid). In other words, the interaction between the local and global does not only operate as "friction" as per

[10] In explaining friction, Tsing argues: "A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road; spinning in the air it goes nowhere. Rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light; one stick alone is just a stick. As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power."(2005, 5) My intervention does not see the spinning wheel or the single stick as inconsequential events, but rather as key possibilities of interaction that should be accounted for. Taking into account origin (where did the wheel come from and how did it end up in the air?) and agency (who or what is rubbing the two sticks together) reveals a more complex story of the interaction between structures, processes, and actors.

Tsing's usage – that universalist notions mutate and therefore gain new meanings in local contexts. Boellstorff stresses that "it is always clear to Indonesians of any ethnic religious background that the terms gay and lesbi do not originate in locality or tradition" (2005, 6-7), but that they are translated without ever creating a "unitary whole" (ibid, 58) making it so that there "can never be a 'faithful' translation" (ibid, 5).

Although "dubbing" offers a much needed relief from the tension produced by a binary conception such as the Gay International, it is not completely applicable for the Beirut context. The negotiation over which labels to use is continuously reproduced in relation to state and space (like NGOs, bars, and detention centers) and for Syrian refugees, in relation to displacement as well. It is also negotiated in relation to profit and sex work for some 'Shemales' and 'Ladyboys' who choose these categories over 'Trans' depending on place, gain, or risk of arrest and policing. The Beiruti interlocutors, just like their Indonesian counterparts, are aware that these terms are not 'faithful' translations – but at the same time, these terms have also gained new origin stories that pin them down to a certain locality, or a certain discourse. For example, for some Syrian refugees, the term 'Gay' becomes pinned to asylum seeking procedures and denotes a particular performance of homosexual monogamy, sexual activity, and victimhood, while excluding heterosexual marriage or queer/alternative kinship. This means that choosing the word 'Gay' becomes tied to a particular set of spaces and discourses and is often used to navigate – or hedge – these specific situations. The arrival of these terms, whether through the Gay International, the porn industry, new tactics of state policing or otherwise, is not only about a negotiation of an identity and rightful belonging, it is also about negotiating the very definition of sexual non-normativity and who is captured by it.

2.3 Where do We Go from Here? Returning to Cross-bracing and Hedging

From the above analysis it seems that, as post colonial subjects and thinkers who aim for the study of the sexual, we cannot escape – or afford to escape – the question of erased local origins and imperial contamination. Nor can we ignore the material effects of transnational sexuality politics; which not only include new security regimes that take the sexually non-normative as a measure for morality and an excuse for violent intervention, but also includes those who attach themselves to the discourses and regimes of LGBT rights and

identities, be it persons or NGOs, as well as transnational and regional networks of activism and solidarity.

What appears as a constant quest for decolonizing knowledge and bodies (with perpetual impossibilities to do so), is set up against inevitable interaction with transnational flows coming through old colonial routes and new pathways established by the conditions of our current moment. As many activists I met in Beirut and as many of the above academics whose work I am in conversation with, I am searching for room that accounts for both of our histories of colonization and for our realities of post-colonial existence. The way to do so, as I explore in the next chapters, is through an ethnography of the contemporary moment and the bodies, subjectivities, and persons living it. If we begin our theorizing from the persons caught in navigating exactly these forces, we begin to understand the contradictions, (im)possibilities, and opportunities of existence between them. It is thus pivotal to turn to activist voices in Beirut and the region, and to ethnographies that catalogue their different navigations.

Activist voices in the region offer new insights into how to conceptualize the sexual, while keeping colonial inequality visible, and in tension with benefiting from transnational knowledge and networks. For example, Palestinian queer activists in AlQaws group insist on their "queer"[11] existence, but not without first showing how the figure of the homosexual came to be constructed through the Israeli settler colonial regime. For them, in the context of Israeli occupation, queer sexuality matters because of the ways in which it is used to further their illegal occupation and subjugation through claiming power over knowledge of the sexual (AlQaisiya, Hilal, and Maikey 2016). Hence, exposing pinkwashing – that is, Israel's use of a transnational gay rights discourse to claim progress and democratic values in its society and homophobia in the Palestinian one, through which it in turn justifies its use of violence against Palestinians – is primary. It is pivotal both for queering coloniality (questioning and revealing its racialized hetero and homonormative underpinnings that serve occupation) and for creating a space where the sexually non-normative can be interpreted as something other than a Western import, or suspicious collaboration with Israel. Al-Qaws and other Palestinian queer groups have worked for years to demonstrate how sexual liberation is tied with liberation from Israeli occupation, whether through youth groups in which they "work collectively on understanding the links between sexual oppression and colonialism,

[11] Term used by the Palestinians authors cited.

and how our bodies, desires, and sexualities have been used by Israel," or through refusing to "normalize with Israeli LGBTQ groups" and instead "decolonizing Palestinian identity within the Palestinian Queer community" (AlQaisiya, Hilal, and Maikey 2016, 135–136). These activists are well aware of the Western origins of terms such as queer and LGBT, yet they still find them useful in their fight to reassert their Palestinian non-normative and non-conforming selves. In other words, similar to several of their Lebanese counterparts, they hedge.

Beirut's activists have offered several interventions in the debate over authenticity and Western mimicking, as I have explored partly above. In "Bareed Mista3jil," the first collection of stories of female sexuality in Lebanon published by a queer women's group (Meem), the authors expressed their conundrum over the use of Westernized terms such as LGBT and queer (Meem 2009). While they argued that the word *shaz* in Arabic (meaning irregular or deviant) would be more appropriate than "queer" – and indeed it would have been – they still chose queer "to represent all non-heterosexual identities" and in place of "LGBT" which they found lacking of diversity and fluidity (ibid, 2). Although the authors strongly argue for the limits of LGBT categorization, they still use it for themselves and others as a useful transnational term that captures parts of their sexual existence. They use the term queer without much interrogation of its Western origins, because they see a common enough of a link between its derogatory history and theirs. A shared sentiment of rejection enables finding cross-border similarity.

At the same time, to defend themselves against the critique of imported sexualities, they are pushed to argue that "sexuality existed even before colonization and before the heavy influence of Western movies and music on our culture," citing 8th and 9th century homoerotic poetry by the Arab-Persian poet Abu Nuwas as proof of the presence of homosexuality regionally and across history (ibid, 3). I am not interested in critiquing these activists' assumption of the universality of sexuality, the slippages between identity, desire, and practice, nor their un-interrogated preference for the adoption of queer as opposed to LGBT. What I am pointing at here and in the dissertation more broadly is that the debate over authentic local sexuality and Western imports upon which the entire question of the sexual is based, traps us either in an eternal quest for authenticity or into argumentative moves that appear contradictory. In asking that we examine these contradictions as strategies of being and ways to maintain power, I seek to introduce a different path to theorizing the sexual.

Through the concepts of cross-bracing and hedging, I propose that we must not view the above contradictory approaches as simply failures of one approach and the success of another. Rather, we must take them in the combination in which they are presented, expose their cross-dependency, clashes, and concomitant existence. We must hedge both, just as the above activists have done in claiming lineage to homoerotica of the 7th century while finding common ground with a Western traveling term such as "queer." Analytically therefore, my position acknowledges the importance of the Gay International critique and does not seek to erase it. Yet, it also acknowledges the need to account for the transnational travel of terms, bodies, identities, and politics. I hence employ a post-structuralist approach together with queer ethnography in order to retell the story of interaction between the local and global through the lives and bodies of those who are at the heart of this interaction, whether by choice, chance, or force.

This includes the state apparatus, NGOs, bars, and Syrian refugees and Lebanese activists. All of them offer stories of cross-braced power structures that define the sexual, and the hedging of contradictory strategies. As I argue in the next chapters, the state apparatus engages and disengages in policing non-normative sexuality depending on which act helps it maintain its power and right to violence. NGOs and activists clash over the meanings of proper performance of gender and sexual non-normative identities which includes classed transnational ideas of respectability, and local practices such as *Shakher*. Bars hedge through manipulating definitions of classed Shemale gendered-presentation. The Lebanese public hedges through moral panic and reconfiguration of the meanings of masculinity and morality, while Syrian refugees hedge through attaching themselves to systems of asylum that require them to perform as "LGBTI." All these actors engage in a process of perpetual hedging of cross-braced structures of power in order to survive, to maintain power, to gain legitimacy or profit; to experience joy, or to simply live, as the next analytical chapters will demonstrate.

Chapter 3: Doing Feminist Queer Ethnography, Hedging in the Field

How does one study the sexual ethnographically, and what does it mean to conduct a critical feminist queer ethnography in a West-Asian location like Beirut? In the following chapter I aim to answer these questions primarily through engaging with the sub-fields of Gay and Lesbian Studies and Queer Ethnography. Through telling the stories of Nancy and Jiji, I show that my field site necessitated the creation of a research method that places the subject at the center of the ethnography while engaging with a queer theoretical approach. I do so through adopting two key tenets of feminist Queer Theory: first, shifting the lens from the non-normative subject to the system that produces them as a strange internal other, and second, the consistent disruption of the researcher-subject relation that reveals moments of mutual construction without losing sight of unequal power relations between the two. Both are a consistent effort of rendering the normative strange, or 'queering.' Through this tool I am able to observe and understand my interlocutors' strategies of hedging their sexualities in cross-braced conditions.

3.1 From Gay and Lesbian Studies to Queering Ethnography

The emergence of Gay and Lesbian Studies as a field of research and theorizing in the late 20th century enabled ethnographers to shed light on the ways in which Lesbian and Gay persons live their identities, choose queer families, and build queer communities (Weston 1993). Some of these accounts assumed that Gay and Lesbian identities, though multiple, are a universal and transhistorical phenomenon, while others argued instead for the necessity of examining the production of desire, gender, and sex in relation to local conditions. Queer Theory, emerging from literary studies and philosophy, challenged the very construct of an agentive and knowing marginal subjectivity, and shifted the focus instead to the systemic production of heterosexuality as a norm (Warner 1991). In this realm, authors such as Judith Butler (1990) and Eve Sedgwick (1990) demonstrated the fallacy of a heterosexual-homosexual binary, arguing it is part of an unequal co-construction which only normalizes some practices while rendering others deviant. The impetus to point to the workings of taken-for-granted systems such as compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980) and the gender binary, became Queer Theory's most crucial contribution. Queer theorists have therefore been interested in pointing to the sexually normative and the systemic processes with which it is created as such.

A debate over Queer Theory's applicability to studying queer lives continued within Lesbian and Gay Anthropology. Lewin and Leap argued that Queer Theory was often not guided by "'empirical' approaches" and rather based in literary studies (2002, 11). In their view, this renders it incommensurable with Lesbian and Gay Anthropology which is more concerned with knowledge creation from the intimate details of interlocutors' lives. In fact, Lewin and Leap argued for the necessity of distancing Lesbian and Gay Anthropology from Queer Theory, stating they were "not convinced that Queer Theory was part of lesbian and gay anthropology or that such connections were likely to emerge" (ibid, 11). In their scholarly vision, Lesbian and Gay Anthropology would thus remain committed to Lesbian and Gay anthropologists who are producing insights from their positions of outness in the field, on topics that have been considered taboo or even un-academic, namely Gay and Lesbian sexualities. Lewin and Leap returned to the debate in their 2009 volume "Out in Public," cautioning against Queer Theory's detachment from the subject's daily concerns and arguing: "those who use the Queer Theory paradigm to frame their studies of sexuality and gender will find that site-specific, subject-specific concerns like giving witness to local struggles, positioning struggles within regional contexts, and building alliances between academe and activism are irrelevant to their inquiry" (Lewin and Leap 2009, 7).

Although queer theorists would agree that the theory's impetus to destabilize bordered categories such as subject and researcher leads to displacing the focus from the singular subject identity, several would also challenge the above depiction of Queer Theory's inapplicability and irrelevance to the interlocutor's "subject-specific concerns" (ibid). In their edited volume "Queer Methods and Methodologies," Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash (2010) collected a plethora of experiences of scholars who rethought the conceptualization of "queer" specifically as method and methodology in their research. For example, Mathias Detamore argued that it is Queer Theory that – through its destabilization of traditional researcher-researched relations – can account for intimacies as political, and pushed for a serious consideration of "queer ethics as method" in social research (2010).

Moreover, since the 1990s, leading anthropologists experimented with adopting queer methods and methodologies in research, in ethnography and beyond, precisely because of the possibilities a queer method offers in revealing systems and processes of identity-making. For example, in revisiting the fieldwork he conducted on "*gay*" and "*lesbi*"[12] sexualities in

[12] Boellstorff uses Italics to convey the local usage of these terms.

Indonesia, Tom Boellstorff demonstrates how his concept of "gay archipelago" joins the emic (theory produced from/by the subject) and the etic (theory from the outsider, or the researcher) thereby troubling the neat researcher-researched distinction in classic ethnographic knowledge making (2010). Boellstorff explains that the local Indonesian notion of "archipelago" is "a key metaphor for national unity and diversity," while the term "*gay*" or "*lesbi*" themselves point to a sentiment of shared sameness with other "gay and lesbians" globally *as well as* a local difference in how this subjectivity is practiced in Indonesia (ibid, 219).[13] By re-organizing the notions together, the concept of "gay archipelago" demonstrates his joint engagement with "*gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians as sources of theoretical insight" (ibid, 220). What makes this a queer method specifically according to him is that "it is predicated on reworking and transforming, rather than transcending, the concepts with which it engages – as queer studies has consistently done" (ibid, 220). Hence, through actively disturbing a neat division between researcher and researched, Boellstorff shows us what types of knowledge making on sexuality is possible through a queer method.

This is the academic context within which queer ethnographies have emerged, first turning their inquisition toward the systems that produce gender and sexual normativity and how heterosexuality is implicated in them, and second, troubling rigid divisions between researcher and researched. My own study of gender and sexual non-normativity in Beirut, framed by Queer Theory, examines exactly the subject-specific concerns that Lewin and Leap list, and I argue that a queer method is indeed necessary for capturing the workings of gender and sexual non-normativity in Beirut. As Sofian Merabet has shown, a queer method and especially one that uses "competing methodological angles" is needed in a field site like Beirut "where the anthropologist is constantly reminded of the historically rich and conflating nature of the landscape, its shifting borderlines, and the entrenched interpretations of a variety of spaces that are persistently contested" (2014a, 4).

In applying a queer method then, I have adopted the two key aspects of Queer Theory that I mentioned above. First, shifting the lens from the non-normative subject to the normative system that produces her as strange, out of place, and 'queer.' Second, the disruption of the researcher-subject categorization in line with Queer Theory's aim to dilute bordered categories, and instead demonstrate their co-reliance and co-construction. In this sense, I adopt 'queering' to mean the consistent effort of rendering the normative strange in

[13] Wherein one can for example be heterosexually married and be *gay* as well.

order to reveal its dynamic existence and expose its structures, something that my own interlocutors engaged with directly as I demonstrate in the following examples.

3.1.1 Queering the Subject: Rendering the Normative Strange

On a breezy October day Nancy and I struck up a conversation on HELEM's balcony overlooking the congested traffic. Rather bored, we were both waiting for a film screening to begin. Sometimes events were cancelled at the last minute, other times we'd wait a while before someone gathered us all into the main room. During these times Nancy and I chatted often about her life in Beirut as a Syrian transwoman[14] in her late 20s, and her wish to leave the city and re-settle abroad. This time, I asked her if she wouldn't mind clarifying all the terms I heard her use to refer to herself, and that I would be interested in quoting her. "*W iza?* [So what?]" she asked rhetorically as she lit a cigarette and leaned back in a plastic chair:

> Adriana: do you use Shemale to refer to yourself?
> Nancy: No, I don't have breasts.
> Adriana: so which term do you prefer?
> Nancy: woman. At home, I am *sit-il-beit* [woman of the house], everyone refers to me as a woman
> Adriana: do you also use trans?
> Nancy: yes, like now, I am trans.
> Adriana: what do you mean?
> Nancy: the way I came here [to the community center] is trans. I'm not dressed as a woman, or a Ladyboy, but as trans, a bit feminine.. but not *too over* [the top], it depends where I'm going. In Syria, I was a full Ladyboy, I would wear dresses and walk anywhere I wanted to in public. I paid the neighborhood guys and they all knew no one could mess with me. I walked the way I wanted to in the street: as a Ladyboy. Here [in Beirut], no way. I can't do it here, I can't go out in a skirt here, you never know what can happen to you.
> Adriana: so what do you go out as?
> Nancy: In the street I'm straight, I'm a man.
> Adriana: what do you mean? What do you wear?
> Nancy: like this, jeans and a sweater. Nothing too tight, no dresses and so on.

Similarly to David Valentine's (2007) argument in his ethnography of the Transgender category's use among activists in Manhattan in New York, reading Nancy's self-identification while using the transnational definitions of LGBT identity categories offers the interpretation that Nancy confuses sexual orientation (straight) with gender (man). At the same time, she is also read as creating differences between Shemale and Ladyboy on the one

[14] For the purposes of this dissertation, I use "trans" or "transwoman" to indicate the local usage, and "Trans" or "Transgender" to indicate the category's place in the transnational "LGBT" or "LGBTI" acronym.

hand and "trans" on the other, which does not register as correct usage under the transnational definitions of these terms which see "trans" as short for the Transgender umbrella category that *includes* Shemale and Ladyboy, and not a separate term as Nancy uses it. However, what is particularly striking is Nancy's space-specific differentiation between looking, embodying, and passing as "straight and man" on the one hand and "trans" on the other, while dressed in exactly the same way.

The main factor that informs Nancy's choices of identity labels and self-presentation is context and location. At home, a safer and private location, regardless of what she is wearing, her housemates refer to her as a woman and she adopts the gendered domestic role of a household's caretaker – *sit-il-beit* is a term used for the female head of a household and the feminized role of housekeeping. However, she switches to being "straight" while navigating Beirut's streets. For her, being straight is indeed the same as performing and passing as a man: she accesses public space through activating the signs of male privilege she is read as having, such as short hair and a body that can pass as male too. She completes this performance through special attention to her attire: jeans and a purple V-neck sweater (no dress). Performing a straight cis-gender man allows her a degree of safety in Beirut from gender-based discrimination but not necessarily from anti-Syrian harassment that many displaced refugees face daily. However, when she was in Syria, she could present herself as a Ladyboy and wear dresses (signs of womanhood and femininity for her) while feeling secure that no policing entity, state or communal, formal or informal, would harass her because of her appearance, due to paying off the neighborhood's men for protection. Lastly, when she comes to HELEM's community center, she presents herself as trans, both in speech, 'look,' and attire. Although she is wearing the same clothes she wore in the street as straight, she argues that she can be read as both, straight and trans, depending who the message is for: straight for the public, trans in the community center. Trans is the preferred politically correct word at the center, as opposed to Ladyboy or Shemale (see chapter 5). At HELEM, "trans" can hence refer to the transnational category of Transgender, and also to the local usage of the term. Although Nancy mentioned she was a bit more feminine as trans, but not "too over" the top (see chapter 6), she was differentiating herself from feminine gay men. Thus, "trans" to her is not only the politically correct term to use in an NGO, and not only a reflection of herself, but also a category that differentiates her from the majority of HELEM's frequenters; gay men.

What is evident in this conversation is that it is impossible to understand Nancy's hedging of her self-presentation as "straight and a man" and as "trans" without positioning it in the context of several cross-braced factors that inform how and when to hedge. These include: state repression of non-normativity which forces Nancy into a cis-heteronormative self-presentation as "straight and man" (chapter 4), effects of NGOization and institutionalization processes on her identity-making and self-presentation in the community center as trans/Transgender (chapter 5), various urban locations from the street to the home that shape the process of strategic 'passing' (chapter 6), as well as the regional Syrian refugee crisis and the ensuing dynamics of displacement and their effects on how Syrians must carefully negotiate community relations and resettlement opportunities (chapter 7).

As a researcher, for me to understand the multiplicity and shifting uses of identities such as trans, Ladyboy, Shemale, straight, and woman, which I have called a process of "hedging" sexualities, I must adopt a queer approach. In order to place Nancy and others at the center of this ethnography, I must start from her "site-specific, subject-specific concerns" (Lewin and Leap 2009, 7) which include a contextualizing of the politics of sexuality as they unfold between local meanings, regional, and transnational ones, in her walk from the home, through the street, to the center, and to the bar; all "spaces that are persistently contested" (Merabet 2014a, 4). In other words, I must foreground the personal, intimate, and the everyday, in order to understand the larger shifting structures and contextual practices they're embedded in. What must be 'rendered strange' is not Nancy's multiple labels, but the specific heteronormative, heterosexist, racist and classist systems and our ways of understanding them. It is these structures that Nancy must navigate, and that produce her as the anomaly. Choosing to invest in a multiplicity of meanings, Nancy shows us how hedging operates as a strategy of surviving the daily commute and as a strategy of crafting belonging to multiple groups.

In short, understanding Nancy – if that is the goal per Lesbian and Gay Anthropology – is impossible without turning the inquisitive lens towards the normative and the cross-braced ways in which it produces the subject (a Queer Theory principle). In this sense, my field necessitated the adoption of a queer analytical tool, which is an analytical impulse that emerges from post-structuralist and feminist analysis in anthropology. It accomplishes an engagement with the subject on her own terms while offsetting the element of 'strange' from

her and attaching it to the system that produces her as such, which all of the next four analytical chapters aim to do.

3.1.2 Queering Research Relations

The reflexive turn in social theory offset the longstanding assumption that a researcher is objective or that she does not influence the data she collects (Judith Stacey 1988). More so, feminist ethnography emphasizes accounting for a researcher's privileges and their effects not only on her access to the field and the type of data she is able to collect, but also on the ways in which the positions we occupy are performed, interpolated, maintained, and co-constructed in the socio-political setting and ethnographic encounter. Feminist ethnographic knowledge production on the West Asia region by so called 'native' academics has offered insights into research in one's home location, without reproducing the Western Orientalist gaze, but under constant pressure to break or counter it (Altorki and El-Solh 1989; Deeb and Winegar 2015; Kanafani and Sawaf 2017).

If feminist research approaches demand that a researcher accounts for her position in the field's gendered, racialized and classed systems of privilege and oppression – in a sense always consciously laying bare the power imbalances between a researcher and her interlocutors and how they shape the ethnographic encounter – then what does it mean to queer this relationship (dilute the boundaries between researcher and researched) while ensuring that power is accounted for? In other words, can queering remain feminist? In my research I adopt a queer feminist method and analytical lens that seeks to do exactly that.

Take the example of Jiji's process of identity co-construction. After explaining that she prefers to be called trans/Transwoman or woman but never a Ladyboy; Jiji, a Lebanese Transwoman in her late 40s from south Beirut, also explained the difference between trans and Shemale arguing that Shemales hate [cis-]women while trans persons don't; an odd opinion that I had not encountered before. When I asked her to elaborate, she used the opportunity to clarify her relationship to me; a cis-gender female researcher:

> Jiji: the Shemale hates the woman, because she feels she is like her, but can't do or be the same as her. Me? No; I feel the woman completes me in places that I cannot be in or reach. So I envy you. But how? I envy you because you have reached a high level of education, you can reach a stage, you are going to do your doctorate, your master's thesis, this is what I envy you for. At the

> same time, you are *completing me*, the thing that I cannot reach, you could. [emphasis in original]

Jiji then moves to talking about biological motherhood and argues that my ability to bear children is another way I complete her as a woman – this occurred despite her own self-definition as a mother of the community, which she experiences through cooking at the center for "my children."[15] Jiji's above words reposition us both towards each other as cis-woman researcher and Transwoman subject with my privilege of education openly stated as a marker of difference and power, and her lack of access to educational opportunities as a marker of marginalization. At the same time, Jiji uses this difference not only to articulate but also *experience* her identity as a woman. She differentiates between herself and Shemales not [only] through who has had specific medical surgeries (the most often cited marker of difference – see chapter 5), but rather by her love for and not 'hatred' of cis-gender women.

This, I contend, is a form of queering the researcher-subject relationship without losing sight of each of our respective positions of privilege and marginality. My cis-gender identity is being utilized during the interview process as an extension to that of Jiji's identity as a Transwoman. Jiji realizes that her marginalization – due primarily to her public life as a Transwoman from a low-income Shi'a family in south Beirut, which means consistently being denied the most basic of services and opportunities and facing systemic discrimination – will not allow her to pursue more advanced education. And at the same time, she points to the fact that my cis-gender privilege enables me to pursue higher education, and she is fully aware that I can accomplish my research partly due to the interview she agreed to provide. Jiji's co-construction of my gendered self and her gendered self without losing sight of my privilege and her marginalization is in line with feminist critique and ethics of positionality. In addition, instrumentalizing my cisgender 'self' in explaining and *adding* to her identity as a Transwoman, leads Jiji to destabilize these two categories through demonstrating how they are co-dependent not only for her in her daily life (for example: her ability to experience motherhood) but also for me and my research. The 'queering' hence takes place through her deliberately diluting the categories of researcher-subject and addressing us both as women, with me becoming an extension of her self-identified womanhood.

[15] My personal choice to have or not have children is irrelevant here because of its biological possibility, and hence in relation to Jiji, it is a cis-gender privilege that she exposes.

To summarize, Jiji exposed my academic accomplishment by tying it to my cis-gender privilege (a feminist approach) while at the same time destabilizing the binary categories of cis-trans, and researcher-subject through incorporating my cisgender self as a necessary extension to her achieving and experiencing her Transwoman self (a queer approach). Thus, what is evident is that if I wanted to study the factors that shape sexual identification and sexuality politics, then I would miss out – precisely as Tom Boelstorff argues – on the knowledge produced from such queering encounters, which entail such moments of "reworking and transforming, rather than transcending the concepts" which I and my field employ (2010, 220). In this sense, Jiji becomes an agent that demonstrates to me that her subjectivity as trans and as a woman is always shaped in negotiation with the moment and circumstances at hand, and that looking ethnographically for moments and strategies of queering can not only expose the cross-braced factors at work in a researcher-subject relationship, but also lead to novel ways of understanding the factors that go into crafting a Transwoman self during a specific temporal encounter in Beirut.

What I hope these two examples demonstrate is that although Queer Theory focuses on exposing heteronormative systems of power, rather than on non-normative subjects per se (as Lewin and Leap claim for Lesbian and Gay anthropology), it is reconcilable with ethnography that places the subject at the center of research. I have argued through these examples that such a queering combination is in fact necessary for illuminating the cross-braced structures within which the politics of non-normative sexualities in Beirut function today, including the ways in which various settings construct a person's sense of a non-normative self while being cast as strange by a cis-heteronormative order. In exposing these structures, such a queering method also enables us to see the various hedging techniques that interlocutors such as Nancy employ in navigating these cross-braced systems.

3.2 Fieldwork Positionalities: Out of Place

Being considered a 'local' ethnographer creates a special positionality that may facilitate one's access to some community members and specific narratives, while at the same time presenting challenges for the researcher who may have to comply with gendered family and community expectations (Joseph 1999; Abu-Lughod 2000). Such a positionality can also point in the direction of new questions and fields of inquiry using the "sensory, embodied and emotive aspects of field experiences" (Kanafani and Sawaf 2017, 5).

My experience as a female non-local researcher and rather a native Arabic speaker from the region, placed me in an-always already multiple position that was difficult or confusing for some to read because of the ways in which it fell out of dominant interpretive frames, hence creating moments of tension, confusion, and queer encounters.

While feminist and LGBT NGOs in Lebanon and some queer persons are becoming increasingly familiar with Western researchers due to their overexposure and hypervisibility as research subjects to academics and the media, they were often surprised when hearing of my Palestinian-Jordanian background and my academic institution in Central – and not Western – Europe. Research in sexuality is still largely perceived to be a Western domain of knowledge, even among those in Beirut fighting for the acknowledgment of local gender and sexual non-normativity and its place in transnational academic and activist circles. My lack of full Western identification, and my 'out-of-placeness' as a regional researcher and not a local Lebanese one, placed me in a peculiar position vis-à-vis Beiruti activists and interlocutors: I could not be easily dismissed for imposing a hypervisibilizing gaze on the local activist community as Western researchers and media outlets frequently do (Farah 2013), nor could I be claimed as part of the local community due to my foreignness as well as my different affinity with local LGBT politics.[16] The moments of confusion or mismatch meant that my movement on the field itself was frequently out of sync, out of place, and indeed 'queer' in its exposure of taken-for-granted ideas about who can research non-normative sexualities, if neither a local nor a Western researcher.

Further, my lack of association with the Jordanian capital Amman and my upbringing in the northern part of the country did not create much room for overlapping experiences with middle and upper class Beiruti interlocutors who frequently confused my home town of Irbid with Erbil; the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. At the same time, for some of the Syrian refugees I met, Irbid and its neighboring town Ramtha were familiar locations as they lay closest to the southern Syrian border. Ramtha in particular – a mere 15 minute drive from Irbid – is considered the 'sister town' of the Syrian border town Dar'a which is cited as the origin of the Syrian revolt in 2011.While so called 'south to south' cross-continental ethnographies of gender and sexuality are increasing in number, it is often the case that those from the 'south' study their own communities and countries, or conduct comparative research with other

[16] While I frequently expressed my commitment to feminism and to an alliance with LGBT groups, my experience with activism was more in line with radical queer activism than the liberal and NGOized types. At the moment of research, and as I explain in this chapter, radical queer activism was mostly underground and run by queer women, who were explicit about not wanting to be part of academic research.

regions (Amar 2013), as opposed to immersing oneself in another's context without a prior relation as I have done. For Lebanese researchers who have lived abroad for most of their lives, when they return to Lebanon, there exist ready-available categories such as that of the returning diasporic migrant, given Lebanon's massive diasporic communities in locations such as Brazil, Australia, and the United States. The children of those emigrants, even if often never living in Lebanon, are not anomalies in Lebanese society – many frequently return to learn Arabic, meet extended families, or simply spend summer vacations in their second homes. But regional researchers are rare, and don't quite have a fitting category to fall into as ethnographers specifically. Regional research is more prevalent in fields such as medicine, engineering, and International Relations, but is certainly scarce in the social sciences (Deeb and Winegar 2012).

In this sense, my non-native but regional relationship to Lebanon was met with disinterest and confusion while my non-affiliation with Western universities raised questions about the seriousness and quality of my research. Rarely, it was the fact that I researched LGBT politics and NGOs that led some to assume I was a Western researcher, as even among activists and practitioners, the field of LGBT studies, Queer Theory, and sexuality are assumed to be defined by Western interests and not regional ones. This is despite the increasing transnational cooperation and exchange between various sexuality-rights movements across West Asia and the Maghreb, much of which is led by activists in Beirut.

In contrast, my American accent in English made me pass as upper middle class educated Lebanese, while my Jordanian accent in Arabic raised questions about my belonging to Jordan (associated with conservative Sunni Islam and Gulf countries) or to Palestine (associated with Palestinian refugee communities in Lebanon). I was regularly approached by some of the Syrian refugees I met asking me to help them with their resettlement cases, or to follow up with foreign representatives of Western embassies. They assumed, correctly, that my English fluency was an asset in terms of understanding the resettlement process and being taken more seriously in front of Western authorities (embassies, foreign representatives of humanitarian organizations, etc).

These multiple identities and positions led me to create a queer compass with which to understand and hedge my shifting placements in the field, as well as my shifting relations with various interlocutors. Embodying what frequently appeared to be contradictory labels –

Arab but not a local, English speaker but not an emigrant, educated but not from an urban center elite, researcher of sexuality but not Western – created moments of tension that could then reveal the kinds of dominant cross-braced ideas and discourses at work and my queer or out of place position in them. These queer moments pushed me to ask what parts of my position make me out of place? Mapping the reactions to my gendered, classed, and racialized embodiments, I could then see not only which narratives of power are upholding each other, but also how they operate and produce the normative and non-normative.

3.3 Research Steps and Design

I arrived to Beirut the first time in April 2013 and remained for eight months in the field. I returned every year after that for an average period of one to three months in which I revisited my ethnographic sites, reconnected with interlocutress, and conducted additional research. By the end of 2017, the total time I spent conducting research was close to 15 months.

I split my research strategy into two different phases in which I combined two research methods: participant observation and selective open-ended interviews. The first phase of my research consisted of careful mapping of my field site's actors, starting with activists involved in organized forms of sexuality politics. I collected various information (publicly available online or through my meetings) about the state of affairs in each activist group and its history. This mapping was instrumental for understanding the lines along which some groups have split, and persistent contentious relations among some of them, which affected my access to other actors or simply my perception as a researcher. For example, a case of sexual harassment was frequently cited as the reason behind a major split in HELEM in which lesbian and queer women left the group in 2006 and established their own underground group Meem, and later an aboveground arm, Nasawiyya. Identifying as a researcher who examines HELEM, I was thus often met with suspicion from feminist and queer women activists who did not trust my relationship to HELEM. In addition, HELEM is often the first stop for Western journalists and academics, many of whom take the organization as representative of LGBT politics in Beirut, thus foregrounding the voices of gay men and ignoring the voices of queer women, and ignoring alternative forms of queer organizing that have moved away from political visibility towards building underground communities and support networks.

During this first phase of my mapping of actors and activists, I sought to meet individually with key leaders in the LGBT and feminist movements that I identified, and to introduce to them my research and feminist background. Beginning from a feminist ethic in research, I was interested in what role I could serve to a hypervisible and over-researched community, and offered both my experience as an ally in queer feminist activism abroad as well as my knowledge in academic debates on gender and sexual non-normativity. These meetings bore very different results, some facilitated my access to further spaces or research encounters (such as my experience with Proud – see chapter 7), some became regular meetings to discuss and theorize the state of sexuality politics in Beirut (notably with activists who have left the groups or were forced out), and some were failed attempts at gaining trust as a researcher or activist. I assessed my role as researcher and discussed ways of involvement and exchange with my interlocutress and their organizations. I offered public talks, led a reading circle, volunteered to teach English, helped with writing material when asked, and co-published with some interlocutors. In practice, I attended all protests organized by the persons and groups I met in the city as an ally, provided logistical and analytical support when requested, and co-organized an independent three-day Trans* film festival with several Trans persons and cis-gender activists in Beirut.

My mapping of actors was later elaborated by a geographical mapping of significant sites of queer and sexually non-normative interactions and politics-making, such as NGOs, community centers, public hangout spots, check-points, detention centers, cruising spots, cafes, and bars. I followed Paul Kutsche's mapping exercises in linking actors to sites, who argues that this kind of mapping in ethnographic fieldwork "describes the relation between sociocultural behavior and physical environment" (1998, 14). More than describing, however, I became interested in how space shapes particular gendered and sexual conduct and politics, and how a "queer habitus" emerges in the imaginary and in practice through the presence – or lack – of certain bodies and body-language (Merabet 2014b). As Sofian Merabet notes, Beirut's "parade of multiplicities is closely tied to a number of queer topographies and bodily performances in a war-torn city, whose various serendipities persist in challenging its inhabitants" (2014b, 519). While Merabet develops the tool of walking as a queer method of research in a car-infested city, which I have used frequently, this was not always the safest method for me as a woman walking alone in city (Merabet 2014a, 2014b).[17] Rather, mapping

[17] Although I did possess the able-bodied privilege of navigating the city on foot for most of my stay in Beirut, I did not possess the male privilege such a method requires. Nevertheless, I applied the method when I could and

the temporal possibilities of gender and sexual non-normativity was the primary queer analytical tool as it helped me expand my conceptions of where queer politics can happen and how non-normativity is (re)produced. Seeing that gender and sexual non-normativity is always specially and momentarily negotiated, it became necessary to draw a 'queer' map that reveals non-normativity's daily conditions of (im)possibility, whether at home, at a bar, or at an NGO. As I argue in chapters 5 and 6, such queer spheres are at the same time shaped by factors such as sectarian geographies, check points and state policing. Thus, 'queer mapping,' that is, the tracing of queer formations across bodies, time, and space, was a crucial complementary research tool to my ethnography. As a tool it helped me understand how a person such as Nancy navigates these terrains, and subsequently helped me develop the concept of hedging; an investment in momentarily contradictory bodily performance in Nancy's case.

In the second phase of my research, I resorted to selective open-ended interviews as a queer method of research. I did so mainly out of circumstances affecting my ability to re-access the field or contact the same informants. Kanafani and Zawaf "use the term 'overbearing' to characterize the weight of seemingly unmoving and non-negotiable circumstances and forces, which materialize on the level of spatial arrangements, violent conflict and dominant discourses, as well as hegemonic political and economic regimes" (2017, 4). Due to the high cost of living in Beirut and my minimal income, I was unable to return to the field for more than one to three months per year after my initial eight months of research in 2013. At the same time, the political conditions were such that during my stay several car bombs interrupted the flow of daily life, while political instability and the unfolding refugee crisis led to the multiplication of checkpoints and securitization, conversely adding more rigidity. But I was not the only person caught between unpredictability in certain aspects of life, and increasing rigidity in others; an odd combination in itself. Many of my interlocutors, namely self-identifying Syrian gay men, Shemales, Ladyboys, trans/Transwomen, and other gender and sexually non-normative persons had applied for

mostly when accompanying my interlocutors. This gave me access to observing how my presence as a cis-gender woman serves as heterosexualizing element when accompanying gay men. For example, I would be susceptible to less harassment when accompanying a cisgender man in the street. At the same time, catching a late night shared taxi – *sarvees*– was easier if I was alone than if I was with a man. The *sarvees* drivers chose which routes they wanted to take, and would frequently reject customers if they didn't feel like driving to a particular neighborhood. They operated on the premise that women do not walk alone in the street and are easy customers, while also sometimes feeling sympathetic for rejecting a female customer at night and opting to take her regardless of their planned route. Therefore, I would be frequently the one negotiating with the *sarvees* drivers at night to increase the chances that a driver would take me and a male companion as customers.

asylum abroad using claims of LGBT vulnerability and were gradually relocating outside of Lebanon. Likewise, several activists also relocated abroad in search for work or education in line with Lebanon's high emigration rates. This rendered my interlocutors' lives quite unpredictable, unstable, and precarious.

The "overbearing" conditions of life and research in Beirut are similar to Kanafani and Zawaf's analysis of the West Asian ethnographer's work as follows: "[the circumstances'] overpowering effect on the ethnographic experience is such that the ethnographer is compelled or constrained to devise unanticipated ways of grappling with research at that moment" (2017, 4). Therefore, to capture 'queer' moments in my interlocutors' lives I had to work with the moments' own 'queer' conditions of constant permeability, unpredictability, and at the same time increasing structural rigidity. Interviewing thus became a method to capture a momentary and misleading fixity, a kind of narrative that will remain stubbornly preserved in a recording, while the narrator's own person and life will continue to be unpredictable and precarious. For an ethnography, these circumstances posed a real challenge in terms of temporal and spatial continuity, requiring me to regain the trust of new (and old) members of the community and work around specific developments (for example, changes in managements and directors, changes in specific political feuds that re-aligned allies differently, changes in my health, and financial precarity, all of which dictated where and if I could meet my interlocutors). Therefore, interviews were a complimentary queer research tool I had to use in order to properly capture specific queer moments and their unfolding.

While interviewing leaders of organizations and activist groups is perceived as an expected activity (NGO heads in particular were no strangers to interviews and were often comforted by the use of a recorder), interviews with underground activists, asylum seekers, and refugees were much more sensitive. I did not resort to interviews unless I had a pre-established rapport and trust with the interlocutors and trusted that they understood my role as a researcher and activist, and consented to the recording.

3.4 Framing Field Sites

What is the field site of gender and sexual non-normativity? I propose that an ethnography on the life of gendered non-normative sexualities and its structures and politics in Beirut, and one which examines the interaction between the 'local' and the 'transnational',

is necessarily a "multisited" one (Marcus 1998). Multisited ethnographies are often employed for research questions that examine multiple factors at work in structuring a phenomenon, a chain or a network of relations that requires physical relocation to multiple sites. It is a research strategy aiming to capture multi-factored relations in the midst of their interaction. Often, "multisited" gives the impression of a clear existent relation between the sites as they join in co-producing a phenomenon, such as for example ethnographies of chain commodity production that have a clear beginning, process, and an end (a product). A queer multi-sited ethnography expands our understanding of what a site is, emphasizing instead the permeability of its boundaries or their shifting. It hence shows us that in a place like Beirut, gender and sexual non-normativity "can often be ephemeral and finite in character" (Merabet 2014b, 518). In addition, a queer multisited ethnography also points to the inexistence of a clear unidirectional process that necessarily produces gender and sexual non-normativity. Rather, it emphasizes the need to look for spatial and temporal moments and factors, the unforeseen and odd combination of which reveals non-normativity's production and operation.

Take the example of the Syrian refugees whom I write about in Chapter 7. They arrived to Beirut from various cities in Syria, usually fleeing conditions of war or direct threats to their lives. Their livelihoods in Lebanon are dependent on and maintained by a network of relief and humanitarian organizations (such as UNHCR, UNICEF, the Red Cross, Caritas, Makhzoumi, HRW, etc) with very specific ideas about what constitutes refugeeness and vulnerability with which they must comply. As they are introduced to the humanitarian machine's ideas about proper homosexual or transsexual victimhood, they attempt to invest in, hedge, mimic, or match its assumptions in order to obtain a chance at leaving Lebanon and resettling abroad. If they want to access other services or simply a community space, then they must also comply with LGBT NGOs' requirement for politically correct language. While revealing their non-normative gendered sexualities to the humanitarian machine, they must simultaneously disguise it in front of the Lebanese state, for alongside their Syrianness it creates them into immediate socio-sexual threats to the imagined Lebanese cis-hetero state (chapter 4).

Studying the politics of their gendered sexualities thus entails theorizing this very multiplicity of sites as interactive locations, as relations, and as movement. Therefore, although I conducted participant observation in a community center and an NGO, my

ethnographic research had to spread to street interactions, unplanned conversations in bars, recorded oral narratives, and temporary moments of sharing intimate memories. Nancy's example makes it clear that her gendered sexuality is always in conversation with a specific physical and sentimental site – the home, the street, HELEM, and her hometown in Syria. If a researcher missed this temporal multiplicity, then she would only offer a very partial story not only of Nancy's own identification but also of the factors structuring the politics of gender and sexual non-normativity in Beirut in general. Therefore, queering a field site, that is, contesting its declared boundaries and looking into odd combinations of factors that produce it and its subjects, is a necessary method for studying gender and sexual non-normativity in Beirut.

At the same time, and as Martin Manalansan (2000) argues about ethnographic studies of Asian American communities, "multi-sited" implies "movement" and its lack, a fact all too relevant for Syrian (and Palestinian) refugees in Beirut whose movement is frequently suspended, limited, interrogated, and punished. He explains: "movement for many of these people involves the careful and sometimes fearful navigation of various locations ascribed and prescribed by hegemonic forces" (ibid, 5). Movement for most persons in Beirut is shaped by real and imagined sectarian and military checkpoints that draw the geography of the city in terms of (im)possible, (un)safe, (un)desirable, (in)accessible routes and neighborhoods. Notions about where one can move and how to move is captured in practices of promenading oneself on areas such as Hamra's sea corniche, choosing to be stuck in traffic in a street full of bars only to *be* part of the scene[18] (Merabet 2014b), hiding one's cropped top and bleached hair under a hoodie just to pass between two streets (see chapter 7), or staying close to the walls of a sidewalk in order to minimize sudden interactions with police cars or harassers. Nancy's negotiation of her movements between various locations reveals the queerness of her environment and renders her choice of identifications to appear as contradictory, when in fact it is a queer strategy of hedging power structures that make her legible as (non)normative. Thus the multisited queer ethnography also pays attention to traveling between the relevant sites, as I attempt to capture in all the following analytical chapters, with a special focus in chapter 5.

[18] A practice of 'to see and be seen' is central to the constituting of night life in Beirut as Merabet (2014a, 2014b) explores.

3.4.1 HELEM and Proud

In 2013, HELEM held public meetings twice a week in their community center just at the beginning of the Hamra neighborhood, on the edge of the Zarif neighborhood where I eventually settled. Upon arrival to Beirut, I visited the center during its public events, and identified myself as both researcher and activist. I quickly befriended several activists and two of the board members, who were aware of my research and have been interested in it. However, I did not join HELEM as a member, and explained to the group that I would rather not have voting rights despite meeting the requirements of membership so as to not influence the organization's decisions. As such, I was initially not invited to General Assemblies (GAs) where some debates and voting on organizational matters took place, and later given special permission to attend one GA, in 2013, when HELEM voted to officially disband as a community-based group and transition to an NGO, and revoked membership and voting privileges for everyone (see chapter 5). My field site here thus comprised of the center's public events, as well as regular conversations with one of the five board members, and interactions with regular meeting-goers. I made sure to participate and support the group in line with feminist ethics; for example, I assisted HELEM in drawing out and writing up personal testimonies for their records, gave guest talks and lectures, and organized a reading circle on academic literature written about HELEM and Lebanon.

As the Syrian refugee crisis magnified, so had the interest in supporting 'queer' Syrian refugees fleeing war and persecution. Under initial support from HELEM (through providing a meeting space) as well as the Arab Foundation for Freedom and Equality (AFE) (through providing institutional support), a new project titled "Whispers" was launched by Noah, a gay Lebanese man with a past in gay tourism (see chapter 7). The project developed into a full organization a few months later, and became my second field site. I interviewed Noah several times over the years since 2013.

I was asked by Noah to offer free English lessons to interested refugees. Thus, all my interactions with the Syrian individuals mentioned in chapter 7 were through my position as a volunteering teacher and as a frequenter of HELEM (the classes initially took place in HELEM's community center until Whispers – later renamed Proud – secured their own center). Further, I was the only cis-gender female in the group. In class, the cis-gender men and trans persons often remarked that no matter how strict I can or should be, I am still a woman and therefore will always have "compassion". This gendered rhetoric was often

invoked in situations where class was disrupted by one or two of the students (a majority of whom were cis-gender men), and others would say this as a way of giving me permission to express frustration or even as a way to incite me to be harsher in my approach. Outside of class time I was frequently approached by some of the students as well as other group-members who wanted to tell me their stories of love with their partners, or wanted to share with me news about whom they are dating, or how lonely they feel. Sometimes I was given unsolicited gossip and bad-mouthing about some of the other group members. Many would show me pictures or videos on their phones, some would tell me about their engagement to women or show me pictures of their fiancées in Syria, few would tell me about their torture under the Syrian regime, or at checkpoints, or the latest bombings at home, and several told me about the harassment and violence they experience on Beirut's streets or at work. Thus, in all these encounters, I was perceived as a sympathetic female authority figure, a familiar stranger who could validate their experiences and give weight to their concerns by listening or offering help. I do not use any of the stories that were told to me in confidence, only ones that I had obtained oral permission from their teller and/or that were further shared in public.[19]

Finally, I was asked about my sexual orientation and specifically whether I was a "lesbian" only once and only by one student in private, and it was never clear whether the men were interested or curios to know. In fact, my cis-gendered female identity and appearance is what was more central in these interactions than any reference to my sexual leanings, which were rendered irrelevant. For example, one of the students wanted to know whether I would be interested in marrying him and having children, without ever confirming whether I was sexually interested in cis-gender men. This is important to mention because it demonstrates that despite Proud's very real attachment to globalized LGBT identities and politics, what made my presence possible and acceptable in an otherwise safe space for non-normative, gay, Trans/trans, and queer persons who were primarily Syrian refugees, was not a shared principle of queer marginalization but a legible gendered and classed performance through which I was read as a 'proper' woman, and a partial insider due to my own family's refugee background and upbringing in the region.

[19] During my time on the field, several of these stories made it to public news outlets as many of the men and Transwomen were repeatedly interviewed. At the time, I deliberately did not read the published stories as I could identify their anonimized tellers. Instead I saved the articles and only read them after I started writing.

3.5 Shortcomings

Any multisited, feminist, and queer ethnography will certainly have its gaps, especially in a shifting field site under overbearing conditions. This dissertation is missing Trans men, queer and lesbian women's voices, an odd gap in itself given my presence as a woman researching gender and sexual non-normativity. Despite building strong personal relations with some members from groups such as Nasawiyya, Meem, and Dammeh, I was unable to perform proper participant observation with their wider networks or in their spaces. By the time I arrived to the field, Meem, a queer women's group established in 2006, had published a strict message on their page stating that the group does not want to be researched by academics, citing their refusal to be made objects of study and observation, which I respected.[20] Almost a year later the group disbanded. Although I frequented the Nasawiyya cafe (a public project and space set up by Meem), my fieldwork notes were mostly informative of the activist and feminist politics of Beirut, which became useful for mapping and contextualizing the broader activist scene in the city. I engaged with Nasawiyya members through a public talk and personal conversations until the space's closure in 2015. I offered to collect the group's history through oral interviews, but the offer was met with disinterest.

As I explored in the introduction, the concepts of cross-bracing and hedging are based on queer and feminist principles, rendering them relevant to lesbian and 'queer' women and Trans men's lives. An ethnographic approach can of course still expand these concepts. For example, it can deepen our understanding of the kinds of cross-bracing structures that such interlocutors navigate, their interplay with patriarchal systems, lesbian women's hedging of their roles, and various hedging of 'queer' visibilities.

Despite the lack of these voices in my dissertation, much is being written today on Trans men, lesbian, and 'queer' women's lives in Beirut, and crucially; by persons and activists who are or were part of the feminist movement and queer groups and whom I cite (Meem 2009; Kaedbey 2014; Chaer 2016). The queer feminist movement is also significantly marked by a turn towards the academic. Several of the leading activists who began with HELEM have moved to pursue master and doctoral degrees abroad or in the newly established Gender Studies programs in Beirut,[21] run research projects and trainings, and/or

[20] Meem's website on which the text was published is no longer active or available.
[21] An MA program in Gender Studies in the Lebanese American University (LAU) and a minor in Gender Studies in the American University of Beirut (AUB) were recently launched.

issue publications. Beirut has been marked by a small academic and publishing boom on issues of gender and sexuality, including addressing the crucial question of language and translating the sexual (Mourad 2013). This boom includes countless small, independent, or group publications such as the peer reviewed academic journal that exclusively focuses on gender and sexuality titled *Kohl*, among others. As such, the lack of these voices in my dissertation should not at all be interpreted as a form of lesbian invisibility or the lack of Transmen and 'queer' women's representation in Beirut. On the contrary, it should be celebrated as a movement's success in sticking to the feminist and queer practice of 'nothing about us without us,' which encourages community knowledge production.

3.6 A note on anonymity

By the time I was finalizing the writing of this dissertation (2019), many relations among the activists had shifted significantly on the field. In 2014, rumors spread of several cases of sexual harassment, coercion, and exploitation of a number of Syrian refugees by a head of one of the LGBT NGOs. The allegations became quite serious and were investigated secretly and independently by the Dutch embassy (a donor) in 2015, as well as by the UNHCR where many of the refugees claiming harassment were registered. The results of the investigations were not shared publicly, and the UNHCR and the Dutch embassy chose to keep the matter private, only sharing it with other Western donors. Although the cases were never confirmed publicly, funding was eventually pulled from the organization involved. The bitterness over these accusations caused the accused to allegedly (by their own assertion) file a defamation case against other NGO heads and activists, claiming the sexual exploitation allegations were purposefully fabricated in order to take away funding from their organization. Despite following these allegations, interviewing all sides multiple times (with the exception of the refugees whose identities were kept anonymous), I could not access precise information neither on the allegations of sexual exploitation nor on the defamation case. In 2016 however, a close interlocutor was called into the police station for charges of defamation filed by the accused person. This was the first time that a state entity – and specifically the Ras Beirut station with its Hbeich detention center that are well known among the activist community – was instrumentalized by one member of the activist LGBT community against another. This was a dangerous precedent. After consulting several activists as well as academics and mentors, I decided to anonymize the names of the persons and organizations involved, and not delve into this issue analytically in this dissertation. The

testimonies remain anonymous, but the allegations are public and known to the community members.

With the exception of quotes taken from formal interviews, all names have been altered and anonymized in this dissertation. If the interlocutor did not request anonymity, I respected their request unless the story they are mentioned in involves others and could reveal their identities or could place them or others at risk (of outing or of detention for example). Similarly, some location names such as bars and rooftop parties were also altered, partly at the request of some interviewed bar owners, and partly to protect the bar goers who have little to no say in the political relations between the bar owners as I explore in chapter 6. Only when citing a published story about a bar, I use the location's real name as mentioned publicly (such as Bardo and Ghost). Otherwise I anonymize queer sites to the extent it is possible.

3.7 Summary

I began this chapter by answering the question of how can we study gender and sexual non-normativity in Beirut, and proposed doing so with a feminist and queer ethnographic method. Through the examples of Nancy and Jiji I demonstrated the central function of my feminist queer ethnographic lens in capturing the subtle ways in which Nancy and Jiji hedge their identities, bodies, and non-normative selves among cross-braced structures and in spaces of power. This dual function is at the heart of my dissertation's purpose and approach, as I argue in line with post-structuralist approaches and with Queer Theory that I can centralize my interlocutors and their lives, and *at the same time* understand the cross-braced structures and conditions of power that produce them as non-normative. In doing so, I follow in the footsteps of regional feminist ethnographers who saw the potentiality of an ethnographic method to go beyond its links to colonial methods of research (Abu-Lughod 1989) as well as path-breaking queer ethnographies of Beirut (Merabet 2014a). I also follow in the footsteps of novel experiments in conducting ethnographies in Lebanon and West Asia as Arab and regional women researchers under "overbearing' conditions" (Kanafani and Sawaf 2017). Therefore, I align myself with "making a case for the continuing value of a thoroughly localized ethnography as necessary for tracking systems of power and structures of inequality and perhaps even for intervening in them" (Abu-Lughod 2000, 266).

"The huge presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon poses an existential threat to the country."

- *Gebran Bassil, Lebanese Foreign Minister, 2013*

"There are societies abroad that were ruined by homosexuality, and now they are exporting it to Lebanon and to the Arab and Islamic world. They want to legalize same-sex marriage in the parliament. […] Some people say: 'But this is about freedom, freedom of choice. What's the problem?' No, this is a big problem […] Anyone who cares about his society and about the purity of humanity and mankind must stand against these kinds of projects."

- *Hassan Nasrallah, Hizbullah Secretary-General, 2017*

"There is a difference between giving you a right and turning a blind eye [to what you do]. Just like you are saying 'I am here and I exist,' the state also tells you 'I am here and I exist.'"

- *Jahd, interlocutor, 2017*

Chapter 4: Gender and Sexual Non-Normativity and the State's Hedging of Morality

In this chapter, I look at how gender and sexual non-normativity is articulated in the Lebanese state's laws, official discourses, as well as on-the-ground policing practices. I show that in a moment of Syrian refugee influx, anxiety over social and political instability becomes articulated through anxiety over gender and sexual non-normativity. Various local groups make claims in relation to sexual non-normativity as a moral vice or a human right, supporting their stances through the use of transnational ideas and discourses which – in their view – support or threaten Lebanon's progress and stability. Multiple positionalities become articulated alongside a cross-braced binary structure in which one side represents tradition, religion/sectarianism, and morality, and the other represents secular statism and human rights. The Lebanese state finds itself caught in between contradictory roles: the outlawing of immoral sexual acts or the protection of sexual diversity? The guaranteeing of sectarian pluralism or the defending of secularism? I argue that through its hedging of when and who to regulate and police, the state not only redefines gender and sexual non-normativity by weaving it with ideas about national security, but also attempts to reinforce its rule and monopoly over violence, thus reproducing its own power and hegemony in the process. By looking at state regulatory legal tools like the Penal Code and state disciplinary organs, such as the Internal Security Forces (ISF) and their practices of arrest and detention, as well as at the case of the 2017 and 2018 Beirut Pride events, I reveal both the falseness and necessity of a binary conception of gender sexual non-normativity (as either acceptable or police-able) for

the Lebanese state's reproduction of power. This conception challenges Western narratives of unidirectional state progress towards democracy and modernity, and rather reveals a state apparatus that engages in what appear to be contradictory multi-directional practices in order to uphold its own claim to power.

4.1 Context

4.1.1 We are in Crisis

As I began my fieldwork in 2013, the Syrian refugee crisis was at its height in Lebanon. While multiple discourses circulated about the crisis and its meanings, one particularly dominant narrative focused on articulating the economic, social, and security 'price' of hosting Syrian refugees, summarized as an "existential threat to the country" by Lebanon's Foreign Minister and leader of the Christian Free Patriotic Movement Gebran Bassil in the quote at the beginning of the chapter (Sen 2014). In a meeting with European and Arab foreign ministers in June 2014, Bassil framed the refugee crisis as a dual economic and security threat to Lebanon, explicitly stating: "Lebanon's stability is not only threatened, its existence is at stake, as more than 50 percent of its population is comprised of foreigners, namely Syrians and Palestinians" (The Daily Star 2014). It is telling that Bassil lumped Syrians and Palestinians together into the category of "foreigner," effectively co-relating two refugee populations as invaders, despite the fact that Palestinians have resided in refugee camps in Lebanon since the first wave of Palestinian expulsion in 1948 due to the establishment of the Israeli state on Palestinian land. In these kinds of statements, Bassil also reproduces fears over the destabilizing of fragile sectarian balance and its effects on outnumbered groups, such as Lebanon's Maronite Christians; his constituency.

Such statements also use economic arguments to conceptualize the refugee crisis as a threat to security and stability, while concomitantly justifying a larger social anxiety about the refugees' presence and, hence, also justifying state efforts to contain it. Mohammed Ali Nayel and Bassam Chit argue that various political forces and their supporting media outlets have been responsible for fashioning xenophobic and classist "discourses of blame" that use the Syrian refugee crisis as a justification for the shortcomings of the Lebanese government towards Lebanese citizens (2013). For example, blaming economic stagnation and poverty in the northern Lebanese border district of Akkar on the high cost of hosting refugees disregards the fact that the Lebanese state neglected the region for decades causing poverty to rise

among more than half of its population (ibid). Likewise, complaints about high numbers of Syrians riding motorcycles instead of driving cars in the streets of Beirut overshadows the reality of a nearly non-existent public transportation system, as well as the fact that poor Lebanese citizens also use motorcycles to move around the city instead of cars (ibid). By reframing the conditions of life in Lebanon not only as novel changes caused by the Syrian influx, but also as a threat to an imagined middle-class "Lebanese way of life," sectarian leaders and media outlets thus divert attention from long-term structural conditions and reframe them as threatening outcomes of Syrian refugees' presence (ibid).

The discourse of existential, social and economic threat is also clearly gendered. In another one of his tweets, Foreign Minister Bassil claimed that Lebanese hospitals were delivering 80 Syrian newborns for every 40 Lebanese newborns (Lebanon24 2014). Such statements were accompanied by media stories referring to an alleged rise in birth rates of Syrian women in refugee camps. The public visibility of Syrian women post-2011, with many occupying shaded spaces on pavements, overpasses, and bridges with their children, but also visiting hospitals, government offices and NGOs, caused a panic over possible changes in demography. While presented as victims of war in most discourses, Syrian women were often only conceptualized as having agency when it came to their reproductive sexuality, and hence, they were drawn as key threats to the demographic – and sectarian – 'balance' in Lebanon.

Importantly, ideas about sexuality, sexual violence, and sexual non-normativity play a central role in the fashioning of these state and media discourses of crisis and threat. With anxieties over the increasing visibility of Syrians' presence in Lebanon, new panics around men's sexualities emerged. Syrian men began to be portrayed as hypersexual, aggressive, rapists who abuse the good will of the Lebanese people and disrupt an imagined Lebanese heterosexual order (Qubaia and Gagne 2015). Stories of alleged rapes, sexual assault and harassment increasingly appeared in popular Lebanese news outlets, causing several violent evictions of Syrians from refugee camps by angry Lebanese locals and with the support of the Lebanese armed forces, only for many of the stories to be later dispelled as rumors (ibid).

Additionally, the fake narrative around Syrian men raping Lebanese women relies on a common national gendered and highly sexualized script in which Lebanese women are portrayed as victims whose rape (only by Syrian men) represents an attack on Lebanese territory, signaling male and national 'ownership' of female sexuality (Nagel 1998; Hayden

2000; Cockburn 2010). Anxiety over Syrian refugees' presence is linked to past Syrian military and state violence. Syria occupied Lebanon during the Civil War in 1976, fought against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and its forces only left after the assassination of then Sunni Prime Minister Rafic Al-Hariri in 2005 and the ensuing Cedar Revolution. Syria continues to have a major influence on local and regional politics today, including through its mutually beneficial relationship with Shi'a Hezbollah; the latter of which has fought in the ongoing Syrian war on the Assad regime's side. The facile conflation of Syrian refugees with the history of their violent state and soldiers allows rape to be articulated as a national issue. Therefore, the national dimension in this scripted moral/sex panic "legitimate[s] particular ways of thinking and talking about sex in public" (Irvine 2008, 252). Here, outrage about rape and sexual assault is legitimated insofar as the rapist is a Syrian man and the victim is a Lebanese woman, which is then used to redraw boundaries between the two nation-states. This stands in stark contrast to Lebanese feminist efforts to bring marital rape in Lebanon to national attention, including efforts to lobby for new legislation that would punish domestic violence (Rizk and Makarem 2015). Their efforts, though successful in inciting public debate, have often been met with sarcastic attitudes from parliamentarians, direct opposition from religious groups, and were certainly not considered a national priority meriting state intervention.

That such narratives were proliferating at a particular political moment of refugee influx effectively collapsed all Syrian men into a particular form of timeless gendered sexual threat embodied in any single Syrian man, echoing familiar scripts of racialized, classed, and sectarian discrimination. Tying the discourses of blame, gendered demographic anxiety, alleged sexual violation, and existential threat together, Foreign Minister Bassil warned: "this situation cannot last without really exploding" (The Daily Star 2014). It is clear, then, that the discriminative discourse on the Syrian refugees bluntly frames them as a primary security threat – akin to the car bomb – that undermines the country's alleged economic, social, sexual, and demographic/sectarian stability.

Once constructed as a threat, efforts to curtail the threat ensue and a debate over who has the right to exercise violence emerges. As a post-colonial modern nation-state in the age of neoliberalism, the Lebanese state, together with its police apparatus, claims "the right to punish" (Foucault 1975). However, in a state organized through allocating various powers to sectarian groups, and in which armed sectarian groups still exist, this right is not absolute.

The conundrum over who has the right to legitimately exercise violence is best captured in the words of the mayor of Mezyara, a Christian town in the south of Lebanon in which a Syrian man admitted to the brutal rape and murder of a Christian Lebanese woman in 2017. The town reacted by immediately expelling all of its Syrian residents and, in a televised interview, Mezyara's mayor stated: "we support the state in taking the appropriate measure; this is not a problem unique to Mezyara, but a problem in all of Lebanon. If the state does not take the right decision, the people will take the right decision. And I cannot stop the people" (AlHadath 2017).

Calling on the state to act, and to do so violently, is a dynamic that will reoccur in this chapter. When reviewing the case of the two Beirut Prides, I will be arguing that it is through this call on the state and the decision to heed the call or not (a process of hedging), that the state and its organs reproduce themselves and their legitimacy. Gender and sexual non-normativity thus emerge as central terrains through which the state reproduces itself. The state's organs continuously engage in (re)defining gender and sexual non-normativity using legal discourse and social ideas about classed morality. As I demonstrate in the next sections, this interplay between call and response is continuous, with the state constantly hedging with regard to when it will intervene with violence and when not, making its decisions appear as multi-directional contradictions and not unidirectional democratic progress. Theorizing the Lebanese state apparatus as a hedging actor then complicates our understanding of state function and reproduction of power and legitimacy.

4.1.2 New Security Script

Given the above social, economic, political, and demographic/sectarian anxieties articulated around the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, it is no surprise that state and security organs responses have employed selective discriminatory and divisive policies towards the Syrian refugees, and have increased their policing of them. This includes, for example, introducing a ban on air travel and entry of any Palestinian-Syrian refugees into Lebanon in 2014, severe restrictions on employment for Syrians in 2015, deportations, and even the suspension of residencies for some foreign staff of humanitarian NGOs directly working with Syrians in 2018 to stall service provision and push Syrians to leave.[22] Further, following the kidnapping of Lebanese military personnel by Syrian anti-regime forces in

[22] Based on a post-fieldwork interview with an interlocutor working for a major humanitarian organization in Lebanon.

Arsal, a town bordering Syria, the Lebanese military and political authorities sanctioned the razing of Syrian refugee camps in Arsal and the forceful deportation of the camps' inhabitants back to Syria, where they were denied entry by the regime. As the Assad regime began to reestablish its control in Syria in 2018, Lebanese state-organized deportations increased. Other local-level governance measures in Lebanon have included curfews for Syrians refugees in a number of Lebanese municipalities, despite a statement from the Minister of Interior describing them as unlawful. In many locations, ad-hoc neighborhood mobs have attacked 'suspicious men' in their effort to reinforce local curfews against Syrians.

Faced with economic strain as well as increasing car bombs and infiltration of armed anti-Syrian-regime fighters from the Syrian border, the Lebanese government appealed to foreign countries for various amounts of securitization assistance funding. The U.S., U.K., Italy, and France, among others, promised billions of dollars in funds directed predominately towards the Lebanese military (Lebanese Armed Forces – LAF), but also towards the Internal Security Forces (ISF). Saudi Arabia, a close ally of Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri and his Future Movement Party, promised a one billion dollar donation to both LAF and ISF in 2013 as part of a larger three billion dollar aid-package, only to withdraw it later, after the Lebanese government's "failure to condemn attacks on Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran" (Reuters 2016). Lebanon allegedly did not condemn these attacks due to pressure from Hezbollah, a Shi'i political party and a close ally of Iran (ibid). Such foreign security assistance has not only been used to fund the training of LAF, but has also been used to build infrastructure, such as border towers, and to purchase various kinds of armor and military vehicles. Significantly, parts of these funds were used to improve the image of the ISF and other domestic policing bodies in local neighborhoods, as well as to support the state's bureaucratic bodies, such as the General Security (GS) service, which oversees legal residencies.

The ISF frequently install abrupt checkpoints and conducts various arrests on the basis of suspicious or immoral behavior, which affects the policing of gender and sexual non-normativity. For example, the Hbeich police station and detention center in the Hamra neighborhood in Beirut, notorious among feminists and sexuality-rights activists for detaining and processing all morality-based cases (violations of the Penal Code), was rebranded as Ras-Beirut station. It not only got a new façade, but also established various community outreach activities like football days with police and bikes patrols along the public corniche area

(Qubaia and Saleh 2015). This face lift used a new "community policing" approach that normalized the increased presence of police officers and checkpoints in Hamra's streets and facilitated the increased targeting of persons seen as socially and politically threatening (ibid).

In what follows, I take a closer look at the legal and policing tools that the state apparatus employs in defining, regulating, and punishing gender and sexual (non)-normativity. I do so to demonstrate that gender and sexual non-normativity is an integral field of the state's reproduction of its own power and control. For the purposes of this chapter, I define the state (or the state apparatus) as the entity overseeing sectarian Personal Status Law, implementing the Penal Code, and as an entity that encompasses policing organs such as the Internal Security Forces (ISF), the Lebanese military (Lebanese Armed Forces – LAF), and the General Security (GS) office that oversee legal residencies. Following Maya Mikdashi's work on "sextarianism" (2018), I first look at how the Lebanese state operates with a specific kind of middle-class marital and heteronormative ordering of citizens, regulating them by overseeing sectarian Personal Status Law. I then turn to analyzing how the state defines gender and sexual non-normativity in a broad spectrum of non-heterosexual and non-marital acts, orientations, and persons using legal tools like the Penal Code. Through analyzing what appear as contradictory policies that do not neatly align on the transnational heterosexuality-homosexuality binary, I argue that the state is engaged in practices of hedging in order to maintain legitimacy and power. The state specifically hedges policies on gender and sexual non-normativity such as sex work (as either immoral or legitimate productive economic activity), homosexuality (as an immoral act, deviant orientation, deviant person, or part of a natural order and diversity), and Beirut Pride (banning or allowing the event to take place).

4.2 From Regulation to Punishment: Sextarianism and the State

4.2.1 Creating a 'Hetero'-sextarian State

In tracing the shifts in conceptions of power in modern Europe from the 19th century onward, Michel Foucault (1978) argued that sexuality became a critical site of intervention about which the legal, medical, and psychological establishments create knowledge, which they use to categorize and discipline populations. Over time, sexuality became associated with ideas about health, self-control, morals, and criminality. As such, it was intimately tied

to state institutions that regulated these domains and established normative acceptable behaviors. For Foucault, the interaction between the governing sovereign and various populations was co-constitutive; citizens also self-disciplined and were not mere recipients of regulation. Taking up Foucault's analysis, Margot Canaday (2009) argues that the process of defining perversion specifically as homosexuality, and particularly as a homosexual identity, came about in the middle of the 20th century in the US state formation process. As state building progressed, it was federal institutions that began excluding new migrants from the so-called New World on the basis of "suspected of sexual perversion" as well as racial difference (ibid, 21). Significantly, Canaday shows that "the process of state-building itself drew the regulatory eye to sexual/gender deviance" and made (homo)sexuality a crucial site for organizing citizenship in the new nation state (ibid, 13).

As I have explored in my theoretical chapter, defining the normative and the non-normative were at the heart of Europe's colonization of West Asia and elsewhere (Massad 2007; Thomas 2007). Colonizers worked systemically to erase gender diversity and invest in a binary gendered conception, and used gender and sexual deviance as reasons for justifying their violence (Lugones 2008). While it is beyond my ability to trace the birth of the gender binary in Lebanon, what can be argued is that becoming an independent nation state meant inheriting and rearticulating several colonial practices and projects as well as redefining gender relations in society using national myths and citizenship laws built upon a gender binary that privileges men and marginalizes women (Joseph 1999; Thompson 2000; Mikdashi 2018).

Both Lebanon's national myth and citizenship laws depend on sanctioning heterosexual marital relations as foundational to modern society's regulation. Suad Joseph has argued that privileging the conjugal relationship as the main building block of citizenship is an inadequate approach for theorizing state-making and citizenship in Lebanon (Joseph 1999, 2000). This is because, firstly, Lebanon's national myth is based on the principle of sectarian pluralism, which reinvents the state as the secular guardian of religious diversity and enables it to shore up religious arguments supporting discriminative citizenship for women and others (ibid). Secularism and sectarianism are co-dependently entangled in a cross-brace. As I explore below, in the state's effort to appear secular, it allocates the regulation of Personal Status Law to each sect separately, effectively creating a multiplicity of gender and sexually normative and non-normative relations, and hence, multiple forms of

the conjugal relationship. Second, Joseph argues that "extended kin relationships," rather than only conjugal ones, are foundational to definitions of citizenship in Lebanon, as well as membership in sectarian communities (2000). In fact, she claims that "natal relationships often have been seen to compete with husband/wife relationships" in Lebanon in terms of being seen as more powerful and determining of social relations (Joseph 2000, 117). This dynamic means that in order to understand state-making in Lebanon from a gender and sexuality perspective, we cannot look at heterosexual marital relations in isolation from their social context.

Although Joseph does not explicitly problematize the role that heterosexuality has in structuring conjugal and kin relations in Lebanon, her theorizing still helps us see that we would need to complicate the term 'heterosexuality' itself if we are to show how the state employs it as a structuring system. Framing the state as engaging in heterosexualizing does not necessarily capture the diverse marital and sexual practices covered by Personal Status Law in Lebanon's sectarian system. In order to render the term legible and useful for the Lebanese context, heterosexuality needs to be de-coupled from its exclusive reliance on marital relations and expanded to include practices such as polygamy, and an explicit differentiation between marital (lawful) and non-marital (unlawful) sexual relations. In line with my conceptual kit, and building on Foucault as well as Queer Theory, it is therefore more suitable to begin analyzing the role of the sexual in state-building and in institutions by using the broader concepts of normative and non-normative (see introduction and theory chapter). How do we then understand the Lebanese state as a 'heterosexual' state – meaning, one that is engaging in producing a specific type of gender and sexual normativity – while also accounting for family and sect as equally important organizing blocks?

Maya Mikdashi has shown that the regulation of permissible and normative sexual practices falls into a larger system of regulating "sex"[23] and "sect" categories as part of reproducing state sovereignty in Lebanon (2018). The system of "sextarianism," as Mikdashi terms it, depends on defining citizens as belonging to a particular sex category as well as a particular sect, both of which co-determine the gendered sectarian sets of Personal Status Laws applicable to various citizens (ibid). In this sense, as Mikdashi claims, "sex" and "sect" cannot be understood as two separate regimes, but they are rather fused together to create the principle social and political system that the state uses in the everyday. In a secular state with

[23] In using sex instead of gender, Mikdashi "follows the terminology and categories used by the Lebanese state" (2018, 3).

18 officially recognized religious sects, there are 15 different sets of Personal Status Laws that regulate marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody (Mikdashi 2014). Citizens can migrate with surprising ease between these various statuses by converting from one sect to another in order to obtain a certain advantage, but they cannot migrate as easily from one sex to another. For example, in order to initiate divorce, a Christian who cannot divorce under Maronite Christian Personal Status Laws, might consider converting to Shi'ism, which does permit divorce (though only with the approval of the husband) (ibid). Likewise, it is more advantageous to convert to Shi'ism from Sunnism if one wants to pass property to one's daughters, as Sunni Personal Status Laws allocate only a small percentage of inheritance to daughters (ibid).

Mikdashi argues that in order to understand the functionality of the sectarian system in the daily lives of Lebanese citizens, we must look at how "citizens act within this system in order to subvert the sociopolitical landscape and, to put it crudely, make it work for them" (2014, 86). In other words, we must look at how citizens *hedge* the sectarian system to their benefit. While citizens hedge the various sectarian Personal Status Laws, what benefit does the state gain from such an active migration across and between these regulatory categories? For Mikdashi, the state gains power and sovereignty through its continuous production and management of the various articulations of sextarian difference (2014, 2018). The process ensures that the state can claim to be secular and progressive (hence uphold its national myth), when, in fact, it is the maintaining of sextarian difference that is vital for its claim to power (ibid). In other words, the state's hedging is central to reproducing the myth of an impartial state whose declared mission is to protect religious multiplicity and diversity.[24]

Further, although there is explicit acknowledgment that migrating between sects and Personal Status Laws is acceptable and a legal right, transiting from one sex to another, in contrast, though permissible under Lebanese law, is neither as easy nor done as frequently. As Mikdashi points out, changing one's legal sex must necessarily be accompanied by evidence from one's environment that supports the claim that one is living a different gender (2014). For sectarian/religious conversion, meanwhile, it has not been necessary to provide proof of true faith in order to switch between categories within the spectrum of Personal Status Laws (ibid). In addition, an official change of sex often requires several medical reports (one from a psychologist and another from a court-assigned doctor) and sometimes

[24] Yet, while this may be true for protecting the sectarian system of relations, it is inaccurate to argue that the state is interested in protecting the right to sex re-assignment in the name of secular diversity.

may require the completion of sex-reassignment surgery (Transfocus 2014). These requirements, along with the significant legal fees associated with changing sex-gender categories in Lebanon, mean that those who successfully transition between these categories are likely to be middle or upper class individuals who can afford such costs (ibid). This is to say that, although there are parallels between how the Lebanese state views sect and personal status versus sex and gender, migration between official sex categories has much stricter requirements than changing one's sect. It appears, then, that a gendered sex-binary of female/male becomes as a necessary stabilizer for running a multi-sectarian but secular state with diverse applications of (hetero)normativity.

While the state and its sectarian institutions engage in regulating gender and sexual normativity in Lebanon, they also engage in defining non-normativity and punishments for failing to fit within established normative frameworks. More specifically, the state uses the Penal Code to create categories of gender and sexual non-normativity for the purpose of punishing those whom it scripts as falling within these categories, as opposed to only regulating sex and sect through Personal Status Laws. The Penal Code is unified and applies to everyone regardless of sectarian or personal status, in contrast to the 15 different sets of Personal Status Laws governing 18 sects. Hence, in true 'secular' statist spirit, the Penal Code actually claims to erase sectarian difference in favor of generalizing non-normative gender and sexual acts as immoral and hence illegal. In this sense, the state establishes a form of morality above sect, a legitimate terrain for violent state intervention through the Penal Code.

Given that normativity is a site of *regulation* under sextarian logic, and that non-normativity is cast as a particular site of *punishment* for the 'secular' state, I move to examine how the state apparatus uses this duality to hedge morality itself. In the next two sections, I take up two sets of laws that demonstrate how the state apparatus constantly works to (re)define and punish gender and sexual non-normativity. Non-normativity here includes acts and behaviors that can be aligned alongside *both* transnational definitions of 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' at the same time (even when not explicitly mentioned as such) and are punishable under Lebanon's Penal Code. In other words, gender and sexual non-normativity can include what Western interpretive frameworks see as heterosexual normativity. Specifically, in the next section I show how women's sex work can be both permissible and punishable, and I demonstrate how conceptions of 'homosexuality' can cast both acts and

people as unrespectable. In reading these two practices as cross-braced, I not only untangle the homo-hetero binary, but I also argue that the state deliberately invests in contradictory definitions of non-normativity in order to reproduce its own power through its policing.

4.3 The Penal Code: Legal and Illegal Sexual Non-Normativity, and Hedging Morality

4.3.1 Selling Sex

The Lebanese Penal Code devotes attention to and assigns punishment for practices such as heterosexual cohabitation (privately living with a non-family member of the opposite sex without marriage), adultery and non-marital intercourse (Republic of Lebanon 1943).[25] These are defined as improper acts, mostly falling under a section of the code on "incitement to debauchery and assault on morals and public decency" (ibid). They are listed alongside articles in the Penal Code outlining the definition of and punishment for acts of violence, such as rape and abuse. In this sense, the state's definition of sexual non-normativity expands to several heterosexual acts and practices. Reading the Penal Code's articles together reaffirms my above analysis, that only a specific form of sexual practice is permitted; that which is sanctioned by a formal (sectarian) marital relationship between a man and a woman, in which consent for sex is not a prerequisite and, hence, includes marital rape.[26]

Sex work – whether the selling of sex, financially benefiting from others' sex work, encouraging it, or the crime of coercing those under 21 to practice it – are all referred to as debauchery and are punishable by fines and incarceration anywhere from three months to three years (ibid). The only legal kind of sex work is that which is organized by the state. The Lebanese state maintains a special labor migration and residence category called the "Artiste" visa, under which foreign women can enter Lebanon for formal labor in so-called "super nightclubs" as performers. According to Camila Pastor De Maria Campos, the "Artiste" legal category was formalized by French colonizers in the Mandate period (1921-1946), who were interested in imposing their rule through regulating sexual conduct (2017). In doing so, they placed morality and respectability on the side of French colonizers and invented moral

[25] Punishments for cohabitation and non-marital intercourse are applied less frequently.

[26] Heterosexual marriage is considered a basis for long-term sexual consent under Lebanese law, hence, formalizing men's control over women's bodies and erasing the possibility of sexual violence and rape in marriage. Until 2016, the law also permitted the suspension of punishment for a male rapist if he married the victim of rape. The article was scrapped after successful campaigns from feminist and women's groups in Lebanon.

decadence locally among the colonized population in Mandate Syria and Lebnaon. During this period the "Artiste" category was used, on the one hand, to differentiate between local women dancers who sometimes sold sex and were subsequently labeled as "prostitutes" and subjected to extensive medical check-ups, and on the other hand, respectable foreign women from Europe who also engaged in performance and sex work, but could enjoy less intervention from state security organs due to their perceived closeness to the French colonizers (ibid). Campos argues the distinction between local prostitutes and foreign artistes not only created a moral and racial hierarchy between mobile working women in the region, but it also shaped the definitions of respectability in relation to women's mobility and sexuality (ibid). Through defining these working women's bodies as local (unrespectable prostitute) or foreign (respectable "Artiste" performer), these distinctions contributed to defining the borders of the Mandate territory itself as the location of local moral decay in need of foreign French regulation (Ibid).

Selling sex was thus not only tolerated, but also productive, and became permissible through a "Prostitution Law" in 1931 that defined the various places where the selling of sex could occur. This law was kept even after Lebanon declared its independence in 1943 (and after the French left Lebanon in 1946), until the brink of civil war in the 1970s, when the government froze the licensing for new "super nightclubs" where "Artistes" worked, effectively criminalizing all sex work as prostitution (Abi Samra 2018). Today, the selling of sex as an "Artiste" in exchange for money is actually prohibited under the same law that regulates an "Artiste's" legal stay, while all other forms of sex work are also prohibited as "secret prostitution" (ibid).

However, in reality, the "Artiste" category is used by the state to de-facto legalize one form of sex-selling (or, in my terminology, one form of sexual non-normativity), as Abi Samra explains:

> The 'Artiste' visa scheme requires 'Artistes' to live in licensed hotels, and denies them the freedom of movement before 1 pm and after 8 pm. At 10 pm, a bus takes them to the establishment where they work until 5 am, and they are not permitted to have any days off. Medical tests must be repeated every 3 months. […] The licensed establishments have an 'arrangement' allowing the client to buy sex from the 'Artiste': when he buys three drinks (between 60 and 80$) to the woman at the super nightclub, the 'Artiste' is allowed to have sex with him the next day. The client takes her out from the hotel at 1 pm and brings her back at 8 pm; which delineates the period during which she is allowed to leave the hotel, as specified by General Security. Whenever the

> women 'Artistes' are caught while engaging in a sexual intercourse, the police have the legal right to arrest them; yet, the super nightclub owner cannot be held accountable since sex occurred outside its premises and during the free time of the 'Artistes'. It is also important to point out that this 'system' is facilitated by General Security, which specifies that the 'Artiste' is allowed to leave the hotel solely with a super nightclub client, who registers his name, phone number, and car license plate number when leaving with the 'Artiste' (Abi Samra 2018, 22–23).

This process reveals that the state, through its General Security arm, is investing in contradictory policies, or in other words, that it is hedging morality itself. On the one hand, the Lebanese state outlaws all forms of sex work as prostitution in its Penal Code, citing it as an offense to public morality (Qubaia and Saleh 2015).[27] On the other hand, as Abi Samra (2018) explains, it has created a form of tolerated sex work, but without legal liability for the state itself – the blame and punishment for sex work still always falls on the worker. Therefore, although selling sex is illegal under the law, the state's General Security has ensured that, in practice, a form of state-sponsored sex work – which frequently "functions as a state-facilitated sex trafficking system" given the restrictions on movements and the disregard for the women's own choice in performing or rejecting the work (Abi Samra 2018, 15) – exists instead. Through *simultaneously* investing in both outlawing "prostitution" and upholding a system of state-sponsored sex work in its place, I am arguing that Lebanon's General Security office accomplishes two things as an arm of the state. First, it maintains its role as defender of public morality, while second, it strengthens the state's authority over defining sexual non-normativity and the policing of gender and sexual non-normativity at large.

4.3.2 Ambiguous Homosexuality: Defining Non-normativity

Gender and sexual non-normativity under the Lebanese Penal Code also includes several articles that have been used to police, outlaw, and punish same-sex acts, as well as persons who may identify as Shemale and/or trans. For example, a section on "offences against morals and public decency" prohibits public cross-dressing under the pretense of breaching women's segregated spaces (Republic of Lebanon 1943). However, as I have argued with Ahmad Saleh elsewhere (2015), the article is used to accuse Shemales and trans

[27] "Articles 523, 524, 526, and 528 criminalize the solicitation of others for sex. Sex workers are targeted through these articles as solicitors of selling sex, while article 527 criminalizes facilitators and the employers of sex workers" (Qubaia and Saleh 2015).

persons of being disguised men who attempt to access women's spaces. Another part of the Penal Code punishes impersonation under the forgery section. Some Shemales, Ladyboys, and trans persons use the ID card of a relative (brother, sister, cousin) who they resemble in order to pass as the correct gender and not get arrested for indecency. By doing so, they risk being accused of stealing an identity and falsely impersonating someone (ibid).

Although all of these Penal Code articles (and many more) are part of the web of selective laws applied to gender and sexually non-normative persons, Article 534, specifically, has received much attention and lobbying from activist groups and has featured in virtually all media reports published on LGBT issues in Lebanon. The Article states that "any penetration contrary to nature shall be punishable by up to a year in prison" (Republic of Lebanon 1943). For over a decade, LGBT activist groups in Lebanon, such as HELEM, the Arab Foundation for Equality, Proud, and the lawyer group Legal Agenda, have openly campaigned against Article 534, arguing that it is a homophobic law used specifically to target men who have sex with men. In practice, it is used to target men who have sex with men as well as trans persons and Shemales who have sex with cis-gender men, among others. HELEM, in particular, views the annulment or modification of Article 534 as a top priority for LGBT rights in Lebanon and considers this endeavor a central part of its organizational mission.

This position has been questioned by some lesbian and queer feminist activists in Lebanon, who argue that campaigning only against Article 534 as the main homophobic law ignores the larger structures of policing gender and sexual non-normativity in the country. Only cancelling Article 534, they contend, will do little to alleviate other forms of state intervention and policing of gender and sexual non-normativity embedded in the Penal Code. In their view, fighting against Article 534 represents a limited, short-term strategy. In addition, they argue, lobbying for the rephrasing of the article instead of its annulment risks further expanding the definition of sexual non-normativity from an ambiguous act (penetration contrary to nature) to actual persons or types of relationships between persons (homosexual men or same-sex relations).[28]

In recent years, HELEM has cooperated with lawyers to offer legal argumentation against applying this article to same-sex sexual practices and persons, and has lobbied judges to use relevant legal language. Their main legal intervention has been based on redefining

[28] Based on informal conversations as well as formal interviews with several women activists.

same-sex desires as part of nature and not contrary to it, as well as appealing to the right to personal liberties under various international treaties signed by the Lebanese state. A total of four Article 534 cases were thus far dismissed by independent judges, who reinterpreted the legal clause as discriminatory or as inapplicable to the accused. In a 2017 ruling, Judge Rabih Maalouf acquitted nine people arrested in 2015 who were charged with violating Article 534, although he still charged two of them with "secret prostitution" under Article 523 and, in one case, ignored a defendant's claim of having been forced to confess under threat of torture. Curiously, the judge included in his legal argumentation the following – unprecedented – phrasing:

> […] forbidding homosexuals from practicing their 'natural' right in establishing intimate relations among themselves without discrimination or intervention, leads to forcing them to what is 'contrary to their nature' so that they adjust to the majority's 'nature,' and hence forbids them from practicing the rights that are attached to them as persons […], which constitutes a violation of the simplest human rights in the Lebanese constitution and universal human rights declarations. (Maalouf 2017 – author's translation)

The judge, in essence, argued that a "majority's nature" (to be understood as specific form of "heterosexuality") is contrary to a homosexual person's nature, hence bringing homosexuality (and not only the act of penetration as per the law) into the fold of the *normative*, and dismissing the law's applicability to "homosexuals" as persons (ibid). In the four pages devoted to explaining the ruling, the judge refers to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, cites the World Health Organization's removal of homosexuality from the list of illnesses in 1990, and insists on individuals' right to privacy as well as equality, as sanctioned by the Lebanese constitution (ibid). The ruling appears to be an example of a successful lobbying effort on the part of HELEM and Legal Agenda's lawyers, specifically against Article 534. However, while this ruling was celebrated as a landmark victory by activists in Beirut, the fact that two of the accused were still charged with "secret prostitution" and ordered to pay a fine, and the fact that this case took two entire years to process (leading to unnecessary detention, harassment, restriction of movement, fines, and fees), was ignored in its coverage as a victory specifically for gay men.

The Public Prosecutor's Office appealed the verdict and, a year later in July 2018, a court of appeals cleared the two transwomen of the Article 534 charges for the first time in Lebanon's legal history. The court, however, chose its own justification and reaffirmed that

the law punishes an "act," not an "orientation," because it is offensive to "public morality" (Kfouri 2018). Although it was seen as a victory by the lawyers and many activists, the court, in effect, only argued that homosexuality is natural, while reaffirming that publicly acting on it remains punishable under the law. It cleared the two transwomen on grounds of the lack of proof that an "act" occurred, but also, importantly, on the grounds that they had both "sexually and bodily" transitioned to become women, and hence, any act of sex they commit with men would be considered heterosexual, or in the court's words, "natural and traditional" (ibid).

The ruling hence brings forward another central binary in the Lebanese state's definition of gender and sexual non-normativity. Both courts in the above case acknowledged and explicitly linked the text of Article 534 – "penetrative act against nature" – as a law specifically applicable to "homosexuals," that is, as applicable to persons judged as taking part in "homosexuality" through penetrative sex. Casually slipping from an act to a type of person is only partly explained by the activists' lobbying efforts that made the jump from an "act" to an "orientation," citing "international developments" and arguing for "ijtihad" – the need to interpret the law with consideration to contemporary conditions (Kfouri 2018; Legal Agenda 2018). Yet this un-interrogated slippage is a deliberate part of the law's actual function and the ways in which it has been applied on the ground. As I explore in my interrogation of the Penal Code's applicability in the next section, the state and its security organs deliberately use this slippage between act, orientation, and person to their advantage in exerting violence against undesirable or suspect people or entities. These slippages are central to maintaining a possibility for punishment available, and are hence productive of state power. I argue that, if we consider the law and its application through policing and detention practices, we do not observe a clear shift from act to identity, as some scholars have argued is taking place in Beirut (Massad 2007, 2015). Rather, we can observe a continuous oscillation between a legal definition of an act that can – increasingly – only be committed by a type of person ("homosexual," "gay") possessing a type of perverted desire ("homosexuality") through ideas about classed and gendered respectability. In other words, we can observe the state apparatus' continuous use of ambiguity and slippages in hedging morality.

4.4 Applying the Law in Practice: Hedging Ambiguity and the Role of Classed Respectability

Although Article 534 of Lebanon's Penal Code punishes an act, in practice, the process of identifying, stopping, arresting, and detaining persons under this article is complex. According to Ahmad Saleh, who was a volunteer caseworker with HELEM for several years during my fieldwork, the police usually apply this article in conjunction with others that punish prostitution and drug possession or use (Saleh in Qubaia-ova n.d.). Following Maya Mikdashi and Jasbir Puar's (2016) work on displacing "homophobia" as a frame of reference for all contexts, my analysis will demonstrate that homophobia "might not be a suitable term for describing violence against queers in Lebanon" (Chaer 2016). Indeed, reading the state's punitive measures only through the lens of "homophobia" does not allow us to see its manipulation of ambiguities, slippages, and its hedging of morality. Instead, I suggest that a frame of non-normativity that keeps the gendered, classed, and racialized aspects of sexuality policing and punishing in Beirut visible is more useful for understanding their cross-braced interactions.

The process of determining which Penal Code articles might apply to a suspect begins with profiling who is suitable to arrest. In the cases Saleh handled, which mostly involved male arrestees, most individual arrests occurred at a checkpoint or were motivated by information pulled from the cell phone of a detainee that the police believed suggested same-sex relations, such as pornographic material (the possession of which is also illegal) or chat history on a gay dating application (Qubaia-ova n.d.).

The police engage in direct profiling of persons they suspect might fall under one of the existing Penal Code articles. Hence, they normally check for incriminating evidence prior to having a specific reason for suspecting it. Several factors determine whether an arrest happens. If the person is identified as a Syrian, their residential status is automatically checked for violation of stay. If the person travels on a motorcycle, they are assumed to be a poor Lebanese citizen (without enough social clout to avoid arrest) or a Syrian working illegally and, hence, subjected to more questioning. Even minor details such as carrying "too many" condoms can lead to a charge of suspected "secret prostitution."[29] Sometimes, it is

[29] In the case examined above, the court ruling cited one of the defendant's possession of ten condoms and a lubricant as suspect, in relation to which the judge argued: "Although condoms are a contraceptive or are used for protection against STDs and, hence, are not in themselves evidence of practicing prostitution, the fact that a large number of them (ten) was seized from the defendant strengthens the court's conviction that the defendant

enough to simply stand in a particular place known to be a spot for sex work in order to be labeled a suspect, as was the case of the nine people mentioned in the 2017 case who were arrested in the busy Dawra area – a major meeting point for those arriving or departing from Beirut, a cruising spot, and also a neighborhood frequented by migrant workers and low-income Lebanese. Once the police stop a person, they will also check for drug use or possession, even if they have no reason to suspect its relevance. Hence, the police use these charges – drug use, prostitution, acts against nature, and violation of residential status – in combination before knowing for certain which charge may apply (Saleh in Qubaia-ova n.d.).

Determining the applicability of a "penetrative act against nature" is, of course, impossible. In the past, the police would subject male arrestees they suspected of sexual activity to an invasive anal inspection called the "egg test" to determine whether they had been penetrated. The name of the test refers to the shape of the tool used in these forced forensic exams. Likewise, "virginity tests" were previously performed on women by police-assigned doctors who claimed they could determine whether penetration occurred and, hence, accuse them of adultery. Although the "egg exam" was denounced as unscientific by the Lebanese order of physicians and psychiatrists in 2014, arrestees continue to be forced into such tests, which constitute a form of rape and sexual torture.

What this detailed description of the process of arrest demonstrates are two things. First, I am arguing – in line with activists from the field – that arrest is determined by a combination of gendered, raced and classed self-presentation, in a particular time and geographical setting, that are read against the police's own interpretations of symbols of non-normativity, for which they then apply a legal article to justify arrest and detention.[30] In this sense, it is inaccurate to only argue that 'gay men' are targeted under Article 534, as some activists, NGOs, and media outlets do. Rather, specific persons who fall into the web of meanings and symbols that represent non-normativity for police officers on a particular occasion are the most vulnerable. This includes gender non-normative persons, low-income workers, and those without social capital to fight arrest.

Second, Article 534 only forms one part of an entire cluster of Penal Code articles used to police gender and sexual non-normativity. It is used in combination with other

was intent on practicing prostitution, especially in light of his confessions mentioned earlier, which necessitates charging him with article 523 of the Penal Code" (Maalouf 2017), my own translation.

[30] I credit Ahmad Saleh for this analysis.

articles mentioned to conduct an arrest. Reading the Penal Code and its on-the-ground interpretation and application as a collective process of policing non-normativity reveals that the state's security apparatus is, forcefully implementing a version of gendered and sexual national morality. This version upholds a gender-binary and heteronormative structure that favors middle-class Lebanese citizens with legally sanctioned marital relations, while punishing gender and sexual non-normativity as well as persons of a lower class, persons racialized as inferior, and non-citizens. The case of the two transwomen acquitted of Article 534 charges because they are women, and "therefore any sexual relation they have with men is natural and traditional" (Kfouri 2018), demonstrates the Lebanese state's attachment to a heterosexual gender binary.

Given that the process of targeting someone for an arrest has several factors that must meet in order to complete an arrest and assign a punishment, it becomes possible to see how a certain performance of classed and gendered respectability might help in navigating and potentially avoiding the arrest, questioning, and detention. Saleh gives an example of a cis-gender man who was called in for questioning after the police obtained his name and number from another detainee accused of violating Article 534. The man admitted to committing "penetration against nature," but was neither detained nor fined:

> One guy was called in and he was very diplomatic, as he put it. He said, "yes, I do that" in a way that was not confrontational, and was very apologetic about it, [saying] "I can't help it, it's something I do, it's an instinct" and, you know, they [the officers] were OK with it. He came down in a suit, he spoke English with Arabic, and he was a national – Lebanese – so they treated him OK. The officer who was writing his statement added a phrase that he [the accused] had not used: "he only does it out of need, and he always uses a condom." It reflects the officer wanting to add positive things to the statement to help him out [in front of the judge]. In the end, they didn't charge him [with Article 534]. (Saleh in Qubaia-ova n.d.)

Presenting oneself legibly as a member of a respectable class, modern, and ashamed of a carnal desire (as opposed to 'proud') closely matches the type of respectable morality the police aim to defend and establish. Hence, the officer attempted to support the questioned sexual aspect of this respectability by adding an unuttered line about condom use. The condom use not only signifies the arrestee's responsible sexual activity as someone who does not 'spread disease' even if he cannot control his desire, but it also demonstrates the officer's attempt to list the man as a penetrator, which is more respectable than a penetrated male,

given that it upholds an idea of masculinity that fits within Lebanon's national myth rather than a more 'feminized' notion. The arrestee then becomes simply a man who enjoys a non-normative sex desire he cannot suppress (in line with a narrative of men's uncontrolled sexual urges), but he does so responsibly without either spreading disease or undermining Lebanese masculinity.

Hence, a sexual non-normativity is reinterpreted by a state organ as unpunishable, using not only normative notions of masculinity and disease, but also a notion of classed respectability. These kinds of cases reaffirm the state's power to define gender and sexual (non)-normativity so long it remains in charge. Crucially however, activists and case workers often use such functioning slippages to advise those arrested to perform similar notions of classed and gender respectability in hope of annulling the charges or decreasing the fines (Saleh in Qubaia-ova n.d.)

4.5 Hedging Predictable Frictions: Cross-bracing Sexual Non-normativity Between Virtue and Vice

In 2017, Hadi Damien, a Lebanese man in his late twenties unknown in the activist scene in Beirut, decided to create a web page combining all events taking place around the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) in Beirut under the title of "Beirut Pride." As I explored in the introduction, the IDAHOT day has been marked by activists in Beirut since 1999 (before the establishment of HELEM) and developed into a regular occasion for activists to organize various programs and marches. With the multiplication of NGOs working on LGBT rights and gender and sexuality issues broadly (see chapter 5), different NGOs were now organizing movie screenings, picnics, workshops, and parties around the international day. Yet, before the creation of Damien's web page, no NGO or activist group had considered developing these events under the transnational banner of "Pride." The reasons varied – some activists have long argued that the type of visibility celebrated by the now-transnational "Pride" events is simply inapplicable to the Beirut activist context, which seeks decriminalization rather than rights-based visibility. Others perceived "Pride" to be a consumerist gay party, of which there are plenty in Beirut, and which does not bring forth any particular gains for decriminalizing homosexuality. Some simply deferred to the fact that a series of events was already regularly organized under the

transnational day of IDAHOT and, hence, rendered another event unnecessary, while others saw a public "march" in which many participants would wear masks or risk being outed as not corresponding to the community's needs and political lives (Darwich 2010, 2017) (see more in chapter 5).

Some activists, however, were also concerned about the political risks emanating from aligning with visibility under the banner of "Pride." "Pride" has become a homonational and transnational event that is celebrated across many European and North American cities, and, hence, represents a measure for a modern state's progress in tolerance and diversity (Ayoub 2016). Its function as such a measure comes at the price of erasing local variation in sexual practices and histories of political action and riots tied to "Pride" events, such as in the case in its home origin of the U.S. (Manalansan IV 1997). Having had experience with being continuously measured against Western ideas of sexual progress (Farah 2013), some activists refrained from participating in what they saw as a primarily homonormative and homonationalist event that favors cis-gender gay men.

Damien, having been outside such activist debates in Beirut, did not consider the larger stakes of his efforts for such communities. Rather, oscillating between arguing that his project was apolitical and claiming that a Pride-like event was necessary for increasing the visibility of the gay community and fighting against hate and discrimination, he approached various organizations and asked if he could list their events on the web page (Joy Stacey n.d.). Several of the visible LGBT organizations in Beirut, such as HELEM and Proud, agreed. Apart from NGOs, he also approached various nightclubs and designers to organize a fashion show, a drag workshop, a gay party, and even commissioned the creation of a specific Arabic font with rainbow colors to brand the Beirut Pride. His program was published online and only in English.

As 17 May, the official date of IDAHOT, approached in 2017, news spread about Beirut hosting the first "Pride in the Arab World," with all the predictable hype. It even led some embassies, such as the French and Dutch, two top donors to LGBT organizations in Lebanon, to raise the rainbow flag alongside their national flag at their embassies (Fleming-Farrell 2017) – an act they had not considered doing over the past two decades of IDAHOT celebrations in Lebanon. Two days before the activities were scheduled to commence, the Association of Muslim 'Ulema, a conservative group of Sunni scholars, issued two consecutive statements against the Pride event. One statement was titled "Final Warning" and

denounced the event as the spread of vice, threatened the venue with the use of violence, and later demanded that the state arrest the organizers:

> After [the failure of] numerous attempts by a number of those devoted to stop the heinous crime against virtue which will be committed in Beirut through the rude meeting organized by homosexuals in Lebanon, the Association of Muslim 'Ulema in Lebanon calls on political officials, headed by the Minister of the Interior, who is entrusted with dignity, values, ethics and the law, to prevent the convening of this conference, and to fulfill the demands of […] the republic's mufti and the religious authorities, and the honorable of all religions and sects, who demand the event's prevention. […] If they do not perform their role, the Association holds the authorities responsible for the consequences of the descending [onto the venue] of those from all of Lebanon who want to preserve chastity and honor and prevent this conference conspiracy. (Amhaz 2017 - author's translation).

Subsequently, Hotel Monroe, based in a bustling Christian neighborhood between East and West Beirut, cancelled its hosting of the two events scheduled for the first day, one by HELEM and another by Proud, citing threats of violence and their inability to provide security for the attendees. Curiously, a HELEM representative later mentioned to the press that the ISF had also asked them to cancel the event, claiming that another unnamed security group threatened the venue and that the safety of attendees was at risk (Fleming-Farrell 2017).

Rumors of "Salafists" and thugs coming into the Christian and Armenian neighborhood of Mar Mkhayel (known for its bustling bar scene) and raiding other locations of Beirut Pride events spread, and the Ministry of Interior ordered the ISF to the neighborhood. In what was read as a response to the continuous threats from the Association of Muslim 'Ulema and state complicity, 18 bars put up rainbow flags at their entrances to mark the day. Damien publicly thanked the ISF for choosing to protect the Pride event from hate and violence, to the dismay of several activists, who pointed out that it was, in fact, the ISF that was responsible for arresting, detaining, and sometimes torturing persons under Article 534 throughout the rest of the year. These activists subsequently demanded the withdrawal of their logos and events from the Beirut Pride page. Others argued that the ISF, Ministry of Interior and the other state organs had all succumbed to the threats of a religious group in favor of compromising the basic rights and liberties guaranteed by the Lebanese constitution (The Socialist Feminist Committee of the Socialist Platoform 2017). Although Damien saw the deployment of the ISF as a win for him and a show of the state's progress and tolerance, the Association of Muslim 'Ulema also celebrated the cancellation of the first

two events as a victory "against vice" and published a thank you note to all those who participated in their "intifada for the protection of values" (AlMoslim 2017). Unsurprisingly, both sides claimed to have won the right to protection from the state.

The following year, in May 2018, the day unfolded very differently. Damien expanded the list of events under the banner of Beirut Pride and, this time, was taken for questioning after officers from the Censorship Bureau walked into a theater play on homophobia. Damien was detained overnight in the Hebich police station and, although he was not charged, he was forced to sign a binding letter agreeing to withdraw all Beirut Pride activities as a condition for his release. His release conditions also included a promise not to repeat his involvement in organizing similar events in the future. Thus, the events could not continue under the Beirut Pride banner.

Both stories were extensively covered by local and Western media outlets, with the local coverage reflecting the above debates and employing a sectarian frame of reference, while Western coverage employed a narrative of progress and regression. While blog posts written independently by local activists in Beirut were critical of the "first" Pride and its emphasis on visibility politics, branding, and declared apolitical orientation (Darwich 2017; The Socialist Feminist Committee of the Socialist Platoform 2017), other Lebanese news outlets celebrated the Association of Muslim 'Ulema's efforts in standing up for virtue. A sectarian frame of reference was also mapped alongside these two crossed ledges, with sectarian difference invoked by both sides. On the one side, some activists argued that the Association of Muslim 'Ulema, the Minister of Interior and the ISF were closely tied to the Sunni sect and Prime Minister Hariri's party, and, hence, they obeyed the Association of Muslim 'Ulema's request. Some bloggers characterized the Association as a group of Salafist extremists and portrayed the events' unfolding as a new "war" between Islamist terrorism and basic values (Aqiqi 2017; Yaseen 2017). On the other side, some news outlets cited sectarian differences by questioning the lack of reaction from Shi'a groups like Hezbollah (Raslan 2017), whose Secretary-General had spoken out against homosexuality earlier in March of 2017 in the quote at the beginning of the chapter (MEMRI 2017), tying local feminist groups and gay activists to transnational gay rights initiatives and wrongly claiming they were proposing a gay marriage law, when, in fact, no such proposal had ever been made by any group of activists in Lebanon.

Western media outlets and international organizations primarily employed a narrative of progress, celebrating the "first Pride" in Lebanon as a timely achievement and branding the country as always slightly more progressive than the rest of the Arab world (Qiblawi 2017). When Beirut Pride was suspended in 2018, Western media emphasized that Lebanon still suffers from homophobia and faces a long road ahead, but still maintained that it remains the most progressive place in the Middle East, citing the Samir Maalouf ruling discussed above as a sign of this promise (Homsi 2018). Damien himself was quoted as saying that "the simple fact that Beirut Pride exists is progress in itself" (Lautissier 2018), which further irked other activists who argued that they had already been doing this work for nearly two decades and rejected being measured by the metric of a Pride event. Additionally, organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International decried the suspension of Pride events in Beirut as an attack on "LGBTI" human rights (Amnesty International 2017). The media's confusion over what it saw as "progress" in 2017 and "regression" back to homophobia and extremism in 2018, fits well with the same kind of discourses used to cover LGBT rights in Eastern Europe, where countries such as Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia, among others, are depicted as endlessly attempting to catch up with Western European democracies, while never quite reaching them (Butterfield 2013; Kahlina 2013; Renkin 2014; Ayoub 2016).

The story of the two Beirut Prides is a rich example of the cross-bracing of dichotomous, but hegemonic discourses of the local and the global, as well as the inevitable organizing of various elements alongside the two ledges of this specific crossing point, causing what I term a "predictable friction." As I explored in my theoretical chapter, Tsing theorizes friction as the central element in the production of power through the unequal and tenuous meeting between particulars and universals (Tsing 2005). The friction in this case is produced between two braces of unequal traveling discourses, each containing elements of the particular and the universal: one is both a local, regional and transnational Sunni religious conservative discourse, claiming to represent cross-sectarian virtue and attaching itself to ideas of a local tradition and a global Islam; the other is a local and global discourse of secular sexual rights and progress, represented under the transnational banner of Pride, and attaching itself to the global narratives of human rights and transnational Pride celebrations, but also to the Lebanese state's national myth of secularism.

The "grip of the encounter" (Tsing 2005, 5) in this case operates almost magnetically, aligning various elements along the two ledges, causing inaccurate but predictable

interpretations, such as that the state has made progress on sexual rights by allowing Pride to take place against the Association Muslim 'Ulema's demand to stop it in 2017. Similarly, the interaction becomes interpreted as a 'war' between virtue and vice, or a 'war' between 'Islamist terrorism' and 'secular sexuality.' Alignments of diverse political positions are reduced to sets of two co-dependent discourses that meet exactly at the issue of allowing or policing gender and sexual non-normativity.

Additionally, specific transnational signifiers such as "Pride" or 'Islamist terrorism' become the loci of this visible crossing between the hegemonic discourses, and invite a series of predictable reactions, positionalities, and policies. As activists had pointed out, simply aligning oneself with a transnational homonationalist "Pride" erases decades of the same kinds of events and celebrations taking place in Beirut under a different transnational banner (IDAHOT). However, IDAHOT does not have the same magnetic transnational currency as "Pride" in attracting various discourses to align on either side of the two crossed ledges. It is precisely because of IDAHOT's limited currency that activists have been tactically using the day as a semi-visible event. This helped activists avoid precisely the predictable friction between ideas of 'local religious tradition' and 'Western sexual liberation' by only partially appealing to the latter from the two dominant interpretive frames between which gender and sexual non-normativity is always caught.

What does this story tell us about the Lebanese state's function in relation to gender and sexual non-normativity? Why did the state's security apparatus allow the first Beirut Pride to occur, but not the second one? I have thus far shown that this only appears as a contradiction if we locate the state exclusively alongside the two hegemonic and cross-braced interpretive frames – as a protector of tradition or a protector of secularism. I have been arguing throughout this chapter that the state hedges when to interfere and when to turn a blind eye to gender and sexual non-normativity, and its decision is based on its calculations of what will allow it to keep power or threaten its grip. In a state in which sects reproduce state logic by claiming a monopoly over violence in specific territories and on specific bodies, the negotiation between sect and state is continuous and often intertwined. Yet, at the same time, and as the concept of sextarianism suggests (Mikdashi 2018), the sect needs the state to guarantee the former's control over bodies and territories it claims, while the state only remains relevant if the sects agree to mark these bodies as national and non-national, and

defer some issues, such as the protection of national morality and punishing of vice, to official secular state tools, as examined above.

In practice, religious groups such as the Association of Muslim 'Ulema, which enjoys a social and political position of closeness to the Sunni sect, questioned the state's ability to protect national morality with its threats of violence towards Beirut Pride and the hotel hosting its events. The state, as represented by the Ministry of Interior, was called to intervene and mediate – otherwise, the risk of a group affiliated with a Sunni organization attacking a hotel and bars in two known Christian and Armenian areas could be read predictably as a sectarian attack and invite retaliation. The Association of Muslim 'Ulema, aware of the risk, made its position clear that it was only against the spreading of moral vice and directed its statement to all who wanted to "preserve chastity and honor" explicitly from "all sects," asking them to share in its position (Amhaz 2017). To avoid a violent confrontation, the Ministry of Interior sent the ISF to the streets in what Damien wrongly interpreted as a win for him and a sign of the state's willingness to defend his Pride event from Islamist 'thugs.'

In effect, the state simply claimed its right to employ violence for the sake of enforcing security. In calculating its risks, the state seized the opportunity to invest in both camps; it succeeded in appearing to heed the Association of Muslim 'Ulema's call to protect national morality by assuming its role in policing non-normative bodies and behaviors in public spaces, and, at the same time, it appeared to protect the Beirut Pride event and received applause for appearing liberal and non-sectarian, and for mimicking some Western European states, who deploy their police forces to protect Pride protestors from counter demonstrations by Christian religious groups and neo-Nazis. In hedging its position with regard to both camps, the Ministry of Interior reproduced its hegemony over violence, but, in particular, it reaffirmed the validity of its role in policing non-normativity. Through doing so, it also reproduced gender and sexual non-normativity as the terrain of its intervention. This dynamic became evident only a year later when the Lebanese state's Censorship Bureau arrested Damien and canceled the entire week of Beirut Pride events. In my interpretive frame, the state simply hedged again, and this time, it took the risk of appearing non-modern (and/or homophobic) for the gain of control over visible signs of gender and sexual non-normativity and the appeasement or religious groups.

In sum, I have argued that the ways in which the state organizes the regulation and punishment of gender and sexual normativity and non-normativity cannot be read using a frame of unidirectional democratic progress or homophobia. Rather, analyzing the state as a hedging actor helps us better understand what first appears to be a set of contradictory choices between regulating (via sect and Personal Status Laws) or policing (via application of the Penal Code) gender and sexual non-normativity. It also helps us understand how the state navigates the two cross-braced structures of modernity versus tradition, or local religiosity versus global human rights and secularism. Further, as the case of the two Beirut Prides demonstrates, the Lebanese state relies on the production of predictable friction, through which it negotiates and reaffirms its monopoly over power and its relation to other formal entities such as sects. Thus, what appears as constant oscillation between these cross-braced ledges is a deliberate hedging by the state apparatus and its various organs, depending on their calculations of risk and loss of power at any given moment.

Chapter 5: Cross-bracing NGOization and *Shakher:* The Hedging of Sexual Activism in Beirut

I was holding an interview with Chris on a particularly hot Saturday in HELEM's community center, located at that point across from the Sanayeh garden in the Hamra district. Chris had been given the center's keys so that he could prepare for the evening's meeting with Syrian refugees. He had just started working in a new initiative called "Whispers" to support "LGBTI Syrians" as he called them. As we sat on the couch with the main door open to the loud bustling street, a young Lebanese man showed up at the doorstep unexpectedly. This was quite odd, as anyone associated with HELEM was well aware that the center was not open on Saturdays. Neither of us recognized the man nor had seen him at any of HELEM's or other organizations' events, or even at any of the parties we frequented. Without giving us the chance to inquire first, the young man proceeded to speak whilst standing at the door step: "I can't believe I'm here. I have wished for so long to come here." He explained that he finally told his family that he is gay, and that their reaction – contrary to what he expected – was positive. He felt such a sense of relief that he decided to come to HELEM the next day so that he could "help." It wasn't clear to him – or to us – what he meant by that. He only knew that he could be at HELEM now without any sense of stress or shame. Coming to HELEM's community center – itself a semi-visible location at the time – was an affirmation of desired belonging.

Chris and I invited the young man to sit down with us on the torn red couches and suggested that he should take time to process what had happened and then think about getting involved later, but that he was welcome at the community center. We asked him if he'd like to speak with any official representative of HELEM, and we told him that he could come back later in the evening when HELEM members are present, or on one of the open days. After probing him further as to why he decided to tell his family about his personal sexual leanings now and checking whether he needed any immediate help, the young man mentioned he had been "watching coming out videos on YouTube for a while" and could not bear keeping this "secret" from his family any longer. He described feeling immense stress, anxiety and depression for months, so much so that his mother and sisters sat him down and asked him to confess whether he had murdered anyone – and assured him that if he had, it was OK. Surprised at his family's reaction, his immense sense of relief led him to immediately want to "give back to the community;" a community he had not been a part of

before, and yet found to be explicitly represented by HELEM. Why did he choose HELEM above all other LGBT organizations in Beirut? Why did he make such a direct connection between "coming out" and coming to HELEM? What kind of "community" did he perceive HELEM to represent?

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Just like "Pride" in the previous chapter, HELEM itself has become a rich signifier imbued with contradictory meanings. As this chapter will demonstrate, HELEM is braced among transnational discourses about LGBT rights, leftist and academic critiques of the use of sexuality in neo-imperialist projects in Lebanon as part of the "Gay International" agenda (Massad 2007), local opposing politics from sectarian groups, as well as local discourses that support diversity in the name of secularism. While for some, like the young man in the above story, HELEM signals belonging to a particular and imagined kind of community that corresponds to his identity as a gay man, for others it signifies vice, the extension of Western imperialism's reach into Lebanon, or the sign of progress on a unidirectional spectrum of development.

This chapter approaches HELEM from the frame of NGOization of gender and sexual activism and argues that NGOization is a key factor shaping sexuality politics in Beirut today (beginning in 2006 and intensifying with the Syrian refugee crisis).[31] By NGOization I refer to Sonia Alvarez' coining of the "NGO Boom" phenomenon among feminist movements and organizations in Latin America, and the multiplication of a particular form of gender and sexuality rights organizations (Alvarez 1999). Moreover, this phenomenon entails professionalizing issues of gender and sexuality as well as negotiating a relationship and collaboration with neoliberal regimes of (mostly Western) funding (Choudry and Kapoor 2013; Bernal and Grewal 2014). Specifically, the multiplication of LGBT and sexual rights NGOs locally and globally is creating new kinds of professional sexual activism, pushing some community members into paid leadership positions, and others into "volunteers" and "service recipients," often in a hierarchical structure. The process of professionalizing activists and social movements – which is a central dynamic of NGOization (Lang 1997) – is linked with defining politically correct terms and outlining (un)respectable practices and

[31] This chapter has significantly benefited from and relied on information gathered through formal interviews and informal conversations with Ghassan Makarem, Anthony Rizk, Ahmad Saleh, Bernadette Daou, Sonya Knox, Rola Yasmine, Georges Azzi, Genwa Smahat, Joe Hamoud, Joseph Aoun, Tarek Zeidan, and Rebecca Abu Saad. I also thank Elissa Helms and Heather Tucker for their reviews of the chapter.

(un)acceptable identities, hence producing certain kinds of activists, genders, and identities (Bernal and Grewal 2014) . This process often clashes with local ideas about gender and sexual non-normativity and other community-specific practices such as *Shakher* that are practiced by some feminine gay men, transwomen, and sex-workers. The cross-bracing of these two strands – the transnational NGOization of sexual activism and the persistence of local practices – is frequently and inadequately theorized as an irreconcilable clash that leads to the erasure of the local in favor of the neoliberal transnational model; a claim that I contest. Rather, the clash produces zones of contestation in which dominant narratives are negotiated and hedged, such as narratives about the definition of community and its practices. It is through such contestations and clashes that NGOs and activist groups themselves become "simultaneously neoliberal entities and sites of struggle" (Bernal and Grewal 2014, 15).

HELEM, the first above-ground LGBT rights organization in Beirut, has found itself navigating the process of NGOization alongside local forms of sexual activism and community building. On the one hand, HELEM faced the need to formalize and gain European funding to survive, which meant self-presenting as a visible above ground rights organization committed to a transnational Human Rights framework. On the other hand, HELEM has also had to answer to its community's independent visions and needs, which included selective visibility and an engagement with broader intersecting issues such as Palestinian rights and pinkwashing, the war on Iraq, and relief efforts after the 2006 Israeli invasion, all within a context in which the Lebanese state apparatus punishes gender and sexual non-normativity (Moussawi 2015). Through telling the story of interactions in HELEM's community space and contestations over defining the appropriate sexual practices and identities in it, I argue that the push for the creation of respectable sexualities and professional sexual politics is *concurrent* with the persistence of local contentious practices such as *Shakher.* I show how the leaders, members, and volunteers of HELEM frequently hedge these strands of meaning depending on the space the contestation occurs in. More so, when these approaches meet and clash, a territory of contestation is created in which all sides re-assert themselves or experiment with local and transnational forms of identification and performance, in effect contesting boundaries and definitions of 'community.' Studying the concurrent processes as well as their clash ethnographically hence reveals that the NGOization of sexual activism is not only a complex process, but also a messy one, and never a complete one.

5.1 The Lebanese case

In order to understand the mechanics of the contestations I just described above, I must first devote some attention to how we arrive to such meeting points in the first place. To do so, I first draw broader contours of the NGOization process in Lebanon, highlighting gender and sexual activism and movements within it. Lebanon has witnessed a multiplication of civil society organizations, associations, and NGOs in at least three stages: the post-civil war reconstruction period (1990 onward), the Israeli invasion of 2006 and its aftermath, and the Syrian refugee influx (intensifying in 2012 and 2013). As such, and as I will argue, Lebanon's experience with NGOs, and especially international ones, has often been in reaction to war and destabilizing political conditions, humanitarian crisis and state weakness, coupled with state reconstruction projects.

The 1990s in Lebanon witnessed an increased interest in women's rights as an integral part of state building in the post- Civil War (1975-1990) era. In particular, Lebanon's signing of the 1997 CEDAW agreement is perceived as a critical moment for many women's organizations working on eliminating violence against women, as it meant direct partnership with the state and its official organs (Mitri 2015). But this event also signaled a renewed shift towards institutionalizing women's and gender activism; a common trend regionally (Joseph 1991; Cheref 2006; Fay 2008; Daou 2014).[32] Formalizing this relationship also meant that the state relied on some of the women's organizations to fill in for its service provision. Such deferral, a neo-liberal policy in itself, enabled the institutionalization of women's organizations and limited their role to fulfilling the state's obligations, thus causing a degree of inevitable containment of women's and feminist activism as well as a clearer separation between formal NGOs and social movements (Daou 2015, Mitri 2015). However, this development did not mean that women's organizations were necessarily listened to or consulted periodically, or that they did not contest state policies. Control over women's rights and sexualities continuously took center stage in Lebanon in the post-Civil War period, and family issues including the civil code were relegated to the religious sects as part of a "strategy of maintaining the balance of sectarian power in the state" (Joseph 1991, 189) – see previous chapter.

[32] Through institutionalizing parts of feminist and women's movements, these actors became linked with oppressive authoritarian regimes which contributed to discrediting them locally.

The 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon shifted the ways in which NGOs and activists operated on the ground, specifically in a renewed moment of insecurity and state instability. Lamia Moughnieh (2015a) describes the role of activist volunteers in creating communication channels between local neighborhoods and international relief and reconstruction organizations. Groups such as the Reconstruction Unit were essential in influencing post-war rebuilding plans, challenging international organizations as well as political groups and "linking the process of reconstruction to social and economic practices" using experiences from the post-Civil War reconstruction era (Moughnieh 2015a). At the same time, places such as Zico House in which HELEM used to be based, and the surrounding Sanayeh neighborhood garden, were essential sites for relief efforts and cooperation with state and non-governmental bodies (Moughnieh 2015b). Some activists even recall Hezbollah representatives arriving to Zico house unannounced and entering HELEM's center in order to thank them for their help[33]. This moment was enabled through HELEM's success in politicizing sexual non-normativity as an intersectional issue in a time of crisis, and would not be repeated in the future.[34] However, some activists still refer to the war-relief period as the first instance in which sexuality-rights activists were acknowledged by the existing civil society and sectarian actors, and were taken seriously. In this sense, it was a crucial moment for the development of sexuality-rights activism and marking it on the map of political and civil actors. After the 2006 Israeli invasion ended, Moughnieh remarks that many of the volunteers were later recruited to work for local and international NGOs thereby shifting from grassroots intervention and emergency response to more formalized and institutionalized forms of aid and organizing. A more formalized approach to relief efforts began solidifying already after 2006.

The Syrian refugee crisis – intensifying a year or two after the first protests in 2011 – has caused another significant shift in NGOs' mandates, positions, power, access, and institutionalization in Lebanon. The Lebanese state increasingly relies on collaboration with recognized INGOs and their local partners to request and successfully secure funding from other state donors. Given the large scale of the crisis, the state also relies on INGOs to disseminate services to refugees, whose numbers are estimated to be over 1.5 million in a small state of 5 million. The conjunction of cross-braced relationships has several effects, from providing employment opportunities to educated middle class nationals ('local experts,'

[33] Two interlocutors mentioned the incident to me.
[34] Hezbollah remains one formal entity opposing homosexuality as deviancy and publicly criticizing queer and feminist organizations (see chapter 4).

translators, project administrators and directors), to deepening corruption channels and the drastic structuring of relations with refugees as temporary service recipients. Some sexual rights NGOs have adapted to the new form of funding for the crisis and began including programs for refugees specifically, whether by offering language classes, creating 'art therapy' sessions, or providing food and blankets. This is best demonstrated by the sudden rise of Proud as a formally registered NGO for Syrian refugees in an extremely short amount of time (Chapter 7). For gender and sexually non-normative Syrian refugees this shift makes it mandatory that they identify with transnational categories of sexuality as well as established narratives of victimhood in order to receive recognition as such and apply for asylum or relocation. As I explore here and in chapter 7, NGOs and community centers can become vital places for translating the meaning of LGBTI identities and subjectivities through communicating expectations about specific behaviors, values, and embodiments. However, the reproduction of these kinds of labels and identities is never complete or uncontested. In fact, these very same spaces often play a role in rebuilding local queer ties and relations (chapter 7), or local practices such as *Shakher* (below).

Lastly, a final dynamic that marks the story of NGOization in Lebanon is the role of the so called 'new' or 'non-traditional' donors that have increased their funding in the aftermath of the Syrian refugee crisis. These are mostly funders from the Gulf States with different political agendas from liberal and Western INGOs and are therefore frequently missing as crucial actors in theories of Western imperialism and NGOization in West Asia specifically.[35] Saudi investment in post war reconstruction in the 1990s and 2000s (after the end of the Lebanese Civil War) played a major role in facilitating the privatization of the city's public space while linking projects directly with Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri's businesses and ensuring a government that was friendly to the Kingdom. By allocating funds for supporting Syrian refugee relief efforts as well as state security, the Kingdom ensures loyalty among Sunni leaders in the Lebanese government, and counters Iran's funding of Hezbollah and Iran-supported NGOs, while challenging Syrian hegemony. Just as Western funding comes with attachments to ideas about gender equality and sexual rights, so does

[35] While there are several studies on the links between gender and gulf funding elsewhere [see for example Kristen Ghodsee's study on Bulgaria (Ghodsee 2010)], there is still little engagement with the issue of gender and sexuality and Gulf funding in Lebanon. Even after contacting a research project on NGOization based at the Issam Fares Institute in Lebanon, as well as several researchers, I was unable to obtain more detailed information on the issue. The most recent publication on NGOs in the region does not tackle the issue either (Erakat and Saghieh 2016).

funding from the Gulf – a dynamic that has yet to be explored in detail in NGOization literature on Lebanon.[36]

As the story of NGOization in Lebanon shows, the processes of institutionalizing, professionalizing, and expanding gender and sexual activism in Beirut is intimately related to war events and post-war conditions. The above developments in the NGO sector in Lebanon have affected the progress of sexual rights activism through its shaping of activist groups into formal NGOs or underground community groups, both of whom hedge the risks and profits of selective public visibility. The next section closely examines sexuality activism in relation to the above context and developments beginning in the early 2000s. Through tracing the history of this activism, I demonstrate that it is primarily the dynamic of post-war relief after the 2006 Israeli invasion as well as the Syrian refugee crisis that have affected the kind of attention and funding paid to sexual rights and sexuality-based movements in Beirut. Through illuminating the conditions structuring this activism, I trace the clash between competing transnational ideas of sexuality politics and local practices. The clash produces zones of contestation in which dominant structures and narratives are negotiated and hedged.

5.2 Before NGOization: A Brief History of Organized LGBT Sexual Activism in Beirut

If one is to search for a clear moment wherein organized LGBT activism and 'queer' politics in Beirut took a turn toward visible institutionalization, then one will find that the establishment of HELEM in 2004 is a frequently cited marker in the stories told about sexual activism in Lebanon. In fact, HELEM continues to be labeled as "the first group of its kind in the Arab world," marking its moment of visible inception a pioneering one in Lebanon's sexual activism and placing it in close relation to Western ideas of compulsory sexual visibility (Benoist 2014). However, several of HELEM's founders and local activists acknowledge that organized sexual activism – even if not in a form that matches an NGO structure – has been well underway in Beirut since the late 1990s and was preceded by informal organizing during the Civil War too (1975-1990).[37] The spread of the internet

[36] For example, education for Syrian refugees in Lebanon is not unified under the same curriculum and different NGOs and associations use different textbooks in accordance with their value sets, funding origins, or political positions: some use Syrian state textbooks, others favor Islamic teachings, or community-organized curriculums. This means that there is a diverse set of political and social convictions and values in refugee education programs.

[37] A claim made by several interlocutors, and an area of inquiry that requires more investigation and research.

facilitated connecting individuals through a website that included a mailing list, and provided information on hang-out spots in the city (Meem 2009). The individuals met regularly and discussed the political conditions affecting their lives. Some took part as members of the Club Free group and managed to rent a space in the city that served for meet-ups and political discussions (ibid).

Later in 2002, several of the same activists registered an activist group under the name *Hurriyat Khassa* (personal freedoms) (Meem 2009). The group grew to include several activists concerned with human rights, with many of its members also overlapping in other leftist groups such as *Khatt Mubasher* (Direct Line); a group that had a significant presence in anti-Iraq War demonstrations and activism (Makarem 2011, 104). More specifically, *Hurriyat Khassa* was created in response to the Lebanese state's proposal to amend the Penal Code. Among other issues, the amendment threatened to further broaden Article 534 toward criminalizing "unnatural sexual relations" instead of only "penetrative acts against nature" (ibid, 104), thereby shifting away from an obligation to prove a penetrative act had taken place, and toward a broader definition and criminalization of sexual non-normativity. This group had a general name and was not specifically calling for attention only to an LGBT-rights agenda, though it treated sexual non-normativity as a central issue to its progressive and secular agenda of 'personal freedoms.'

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 was countered with increased anti-war activism against U.S. and foreign interventions generally. At the same time, security states such as the Egyptian regime – a U.S. ally at that point – increasingly used the narrative of War on Terror for internal policing, labeling any opposition to its grip an act of terrorism, whether by Islamists, leftists, or secular activists. The Queen Boat raid in Cairo in 2004 in which 52 men were arrested, publicly shamed, and trialed in a military court for sexual deviancy, sent warning signs to Beiruti activists about a new wave of incited moral panic and state punishing (Makarem 2011). Also justified through the War on Terror discourse, the raid pushed Lebanese activists to debate whether and how to organize formally in the face of regional instability due to war on the one hand, and the strengthening of some states' authoritarian grip and subsequent crackdown on sexual non-normativity on the other (ibid). While one side argued for a formal registration, many activist voices denounced associating with a Lebanese state that practices sexual oppression and punishment, arguing it is not an effective strategy and would risk demobilizing the activism. In the end, the group chose to

register formally, taking the risk of becoming hypervisible subjects to a state interested in policing morality in a moment of regional upheaval and foreign intervention. It was amidst these developments then that several activists opened a community center in Zico House in the Hamra neighborhood and decided to publicly sign a "notification of association" in order to register their group as an LGBT organization with the Ministry of Interior under the acronym "HELEM", which stood for *Himaya Lil-Mithlyeen* and translates to 'protection for gay persons' (ibid).

The registration of HELEM aimed to force the state to recognize gender and sexual non-normativity as a political field, an issue to rally around, and a priority for leftist activists. Yet, until today, HELEM has not received its registration number from the Ministry and no such recognition was ever formalized. A registration number remains vital for the internal management of an organization, including managing funding and registering workers, paying salaries, providing social security benefits, etc.[38] According to an interpretation of Lebanese law that HELEM follows, if the ministry does not provide a file number and at the same time does not reject the application for it, then the organization is allowed to function legally until further notice. In this sense, HELEM retains an ambiguous legal status wherein its application can still be rejected or wherein it can receive a notification of registration at any moment. The creation of this gray zone allows the Ministry to keep HELEM in an unstable position, curtail its options, and monitor the organization's activity. The Ministry has the power to raid the organization and close it, and indeed it has sent 'spies' into the center before and had explicitly asked for "HELEM members" during night-club searches (ibid).

At the same time, this gray zone is what allowed HELEM to function as the first ever formally organized group working explicitly for the rights of sexual minorities. Subsequent NGOs negotiated the gray zone differently, focusing instead on registration as health and human rights organizations and not mentioning their work on LGBT rights directly. This ensured that they received a registration number from the government. The Ministry, I argue, employed a strategy of hedging – rejecting such an application would ignite a debate over

[38] Because of its inability to regularly process funds, but also because of its past commitment to "refusing conditional funding" in order to remain politically independent (Makarem 2011, 105), HELEM has only received partial funds since its establishment. Initially, only the Director's position was paid through a grant by the Norwegian embassy, which also covered rent costs and utilities for the community space. This way, HELEM's funds have always been registered to individual bank accounts which, while facilitating its operations also led to a number of personal discords and accusations of funds' misappropriation. Other expenses were covered through less frequent fundraisers and donation campaigns. Managing the political priority of remaining independent alongside the need for funding to maintain the community space placed HELEM in an economically unstable and uncertain position for years.

sexual and political freedoms in the country with strong criticism from Western NGOs and embassies, while accepting the application could lead to criticism and opposition from powerful sectarian groups. Hedging ambiguity in this case worked in the favor of both, the Ministry and HELEM, but of course at a higher cost for HELEM.

A wide majority of groups and organizations that focus their work on gender and sexual non-normativity and/or LGBT sexual rights today trace their history in some form or another to the establishment of HELEM in 2004. HELEM became a launching pad for new ideas that later developed into independent initiatives, projects, and organizations. While some of these initiatives were the direct results of splits based on political differences, others were the result of an increased professionalization and specialization in specific LGBT issues that matched global priorities and some funding schemes. For example, HELEM's most major split was articulated in feminist political terms. Many of the women members had often cited issues of male-dominance, sexism, and misogyny, and after several conflicts including an unresolved sexual harassment case, "HELEM Girls" – a sub group within HELEM – as well as some of the gay men left the organization in protest (Benoist 2014). Some lesbian and queer women, including some board members, would later establish Meem (2009-2014) as an underground and unregistered group of queer women activists, and Nasawiyya in (2010-2014), as a visible and above-ground feminist arm. Several previous directors of HELEM also established their own NGOs, including the Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE) established by Georges Azzi in 2009, and MOSAIC founded by Charbel Maydaa in 2014. Both Azzi and Maydaa resigned from HELEM over political differences with the board or the members and created their own organizations alongside more professionalized and formal models of NGOs (and not community centers like HELEM) which were based on hierarchical structures, employed paid positions, and competed for regional funding.

Interestingly, HELEM had also dedicated itself to issues of sexual health and worked together through a UN fund with the Lebanese Ministry of Health on a project to access HIV infected persons in Beirut. In fact, this was the first and only kind of formal relation with state-funding that HELEM had. Through its focus on sexual health, specifically gay men's sexual health, HELEM activists identified a need for LGBT friendly healthcare services, which eventually led to the establishment of the Marsa Sexual Health clinic in 2011. While Marsa started as a HELEM project, during my fieldwork Marsa became an independent and

specialized clinic housed in the same building as a gay bar in Hamra; just a few streets down from HELEM's old center. It provides discounted healthcare for straight and gay men and women and is popular among sexually active women who seek nonjudgmental access to contraceptives and various screenings. Similarly, HELEM had attracted activists concerned with sexual awareness who later specialized in sexual health in the LGBT community and established a new NGO under the title Lebanese Medical Association for Sexual Health (LebMASH) in 2012. All these new NGOs employed a formal structure (hierarchy, specialized and paid staff, and international funding) whilst HELEM struggled to keep its community center and carry out its lobbying mission with only volunteer-based help and one paid director. Other smaller groups also continued to spring up after the break-ups of Meem and Nasawiyya, including groups such as Kuras, the A Project, and the underground non-hierarchical Damma collective which ran a community space for queer women and trans persons.

After restructuring itself (next section) HELEM diversified its funding sources and managed to re-open a community center in 2016 in a new location, and also came together with four other LGBT and sexual-rights and services organizations and created a small coalition. The coalition includes AFE, MOSAIC, MARSA, and LebMASH; all four entities that had direct relationships to HELEM in earlier years. The coalition meets regularly and discusses how to strategically apply for funds without impeding each other's work. The coalition has also taken unified stances against major events such as the massive police raid of the Agha hammam in 2015 and the arrest and detention of nearly two dozen men and trans persons, and the forced cancellation of some events during IDAHOT and Beirut Pride (see previous chapter). This type of strategizing shows a new way of responding not only to changes in funding schemes, but also to state and police repression. Building a coalition of separate NGOs, the activists are able to reach more funding sources arguing that they are each specialized in a particular issue: legal lobbying, health services, support for refugees, etc. It also demonstrates the activists' and NGOs' hedging of cross-braced structures of funding, conditions of (post) war and state repression through, quite literally, investing their energies in multiple NGOs and multiplying avenues of their activism.

What I hope this brief history demonstrates are two key points. First, that the multiplication of sexual activist groups in Beirut has emerged and developed from larger political conditions affecting the country and the region, namely the 2003 Iraq War, Israeli

invasion of 2006, and the 2011 Syrian refugee crisis. It was in response to these conditions of war that activists politicized sexuality as central to the ongoing varied crises, hence "remain[ing] rooted in a local context by highlighting […] intersectional struggles" (Moussawi 2015, 1). Such a frame that exposes the centrality of war and post-war conditions to gender and sexual activism complicates mainstream NGO narratives that only see a specific kind of NGOs multiplying in conflict and post-conflict settings (mainly humanitarian organizations), or skip over the conditions of war that enable the mushrooming of NGOs (Davies 2014), or only examine NGOs in West Asia and North Africa in relation to the so-called Arab Spring (Erakat and Saghieh 2016). Second, several activists moved to stabilize their movements through registering with the state and using foreign Western funds, building both above-ground NGOs as well as underground groups, always with a dual relationship to (in)visibility as "LGBT" activists. Hence, concurrently with various state repressive policies (i.e.: proposals to amend the Penal Code, crackdown on sexual non-normativity regionally) and in line with transnational and regional trends of activist organizing and professionalizing, gender and sexuality activist groups multiplied, often using a specific NGO form that relies on Western donor funding, and specialized skills and services.

5.3 Is HELEM an NGO?

As explored above, since going public, HELEM has become the point of crossing for a number of competing discourses. These include a transnational Human Rights discourse that claims the universalism of LGBT identities and the need for visibility, a counter transnational discourse that claims 'queerness' itself in its various shades, practices, and identities as universal, a local and regional discourse that continues to view homosexuality as a Western deviance meriting legal punishment, and another local discourse that supports HELEM in the name of individual freedoms guaranteed by the secular constitution. Becoming such a locus of contention has meant that HELEM is regularly invoked in debates over sexuality, morality, and progress in Beirut, and is assigned values that it may not represent. One dominant academic discourse that specifically addresses HELEM is Jospeh Massad's Gay International thesis, which I have already explored in chapter 2 (Massad 2007, 2015). To quickly recall, under this thesis HELEM is conceived as the catalyst of imperial Western intervention through funding for 'LGBT rights' which in turn creates a specific kind of acceptable non-normative sexual identity. The following section therefore asks whether

HELEM is indeed the type of successful Western-style NGO that aims to uphold the homosexual-heterosexual binary and convert others into its folds, while supporting the imperial intervention of the Gay International.

In telling HELEM's history in detail, I demonstrate how HELEM's NGOization process is incomplete and messy, and actually reveals contentious and contradictory hedging of dominant power structures. It thus troubles our understanding of an inevitable NGOization as imagined in Massad's Gay International conception. More so, the history reveals that even when some of the above discourses meet and clash in HELEM, they also exist concurrently, and hence they break our understanding of a unidirectional 'progress' from on-ground social movements towards an NGOized model.

As its own history shows above, HELEM did not operate as a regular NGO for several years and remains in an unstable and precarious standing – in fact, it has long been the poorest of above-ground sexuality-rights NGOs on the scene. Any conversation about its formalizing as an activist movement must necessarily take into account the conditions enabling or preventing the specific pattern of institutionalization. In other words, I argue it is inaccurate to call HELEM an NGO given the conditions from which it emerged: unofficial standing with the state, minimal unstable and partial funding, and its internal structure that was based on direct membership in the organization with voting privileges. Rather, I argue in this section that HELEM's NGOization moment did not come until the end of 2013.

After several years of little to no activity, operating without a director, and running out of funds, several of HELEM's older members and executive board members decided to rethink the organization's dysfunctional structure and declining role. In the fall of 2013, the small group agreed that a major problem with HELEM's stagnation has always been an irreconcilable division between an "Executive Board" (unpaid positions) and an "Executive Director" (paid position) both of whom are elected by the membership. Having two executive entities often pitted the Director against the Board in an irresolvable tension, leading to a personalization of disagreements. Some argued that the fact the board members were elected but unpaid for their work meant that there was no firm system of accountability. Moreover, HELEM's regular membership – composed of persons who visit the center – was continuously fluctuating. With the exception of a few regular attendees, most persons would go to the center to meet new friends or lovers, experience a gay space, or kill time in a city that has little public space available. Formal meetings were often of little interest, and

presence was minimal during most General Assemblies in which the membership debated political visions, activist priorities, and voted for volunteer committees such as the "Culture Club" or for new Board members. This often caused a difficulty in passing any new regulations that required the consensus of the majority of members.

Taking all of this into consideration, the small group proposed a new structure that they presented as a "hybrid" between a community organization and an NGO. In their vision, a "hybrid" structure meant operating both as a formal NGO and as a space for the community – a common strategy used to manage neoliberal structures of funding on the one hand and community needs and visions on the other, as experienced by a plethora of women's and feminist NGOs worldwide (Alvarez 1999). Their goal was to create several paid positions that would ensure the organization would continue its own agenda in lobbying against Article 534 and separate these from the community center's activities (film screenings, protests, campaigns, etc). These would include a paid director, case worker, and a fundraising section. The executive board would be replaced with an advisory board, including hand-picked activist figures and notable personas, as well as representatives of HELEM's members who would be elected to the position in order to share the community's view on the organization's function and maintain the organization's accountability towards its community's activist vision. The team presented their vision to the members over a number of meetings and General Assemblies in 2013, and the members debated the proposal. While many agreed with the new proposed structure, several members wondered whether this new form would mean a loss of community-based organizing, or a loss of members' power and voice in the organization, rendering it simply another NGO with donor priorities and a disregard for members' voices. Others also inquired whether this move would indeed help HELEM's legacy or hurt it, and what it meant for future campaigns and activities. Most members did not show up to the meetings however, making it difficult to vote on the restructuring. Finally, in December 2013, the GA reached the minimum threshold of members present and voted in favor of HELEM transitioning into the proposed "hybrid" NGO structure and in essence to withdraw their power as members and engage with the organization as volunteers. The team was given six months to lead the transition phase and hire a new director, and HELEM was meant to re-launch itself under the new structure within a year.

However, the transition was not as smooth as anticipated. HELEM struggled with finding a new director – so much so that even I was offered to apply for the position – and

was running out of funding to pay for the center's rent. In addition, the Zico house management where HELEM's community center was located began expressing discriminatory attitudes when it found out that HELEM was now hosting a new project on its premises for Syrian refugees called "Whispers;" which would later become an independent NGO called Proud. It wasn't long before the Whispers project relocated to another building and HELEM closed its community center for the first time in over a decade. Closing the center meant canceling one of the very few free spaces for gay men and trans persons in Beirut.[39]

HELEM hired a director in 2014 and received new grants from international funders such as Arcus Foundation, European Endowment for Democracy, Hivos, and Open Society Foundations – all new funders. It rented an office in a shared office building in Hamra and hired a case worker to continue its transition plan. Eventually the transition team also secured a new community center in the bustling Armenian neighborhood of Mar Mkhayel, which it opened in 2016 after hiring a space-director. A few months later, the executive office moved back into the community center, and new and old members began returning to HELEM for weekly meeting, movie screenings, and activities. Seeing that three years had passed with only partial advancement in the transition plan, the original transition team began discussing other options with the director and evaluating whether to continue pursuing the transition to a hybrid NGO, or whether to return to the old model of only running a community center with one paid director.

The most significant disagreement between the director and a member of the transition team was over the role of the members in the organization and the need for an advisory or executive board. On the one hand, parts of the transition team wanted to return to the full-membership model, arguing that the hybrid model is not working and is instead causing direct depoliticization by removing members from any decision-making power and accepting them as volunteers only, who are barely consulted. The director and other members of the team on the other hand argued for the return of the executive board, keeping the members as volunteers who would work on whichever activities and campaigns the organization decided on together, and who would be consulted in the organization's strategic vision. The disagreement ended with part of the transition team leaving the organization due to what they saw as HELEM's deliberate and in their view unnecessary depoliticization and

[39] However, during this phase HELEM continued its case work with arrested persons, and the costs of such help were frequently covered from the team's own income.

cooptation into a fully NGOized model, through turning members into volunteers and service recipients, curtailing membership voices, and insisting on multiplying paid positions.

The management continued in its plans, established an Advisory Board, and continued in its advocacy work. Notably, it also changed its funding structure and began receiving funds through another organization's bank accounts – AFE; Arab Foundation for Equality – whose director, Georges Azzi, was a previous director of HELEM, and currently sits on its advisory board. The move was justified as a need to respond to funders' demands of having a formal channel through which to process grants and not do so through personal bank accounts. However, HELEM received funds through personal accounts for over a decade under mutual agreements with funders and an understanding for HELEM's precarious legal position. Hence, some members perceived this move as another step in HELEM's shift towards uncritical NGOization at the price of its autonomy and independence. HELEM also began producing reports in line with the funding requirements, while cooperating with other progressive organizations that work on gender and non-normative sexualities in Beirut and attempted to reach out to communities outside of Beirut, such as in Tripoli.

As this short history demonstrates, HELEM has struggled significantly to remain functional as a community-based group due to financial constraints, its precarious position towards the state, inner disagreements over structure and hierarchy, uneasy transition towards formal politics and institutionalization, and messy NGOization. HELEM's negotiation of its own role both as an NGO and as a local community space has caused several frictions, one of which is about the definitions of community and sexual politics, expressed through clashes over (in)appropriate and (un)acceptable behavior. In the next section I closely examine how one specific practice became the locus of tension; namely the practice of *Shakher*, a form of teasing and verbal play practiced by many in the community. While one can read the debate over *Shkaher* as a clash between transnational expectations of politically correct behavior versus the erasure of a local practice (as per the Gay International thesis), the actual on-ground results of this clash reveal an active contestation zone in which all sides participate in contradictory positions, sometimes labeling *Shakher* as bullying, and other times celebrating it as a local form of community building and fun. These changing positions, I argue, represent another kind of space-dependent and momentary hedging of dominant structures and discourses of power. They demonstrate the inapplicability of a unidirectional narrative of

NGOization of social/activists movements, and rather reveal a messier process of contestation over the meaning of community, its boundries, and its politics.

5.4 *Shakher*: A Local Community Practice?

I walked down to HELEM's center to attend one of the cultural club's biweekly meetings. For most of 2013, these public meetings were held twice a week – Wednesdays and Thursdays – and often included a movie night and a general topic night. Topics varied from presentations on sexual health, discussions of homophobic legislation in Russia and gay marriage in France, "coming out," or discussions of upcoming campaigns. Having met almost all of HELEM's frequenters by then, I often came early to have a chat with others before a meeting started. I wore my usual cloth pants and a dark shirt. Instead of keeping my hair in a ponytail as I usually did when walking in the street – a habit I grew up believing would bring me less street harassment – I chose to let it loose this time. I walked down the steep residential streets in Zarif to the always congested Spears road and entered the center. Only three other persons had arrived, and they shared a conversation among each other that seemed private and inappropriate for me to interrupt. Seconds later, Intisar – a HELEM member and an acquaintance at that point – entered sporting his usual loud bustling demeanor and sat next to me on the empty couch. Intisar saw the group dynamic and decided to engage with me instead. Noticing my uncharacteristic loose hair, he condescendingly remarked: "I see you're attempting femininity today!" I frowned in anger, but he laughed it off and changed the topic. The interaction left me bewildered, not only because of how I would normally interpret such a comment – as not very different from street harassment – but also because Intisar and I were mere acquaintances at that point, and there had been no pretext between us that permitted such a personal comment.

It wasn't until after I interviewed Intisar several months later – and after we got to know each other – that I understood the interaction differently. Intisar had been one of the proponents of being allowed to use inappropriate comments and politically incorrect words in the center after HELEM's board decided to ban it. He, among others in and around HELEM, referred to this practice as *Shakher*. Reminiscent of queer camp, which is "an excessively stylized parody and in-group humor" (Horn 2017, 15), *Shakher* is a community-specific practice of witty, edgy, and often rude mocking, or pushy verbal interactions between two or

more persons, often identifying as gay men and transwomen.[40] The content of such verbal interactions varies from comments on appearance, vocal and bodily self-presentation, language, or even any particular articulation or action. In principle, the practice is meant to test boundaries, create a fun and entertaining interaction, but also test the other person's wittiness, ability to respond, and ability to establish a form of dominance or defense in the shared space. However, it is also central for getting to know one another and for building ties and relations, and possibly for building community, as Intisar explains:

> Because we know we are marginalized, we are hard on ourselves, so that we are more able to survive in the outside world. Because if we can survive amongst us, the bitchiest, then we will survive amongst everyone else who is not as bitchy. If you can't take a fucking joke, you're not going to be shredded by us. The people outside will shred you.

One of the first *Shakher* instances I observed was when two Syrian transwomen were introduced to each other. After finding out which town each woman was from in Syria, a verbal battle ensued. The first woman began, condescendingly, with "Oh so they have people like you in Homs?" and the other replied "Of course they do, what did you think? That you in Damascus are the original?" Such an interaction continued for a few more minutes while the two women got to know each other and acknowledged each other's wit as the rest of the group observed amusingly. This kind of interaction is reminiscent of the practice of "reading" among black queer communities in New York. As described by Dorian Corey in Jennie Livingston's Film *Paris is Burning* (Livingston et al. 1992), reading is when: "we talk about your ridiculous shape, your saggy face, your tacky clothes." It is often accompanied by the practice of "shade" or "throwing shade," which is a more nuanced form of outlining differences between two "queens."[41] Reading, shade, and *Shakher* are similar in the sense that they are all community-based languages and linguistic performances used to test and delineate boundaries of belonging and community membership.

At the same time, *Shakher* can refer to simply challenging authority or is used to relieve a tension. For example, I myself was accused of performing *Shakher* when I got into a verbal disagreement with one of the workers at Proud (a self-identified cisgender gay man)

[40] For the purposes of this chapter I unify trans, Transwoman, Transgender woman, under the category "transwoman."
[41] In Dorian's words, shade is: "I don't tell you you're ugly, but I don't have to tell you because you know you're ugly" (Livingston et al. 1992)

over an opinion. As I confronted him about a statement he made[42], our intense debate suddenly shifted the mood into a more serious one. Instead of engaging me further through argumentation, he used the fact that some volunteers were observing us and exclaimed to the group of gay men we were sitting with us: "Well will you look at that! She is *Shakher*-ing me!" His statement ended the tenuous conversation and caused amusement among the group. In itself, the comment was meant to end the disagreement but on friendly terms, while also teasingly making fun of me – someone who is not a gay man – for unknowingly performing a practice and allegedly using a community language or approach that is not mine. Consequently, it re-establishes several boundaries: me as a (welcomed) outsider to the language of *Shakher* and thus to the group of gay men I am sitting with, and him as a figure of authority and authenticity with respect to the group of gay men.

However, *Shakher* can often be perceived as hurtful and inappropriate. This is especially the case when it is used against or with new comers who are unfamiliar with the practice or the group dynamic and to whom this practice can be alienating, over-exposing, or simply offensive. This is one of the reasons behind HELEM's move to curtail or ban it in the community centre. When I asked the acting director Robyn – a Lebanese woman who arrived well after the ban was in place – to explain why HELEM still continues this policy of rejecting *Shakher*, she explained:

> When I came as director to HELEM I lived through only one month of the community center in [zico house] and then it closed. I remember there was a paper on the wall that said "*Shakheer* Contest" [sic][43] or something like that. I was shocked. For me, this should be a friendly space. Even if we of course can't control what people say or how they look at each other, but at least you can take the paper off the wall.
>
> When we moved to the new venue, it was more directorial. And we had open activities [several] times a week. The transitional phase was important for HELEM because it provided persons with a chance to understand each other better without a chance to hurt someone, because they are taking part of the activity. When you are in the middle of an activity, you can't form cliques and then begin to do *shakheer* to someone. […] At one point there was an incident and we had to separate two people from one another. For us, we didn't really care about numbers of attendees for these activities, so if you are going to be bullying others you cannot come. And things like sexual harassment we don't tolerate […]. Sometimes they [the attendees] don't know if this is [an acceptable] self-expression or not, the concept gets lost for

[42] Unfortunately my field notes do not describe the disagreement in detail.
[43] The term shakheer (double E sound) which the person used for the practice is incorrect. Shakheer means snoring, while Shakher refers to the practice discussed.

> them, but if unwanted touching occurred and it was repeatedly refused, then we are forced to ask the person to not return to the center.

It is clear from the director's quote that she disagrees with Intisar's view of *Shakher* as a community building practice and rather sees it as part of what renders HELEM unwelcoming and unfriendly to some, and in a sense, undisciplined. Strikingly, Robyn sees the solution to curtailing *Shakher* to have been facilitated through HELEM's transitional phase. For her, when people came to HELEM's office during the transition phase (when there was no community center but only an office in an office building) they were forced to set these practices aside and participate in the given activity on its own terms. Later in the quote she joins *Shakher* together with other frowned-upon and rejected practices such as bullying, and sexual harassment, which has tarnished HELEM's reputation in the past and caused a major split in the group as a result of which several lesbian, queer women and gay men activists left HELEM (Benoist 2014).[44]

The difference Robyn makes between the two spaces (the office space during the transition phase, and the community space pre-transition) is crucial for advancing my argument on the NGOization and professionalization of HELEM, which was the partial goal of the transitional phase. As much literature demonstrates, curtailing, controlling, or pushing away certain practices is part of the larger process of institutionalizing movements in an NGO form and creating specific kinds of professionalized activists, service recipients, and gendered and sexual selves (Bernal and Grewal 2014). The director is aware of this process and sees it as an important transformation for HELEM. She outlines her understanding of what the movement should look like in the following extended quote:

> Me: I did hear that people defend *Shakher* among each other, including for example among trans people; that this is how we communicate with each other, it is a way to build a community, this is how we "toughen up." What do you think?
>
> Robyn: Of course they are used to a particular pattern of communication. Any group has its own pattern that we don't necessarily know. But if you actually let them speak this way in the activities, and let's say two persons do *shakheer to* each other, is it really true that the other person was not offended or bothered? Is it? For example if you tell a transwoman condescendingly "oh look at you, your voice doesn't resemble a man's even a tiny bit" [meaning it

[44] Based on multiple interviews.

> does] and everyone laughs, does she really not get bothered? If you talk to this woman alone and ask her, "ok if you're not bothered [that they make fun of your voice], then why do you go to a speech therapist?" Then you get to know from her what she actually felt. So I prefer no one says these things.
>
> […] We are a community that demands its rights and to do this you have to stick together. We in the queer community don't all like each other, and you know this very well. But when it comes to getting work done, no; you have to pull through. You have to stop this stuff and focus on work. So no; *shakheer* won't be tolerated for any reason whatsoever, and we won't even debate this. Even if someone comes to me and says this is how I communicate: no; *shakheer* is forbidden. And even if someone is so much giving a bad look at another person – wanting to draw attention to the other person and how inappropriate or cheap he finds his clothes and so on, we will talk to them [and tell them] no you can't look at people this way, etc.
>
> Also, it is very important that we tell people and make them feel that we don't all have to look the same: not all of us have to put make up this way, have make up on or off, or wear a particular thing, have an accent or not, speak in English or French. We can be anything. So this is the important part; that people realize they can be anything, and that people stay nice [to each other].[45]

For Robyn, as a director understanding her task to be one of bringing HELEM in line with a transnational model of sexual-rights, *shakher* is thus not only an unwelcome form of special communication, but it is also a distraction from "work" that needs to be done in HELEM, which in her view primarily includes organized activities with the community. Although she acknowledges the practice as a relevant language for persons who come to the center, she views it as a policing practice that forces persons into behaving similarly or forming cliques that exclude others. Therefore, she defends censoring it in the name of building a stronger *local* movement and community together, one that is based on a specific idea of respectability: no comments on appearance or policing of people's behaviors, accents, and language. Rather, the community and its movement should be "friendly" and should celebrate difference ("We can be anything"). In contrast however, celebrating this difference comes at the price of ousting other differences, namely the performing of *Shakher* as a communicative practice.

[45] In further clarifying the quote in 2019, the director added that she observed transowmen being marginalized in general, and subsequently acted to involve them in HELEM through supporting their own platforms and committees (including a trans committee and a women's committee).

Further, the director justifies the occurrence of such incidents by drawing analogies with a transnational discourse on sexual harassment that has marked HELEM's reputation locally and internationally (Benoist 2014). She explains it as confusion on the side of the participants who do not understand the concept of harassment or are sometimes unaware whether this is an acceptable form of self-expression. Thus, the mission becomes not only to ban such practices, but to educate about why they are unacceptable, and eventually turn away the people who do not comply in order to maintain a friendly and safe community. In the discursive part of the process, *Shakher* is lumped together with "bullying" and "sexual harassment" – two practices that already have established negative narratives and specific histories in HELEM as I explained earlier – and becomes defined as unwanted, unrespectable behavior.

Intisar disagrees with this vision of community building and does not think it is a viable one. When confronting him about the exclusionary aspects of *Shakher*, he acknowledged that the practice can be hurtful and exclusionary, and that he does not agree with his friends when they practice it this way. Directly following his first quote, I asked Intisar the following question about his definition of *Shakher* as a necessary form of survival:

> Me: but how do you escape it? Isn't it a perpetual cycle?
>
> Intisar: You don't, it is a perpetual cycle yes. You only escape it once you have equal rights. You don't see straight men doing this to each other. Once you have status you don't need these measures anymore, they're just there. My argument is against safe spaces. […] When you make a place a safe space, you can't be yourself. Bonds will not emerge in that space; only professional ones. Professional bonds do not make a community, it makes businessmen, it makes politicians, it does not make people together as a community. You don't get the queens of Acid [a gay bar] and the queens of HELEM together unless there is *Shakher*. Unless there is some form of language that is understood by both, that is funny, and that can hurt you as well.

Intisar clearly views that what HELEM is doing is falling into a transnational model of community organizing that depends on disciplining oneself into the business of LGBT politics and NGOs. In fact, Intisar was one of the opponents of HELEM's switch to a professionalized NGO and debated the transition intensely, but later agreed to the hybrid model. In the quote however, he sees a clear failure in attempting to harness an LGBT community through a particular safe space discourse and politically correct language, rather

than tools such as *Shakher*. He creates a differentiation between the "queens of Acid"; persons who prefer to party in a gay and trans-friendly bar, and "queens of HELEM;" gay men whom he perceives as committed to a liberal framework of globalized LGBT rights and a political vision of HELEM as professionalized group or as an NGO. These two crowds, in his opinion, are separate, do not share the same political vision or even daily priorities, have different class positionings, and cannot be brought to work together or to bond through HELEM's NGOized activities but rather through *Shakher*. He does not, however, elaborate on how *Shakher* can bring these two separately perceived groups together.

While the debate for and against *Shakher* so far illustrates a classic account of professionalizing a community through defining acceptable and respectable behaviors and opposition to them, it also remains an incomplete account of the daily interactions and dynamics on the ground, in the center and outside of it. Both Robyn and Intisar offer two conflicting narratives about definitions of community as well as about doing LGBT/sexuality politics which fall into the frame of a clash between a local practice and a globalized professionalized LGBT politics. Yet, neither discourse fully reflects the day-to-day on-ground interactions, the actual functionality of the center, and the ways in which the practices are negotiated. These interactions are typically not as binary and offer more room for maneuvering than was suggested by both Robyn and Intisar. After all, the "queens of HELEM" are also persons who go to Acid, the "queens of Acid" also participate in HELEM's activities, and the no-tolerance for *Shkaher* policy is frequently ignored as exemplified by my own interactions both inside and outside the center.

5.5 Between Shakher and NGOization: Hedging Community

Despite the banning of *Shakher* even before the new director's arrival, I witnessed it take place often, with relative tolerance and to the amusement of many in the group. The fact that the director saw a poster in the center calling for a competition means that the practice was still tolerated in spite of repeated attempts to curtail it by some members. Very frequently, *Shakher* was an affective tool that was used to create a fun joking atmosphere and even those who had their reservations about it were tolerant of it. In other settings such as the Whispers project which was hosted in HELEM, *Shakher* was used to not only perform people' queer selves, but also to lighten the mood during serious moments such as speaking

about cases of sexual assault and rape in front of figures of authority who visited the queer Syrian refugees (see chapter 7). The latter group drew its own lines of interaction, and when the atmosphere was judged (by any member) to be too inappropriate, a person would ask the others to quiet down or to stop joking through repeating the word "*Sabo*." *Sabo* is a code word that is used to warn the group to check itself, especially if in public, for being perceived as too loud or behaving in a manner that could subject it to the risk of harassment or policing, or for simply taking things too far. The word is not however used among the usual frequenters of HELEM and is more common among Syrian gay and transpersons. It is an example of a group developing its own boundary-making practice to maximize its members' safety – while in the street the meaning of safety is often a physical one, in spaces such as Whispers it can simply signal that a joke, or *Shakher*, has gone too far.

The re-opening of HELEM's community center after the transition phase meant that people were no longer confined to attending specific activities at specific times but are rather encouraged to use the space throughout the day, which often results in multiple interactions that cannot all be policed or monitored or even witnessed. Even in group gatherings or biweekly meetings and events, similar practices exist, and it is usually up to the center's director to draw lines on acceptable and unacceptable behavior, terms, or rules. The boundaries are frequently tested, and the community of attendees consistently debates which rules to follow and agree on. In one amusing incident, a HELEM board member who had a firm stance against *Shakher* and the use of politically incorrect terminology such as "Shemale" in the center when he oversaw the space, told me that a group of younger members and attendees ran to him one evening when they saw him in the street and quickly shouted all the words they were not allowed to say at him. Both him and the group burst out in laughter. They knew and took advantage of the fact that he had no authority outside of the center nor over the attendees' own language of daily interaction. Therefore, while some persons in spaces like HELEM encourage a particular type of communication that is in line with circulating globalized narratives of 'political correctness' and ideas about proper LGBT community and respectability; this does not mean it actually erases existing practices or conditions that produce them, or that merely banning a practice is enough to create a particular kind of respectability or professionalism, or to even turn HELEM into a Westernized LGBT NGO that is merely a proxy of the Gay International in Lebanon.

Indeed, some groups such as trans sex workers (several of whom frequent HELEM and engage in *Shakher*), or 'queer' Syrians (see Chapter 7) maintain their communicative codes and boundary-making rules outside even if asked to suspend them at HELEM. To ensure their own safety in public, to debate transactions during sex-work without the client's understanding, and to maintain a sub-group or community relations, several of these groups do not simply shift their identities into becoming institutionalized LGBT activists or apolitical volunteers and members because their daily conditions (the need to do sex work, living underground, or depending on an already-established sub-cultural group) do not match with these types of identities and politics. And although they often clash with those who support creating a 'safe space' or using politically correct terms and following transnational LGBT topics and politics, leading some to leave the group, the debate itself is not necessarily conclusive for their lived realities as sexually non-normative persons, their engagement with community building, or their engagement with other LGBT NGOs.

The fact that these tensions exist therefore makes it difficult to argue, as Massad has, that these organizations and the politics they pursue help erase existing practices in favor of ones that align with global LGBT rights discourses, or that the Gay International simply "represses same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology" (2007, 163). It is important to be nuanced here: while I do agree that the Gay International champions a particular set of discourses and a vision of LGBT politics, and while groups such as HELEM set forward some of the same transnational ideas about transitioning to NGOized models of political correctness, safe spaces, and how to define LGBT identities and political priorities; I have been arguing that it is pivotal to ask whether and how this process matters on the ground, and to draw attention to the ways in which this 'repression' actually operates.[46] As chapter 6 will demonstrate, groups like HELEM are not determining factors in transwomen's choice to identify as Shemale; a transnational category in itself, but one that is perceived as derogatory among LGBT activists. Neither does HELEM convert sex workers away from their language of transaction or from practicing sex work, even if they frown upon practices such as *Shakher,* consider it unprofessional, and at the

[46] In his newest book, Joseph Massad argues that "Helem was not founded by an existing gay community in Lebanon; rather, Helem's purpose is to create such a community" (2015, 224). I agree that HELEM's purpose is to create a community, but I argue that the fact that this process is incomplete, messy, cyclical, and space-bound, is pivotal to understanding its unfolding for persons of non-normative sexualities who disagree with the version of globalized LGBT politics that some in HELEM pursue. I am proposing that HELEM is not only often inconsequential in changing their material and lived realities, but also, that the same persons engage with the organization nonetheless, use its community space, debate its version of politics, and retain their own sexual practices and identities even if sometimes – but not always – suspending them temporarily.

same time offer legal support to sex workers in need. The primary definition is that of HELEM as a particular community space and organization with a set of supposedly un-tolerated behaviors that are cyclically and concurrently policed and ignored. This too renders HELEM's processes of NGOization and professionalization partial, messy, and never quite complete.

For persons like Intisar, the debate matters because of his own vision of what HELEM means to him personally. Having never held a position in HELEM (aside from membership), Intisar still spoke of HELEM as his group and his organization, and as one of the two communities he sees himself part of and has seen a need to bring together. In his view, HELEM has the responsibility to serve and support disadvantaged persons and groups like low-income sex workers, Shemales, Ladyboys, and transwoman and other trans persons. And while HELEM does provide legal support, informal assistance for finding housing for persons kicked out of their homes and refugees, some meals, and various psychological services, it still falls short in addressing the precarious living situations of primarily transwomen and sex workers. HELEM does not invest in applying for funding for shelters or temporary housing, or so-called 'exit programs' for sex workers who wish to find different employment for example, or for projects that lobby for trans persons' rights to change their IDs, and does not conduct research on or provide information about sex reassignment surgeries (only informally), etc. HELEM's funding primarily covers the cost of a community center, the cost of legal aid in cases arrested under Article 534, and lobbies judges for reinterpreting Article 534 (but not other articles that punish other sexual behaviors, or even articles that police women's sexualities and bodies). While Intisar sees these issues to be of importance, he believes they constitute a type of politics which separates "Queens of HELEM" from the "Queens of Acid." In a sense, this organized form of activism is a non-priority for him, rather, creating a fun and 'campy' interactive atmosphere through encouraging *Shakher* for example, is more important as a form of community building and survival strategy. This is why, for example, Intisar started a monthly fun night in HELEM under the title "*layali il-sit Shaza*" (the nights of madam Shaza) in which he impersonates a fictional female story teller. Shaza would choose a topic such as stories of betrayal, interactions on public transport, or first sexual encounters, and the attendees would share their tales amidst a mixed atmosphere of seriousness, laughter, political (in)correctness, and

Shakher. The activity continued even after Intisar's departure, and continues to be a site of contestation over what counts as appropriate to say and what does not.[47]

The story of HELEM hence offers an account of inevitable albeit incomplete, messy, and contested transformation toward a particular form of LGBT NGOization. It demonstrates that such a process – despite being associated with neoliberal professionalization and globalized trends in LGBT politics and donor tastes – is in fact fragmented as many have argued (Alvarez 1999; Bernal and Grewal 2014; Helms 2014). Chiefly, it also demonstrates that creating proper professionalized identities is a space-bound process in Beirut, as the presence and absence of a community center shows. At the same time, the perpetual banning and ignoring of local practices such as *Shakher* shows that the kind of LGBT professionalization associated with NGOization can in fact run concurrently with existing modes of community building and identification, even when they clash in a specific space. The members and attendees of HELEM continuously shape and argue over the clash between these two cross-braced strands, but at the same time, they operate within both registrars, in a zone of contestation they co-create depending on the space they occupy – the community center, the street, or a bar like Acid.

[47] This activity was initiated toward the end of my fieldwork. After returning to the field several times since 2013, I have been able to observe ad participate in these gatherings but not given permission to share any of the personal stories.

They [the managers] split it up between themselves;
everyone knows this:
Fancy has the gays, The Room has the trans
- *Rosette, bartender.*

Chapter 6: Between Bars: on Being Classy, Shemale, and Trans

Amir and I decided to have a drink in Bardo on an early Sunday evening with one of his dates. Bardo, a local gay bar at the beginning of the Hamra district in Beirut, was just a few streets away from my shared apartment in Zarif and from HELEM's old community center in Zico House. Usually we would go there when the bar was fuller, order one drink for the night and linger outside in the crammed, dimly lit, white-tiled corridor with others, engaging in a ritualized observation of every newcomer. This time we walked through the eerily empty corridor and into the bar's main seating area. The bar was entirely empty, most likely due to new military checkpoints that had just popped up in the city. Earlier in the day, news spread of the killing of 10 Lebanese army personnel at the Lebanese border with Syria, raising tensions across the country and prompting an immediate security response. The checkpoints often create traffic congestions and limit movement between neighborhoods, deterring most from leaving the particular area they are in, and emptying out bars like Bardo.

We were immediately welcomed by George, the bar's manager, sporting his usual friendly smile. Unexpectedly, George turned to Amir and told him he needed to talk with him about something he had witnessed a few nights before at a gay rooftop party called Fancy. After we settled in a quiet corner, George joined us at our table and explained he witnessed a transwoman[48] being kicked out of Fancy rather violently. George, who has been around circles such as HELEM activists, prefers to use the term transwoman instead of Shemale because of its perceived political correctness. He had tried to interfere, but was unsuccessful. George then mentioned that this is not the first case of a transwoman being turned away from Fancy. He worried it indicated a rise in transphobia at those parties. George also wondered whether the public shutdown of another gay bar, Ghost, two months prior, after the arrest of four clients among them trans persons, had made other bars more careful about the kinds of visibly non-normative persons they let in. He asked Amir if HELEM could do anything in response. Amir, a HELEM board member at the time, promised to look into it.

[48] For the purposes of this chapter I will use "transwoman" or "trans" to refer to local usage and self-identification, and "Transwoman" when wanting to include the identity category under the Transgender umbrella in "LGBT."

Several weeks later I met Rosette, a self-identifying transwoman (who uses "trans" for short, but also switches to referring to herself as a "woman") working as a bartender at a place known to be frequented primarily by self-identifying Shemales (some of whom use the term trans) and cisgender men called The Room. After reflecting on her life as a married, working woman, Rosette mentioned that her boss Jameel and the Fancy party managers have struck a deal to divide clients. As Rosette shares in the quote at the beginning of the chapter, Fancy agreed to welcome primarily gay men, whereas The Room would continue to cater predominantly to self-identifying transwomen and Shemales. Further informants confirmed that such an informal bar deal does exist, and that it was reached shortly after the closure of Ghost by the Beirut municipality in 2013.

Why, and how, did the bars come to strike such a deal, one that defines and divides clients seemingly in line with globalized categories of "Gay" and "Transwoman"? Who do the categories of G and T (as part of LGBT) include? What role does space-making and state policing have in enabling this bar deal? Additionally, how might we understand the bars' varying styles of management and internal surveillance as process of (re)producing and hedging categories of non-normative gendered sexuality?

This chapter explores the ways in which local 'queer' bars and rooftop parties in Beirut, as a set of small, specialized for-profit businesses, contribute to customers' practices of hedging their gendered appearance and sexual identification. By examining three bars in particular – the Fancy rooftop party, The Room bar, and Bardo bar – and the emergence of a business deal between the first two, I argue that we must consider gendered sexual identity categorization as a negotiated interaction between several cross-braced (f)actors, including: bars, clients, profit, state and space. While the interaction between bars and clients uses and reuses definitions of circulating categories such as Gay, Transwoman, and Shemale in order to divide profit, they also function as spaces of the "homosexual sphere" (Merabet 2014a) that produce complicated and conflicted labor, communal, and queer relations, all informed by a sectarian geography and a relationship with state policing organs.

My analysis will show that both bars' and clients' choices of acceptable gendered and sexual self-presentation cannot be understood using a Western framework of LGBT identity categories and politics (Altman 2001), or simplified and Orientalist discourses of homophobia and transphobia that cast Beirut as regressive on LGBT rights. Rather, I argue that both bars and clients engage in processes of hedging: bars invest in deals with one

another and with the police in order to divide profit and secure business, even when these deals hurt their own customers or reify gender-based, discriminatory, and classed divisions. On their part, clients hedge their self-appearance and the choices of bars they frequent depending on the risk of rejection or arrest, and on the type of communal space, services, and social opportunities the bars offer.

When considering the queer party scene as an interaction between bar owners and bar patrons then, new opportunities for conceptualizing gendered sexualities emerge. First, it becomes evident that we must go beyond employing an intersectional lens of analysis that would only focus on the clients' gender, race, class and sexuality as identity markers which are taken to explain an individual's identity in a particular setting (see introduction and chapter 2). By taking a wider look at the intersection itself and locating it in a wider structure of cross-braced factors that enable it – such as geographic and sectarian space, state power and social policing, and profit-making – we are able to observe the unfolding process of hedging identities for profit and for leisure. Non-normative gendered sexual identities are revealed as intimately dependent on ideas of classed respectability, and as sites of constant play and redefinition. Therefore, to understand the making and shaping of gender and sexual non-normativity in Beirut, we must return to the larger cross-braced structures in which they are hedged. Thus, this chapter will focus on bars and their relations to one another, the state, and the community, rather than focusing narrowly on non-normative identity-making.

First, I offer a brief reminder of the terms used in this chapter. As I do throughout the dissertation, the term queer is used in specific reference to its analytical function in Queer Theory. I replace "queer" with "sexually non-normative" when I refer to local non-normative practices that I wish to hold back from enfolding into the Western-originating Queer Theory. In Beirut, Ladyboys refers to men who desire other men, some of whom perform sex-work with men, and who are considered feminine in their gendered performance. Shemales are typically born male and have undergone a breast augmentation surgery (otherwise referred to as 'top surgery') but not sexual transition, correction, or re-assignment (commonly referred to as a 'bottom surgery'). Shemales are understood to be transwomen whose physique is considered 'masculine' (significant height, depth of voice, broad shoulders). If they perform sex-work, they can perform active and passive, penetrative and penetrated roles, and for some the choice not to transition sexually is connected to their preferred labor practices. Just like Ladyboys, it is difficult to trace the term's entrance into popular speech, although some of the

term's popularization may likely be linked in part to increased access to pornographic material on the internet. Both Ladyboys and Shemales are terms that are considered derogatory by NGOs, activists, and by some self-identifying transwomen as well.[49]

Trans can be used as an umbrella term in Beirut. In daily speech, it is not usually uttered in the full form, "transwoman" or "transgender," but rather only as "trans." Trans can also include transmen. I employ "trans" in its local use, and I use specifically "transwomen" only when wanting to convey that transmen are excluded. This term is also perceived as politically correct by NGOs and its use is encouraged (sometimes dictated) in place of terms such as Shemale and Ladyboy, which are generally banned from NGO spaces (see previous chapter). Therefore, although some of my interlocutors present themselves to me as trans, they would at other times use the term interchangeably with Shemale or Ladyboy (as the case of Nancy in the Methodology chapter demonstrates). Lastly, for the purposes of this chapter, and as a reminder to the reader, I will use a capitalized "Transwoman" when indicating the identity's specific attachment to the "Transgender" category in "LGBT."

6.1 Bars as Spaces of Gendered Queer Self Production

"The Gay Paradise of the Arab World," declares the title of an article on the Gay Star Travel website listing gay bars and spaces in Beirut (Reid-Smith 2012). The 2012 article is hardly unique. In fact, it is part of a fast-growing genre of travelogues and tourist guides (re)creating a homoerotic imaginary of the city, primarily for European and North American travelers eager to experience an Orientalist fantasy (McCormick 2011; Moussawi 2013). The genre includes preliminary lists of gay-friendly hotels, saunas, hammams, restaurants, beaches, and of course bars and party spaces. The fantasy rests on combining two contradictory elements: the extension of the familiar to the exotic other ('they have gay bars like us'), coupled with a sense of risk and excitement for the possibility of experiencing a gay underground in an allegedly homophobic, violent, yet sensual and exotic Middle Eastern

[49] I once inquired at an open informational session in 2017 to whom is the term Shemale offensive? The two cis-gender activists leading the session answered it is offensive to intersex persons who were born with ambiguous or multiple genitalia and do not fit the sex-binary. However, the term "intersex" was not known among my interlocutors at the time of research, or in fact, among many activists. Even when referring to persons considered as intersex, my interlocutors would always use Trans, Shemale, or Ladyboy, and unless they discussed the person's genitals – which would occur frequently in small groups but was frowned upon in activist settings – there would be no way of drawing a line between trans and intersex. In itself, this negotiation of Trans and Intersex categories is relevant to this dissertation. However, it is beyond my scope and ability of research at this point.

space. For the target of these articles –Western travelers – spaces like bars thus become venues through which to experience, achieve, or "consolidate" (Hennessey 1995) a neoliberal and neo-colonial 'gay' subjectivity (Puar 2002; Manalansan 2005). More so in Beirut, the bar in this frame becomes a rendezvous zone between a neoliberal consumerist desire and an Orientalist fantasy that produces the consumer gay subject.

The bar is always already a space where the local and the global meet. However, analyzing these spaces at the level of the interactions and flows of Western travelers and their sexual expression in the city limits our understanding of these spaces to one particular frame of analysis: that of the workings of the Western gaze and its material affects on the ground (McCormick 2011). What about other factors? Considering that the majority of the clientele at such bars and spaces in Beirut are Lebanese nationals, Syrians, Palestinians, and seasonal tourists from the Gulf, how then do these queer spaces and the persons regularly frequenting them interact? What new frames of understanding of gendered sexualities can be produced from such an interaction? If examined as a relationship between bar owners and bar goers, what new political identity borders and "queer" subjectivities can be rendered visible?

In theorizing the production of "queer spaces" in Beirut, Sofian Merabet proposed "zones of encounter" as a theoretical concept referring to "particular urban locations that foster attempts, with various levels of success, to transcend spatio-temporal fixities" (2014a, 5). These spatio-temporal "moments" allow for the production and imagining of a "homosexual sphere" in Beirut, which Merabet sees as produced through a "dialectic relationship between a controlled space […], and a contested space, […] lived in by all sorts of people and their queer performative corporeality" (Merabet 2014a, 5) . In this sense, interactions within these spatial moments – be they active contestations, subversions, spoken performances, or bodily navigations – are what makes claiming them as a "queer space" possible in Beirut (ibid).

The zones of encounter can be momentary spaces such as a suggestive gaze or a flirting exchange at a street corner (ibid). But they can also be spaces that are more consistently appropriated as queer through their collective contestation by groups of gay men, lesbian women, and trans and queer persons, whether consciously or not. For example, Merabet describes spots such as a set of public steps near the Lebanese Grand Serail (parliament) in the heart of the wealthy and reconstructed 'downtown' Beirut as a location where groups of gay men with fewer socioeconomic privileges would gather for hours in a

desire to be part of the wealthy scene, despite being economically unable to drink in its cafes or buy the clothes in its high-end fashion stores (ibid). Thus, the stairs become one such encounter zone where a gendered and sexual "performance of wealth" is part and parcel of a "spatial economy of [queer] desire" (ibid, 62–63). The performance itself does not only include taking advantage of wealthy surroundings to blend in as part of the scene, but also includes a commitment to showing up dressed fashionably and showing off to one's friends. Class "drag" – as per Allan Bérubé's (2011, 253) description of dressing up and embodying or performing a posh class status that one does not belong to – becomes an essential way through which low-income gender and sexually non-normative persons compose a non-normative self as part of the production of a queer zone in Beirut.

Merabet thus argues that queer space is produced through its inhabitation by performative queer subjects and bodies in a given time and moment. In this vein, bars like The Room, Bardo, the newly opened Wolf, and previously, Ghost and Acid (now closed), as well as bi-weekly rooftop parties called Fancy, Project, Ego, OM, EX, and other occasionally organized 'gay parties,' can be understood as recognizable "zones of encounter" where gay men, lesbian women, Ladyboys, Shemales, trans and other gender and sexual non-normative persons gather at set times and occasions. In their own way, these bars and clubs provide temporary but more spatially-fixed grounds for a variety of classed, racialized, gendered, and sexual self expressions premised upon a politics of consumption, profit, leisure, and fun.

At the same time however, the very existence of these bars is not only based on, or produced through, queer persons' continuous and context-specific spatial reclamation through performances of inhabitation. Geography scholars such as Natalie Oswin have argued that often "queer space" is conceptualized as "an abstract calculation of heterosexual domination and homosexual resistance" (2008, 91) relying on queer bodies to perform this resistance, thus ignoring, as Lisa Duggan (2002) has argued, that they may be just as invested in regimes of (homo)normativity. Other scholarship on queer space uses queer theory to contest the claim that queer subjectivity is fixed, but in Oswin's view, fails also to recognize that "no individual that lives in the social world is free-floating or disembodied" (2008, 92). Oswin therefore argues against "the analytical usefulness of the notion of queer space" and proposes that we rather adopt "a queer approach to space" (ibid, 91). Such an approach means taking the focus away from queer or non-normative subjectivity, not arguing for its abstract fluidity, but rather aiming to "examine sexuality's deployments in concert with racialized, classed and

gendered processes" (ibid, 100). For Oswin then, to follow a queer spatial approach is to look at the gay bar as a queer space that cannot be sufficiently analyzed from the point of view of its subjects, but rather through the larger systems of cis-heteronormativity, racialization, and class.

Because, as I have argued in chapter 5, gendered sexual identities are hedged interactions in Beirut, and because space in Beirut is not only produced through the intersectional trilogy of race-gender-class, I propose a different approach that accounts for both structure and subjectivity. Hence I join Merabet's (2014a) queer ethnographic approach to centralizing the (co)production of queer subjectivity with Oswin's post-structuralist and queer emphasis on "position[ing] sexuality within multifaceted constellations of power" (2008, 100). Once we examine bar spaces as a relationship between bar owners and bar goers, we see that their existence is bound by several cross-braced factors: a relationship with the state and its organs (for example, bars still need a valid license to operate and a working relationship with the police and surveillance divisions), geographical specificities (division of neighborhoods in accordance to sectarian loyalties informs which streets and crossings have permanent or temporary checkpoints), and the possibility of creating a source of sustainable profit (which determines what kind of bodily self-presentation and corporeal expression are allowed or policed in these premises). While cross-bracing reveals the kinds of larger structures at work in shaping the possibility of queer space, hedging shows us how actors navigate such structures, and hence how gender and sexual non-normativity and subjectivity are co-produced.

These cross-braced structures mean that bar managers and clients have to continuously hedge what counts as acceptable social and sexual behavior, meaning profitable behavior, and behavior that is uninviting of intervention by the state, the wider public, or other bars, in order to (re)produce the bar as a specific profit-making queer space. The sets of person-to-person interactions allowed and negotiated in each bar vary significantly, as do the types of classed, gendered, racialized and bodily and sexual interactions. Yet, despite this variance which I will capture in the following ethnographic sections, the people gathered in these spaces also do so based on some form of shared imagining of what affective and sexual possibilities these bars can offer in the Beiruti context; that is to say, an opportunity to embody, reaffirm, or practice one's gendered and sexual self, specifically a self that is often cast as non-normative, but not without being policed. The bars also provide a space where to

pick up clients for sex-work, where to find sexual gratification, meet friends or dates, experience sexual desire, live through a break-up, or simply experience a bordered queer setting purposefully constructed as such. Therefore, these bars serve as key sites for a wide range of cross-bracing structures, and subsequently, a multiplicity of hedging practices used to navigate them.

Finally, it is important to note that queer rooftop parties specifically have seen a multiplication in recent years. The rapid privatization of the city after the end of the Civil War (1990), the massive reconstruction plan by then Prime Minister Rafic Al-Hariri using Gulf investment in real estate in the early 2000s, as well as the reconstruction of the city after the 2006 Israeli bombing have together caused a vast loss of public space across the city in favor of private profit-making businesses and a solidification of space-control by sectarian powers (Gaspard 2003; Al-Harithy 2010). The spread of expensive rooftop parties and the multiplication of bars is linked to a major neoliberalization process, realized through the reconstruction and re-imagining of Beirut not only as an open and 'Western'-friendly city, but also as a modern yet historically-rooted, rich yet smaller "Dubai" (Bădescu Forthcoming). Subsequently, such radical reconstruction processes have affected the ways in which sexual desires can be and are expressed, as Merabet (2014a) demonstrates in the example of downtown Beirut I cited earlier. But it also changes the ways in which gender, sexuality, and sexual desire are expressed politically, thus the ways in which leisurely activity itself becomes political (Khalili 2016).[50]

In the next sections I focus specifically on three cross-braced dynamics that turn bars into crucial sites of specific gendered and sexuality reproduction in Beirut, namely: bars' hedging of profit making and community building, raids and social-norm policing, and clients' hedging of gendered and classed bodily self-presentation. I do so by first offering a *mise-en-scene* of The Room bar, the Fancy rooftop party, and the Bardo bar in Beirut. Through describing various persons' relationships to these bars, I argue that although a split between 'gay' and 'trans' clients appears to mirror a transnational use of the G and T categories, the way this split is practiced on the ground depends on factors other than just the idea of an 'authentic' self expression or a coherent gender/sex divide—the underlining

[50] This does not mean that queer life in Beirut was never at least partly organized around specific businesses. My interlocutors referred to cross dressing and drag parties in the 1970s, gay hangout spots in the 1980s, hook-up, cruising and sex work spots such as the Zaytouna Bay during the Civil War (1975 – 1990), and a couple of smaller restaurants in the nineties known to host parties that welcomed gay men, cross-dressers, men in drag, transpersons, and lesbian and queer women.

assumptions in transnational LGBT identity categorization. These factors include a business deal that divides clients across bars, and a set of gendered and classed assumptions that determine who passes as a respectable and profitable client. Through describing the bars and the interactions in them, I reveal the cross-braced social and economic structures and relations that undoubtedly make bars a primary queer space for crafting and experiencing gender and sexual non-normativity in Beirut.

6.1.1 The Room: Profit and Community?

Right on a quiet intersection on the infamous Monot[51] street in Beirut's Achrafiyeh Christian neighborhood lies the entrance to The Room, a local bar known to cater to trans persons, primarily self-identifying Shemales, and that welcomes cis-gender straight men.[52] Despite its central location it would be very easy to miss its nondescript black door and faded sign. However, the continuous presence of two, sometimes three bouncers charged with collecting the entry fee and managing the customers is what identifies it as a party spot. On the inside, the space is decorated with several black poles, the floor covered with chipped red paint, showing the trails of long nights of dancing, and little interest in impressing anyone with extravagant décor. Despite its surprisingly small size for a party space, on a busy night the dance floor can fit over a hundred people. The bar is open only three nights a week; for the entrance price of $20, a customer can order two free drinks prepared by Rosette or one of the other two regular bartenders.

Typically, the two busiest nights in The Room are its annual Halloween party (October 31st) and Saint Barbara's Day (December 4th). Both days are celebrated among many trans persons, Shemales, and Ladyboys as perfect occasions to dress up extravagantly. While the former is understood as an occasion to dress in costumes, the latter is a religious holiday celebrated by the Orthodox Christian community in Lebanon (and elsewhere in the region), commemorating Saint Barbara, martyred for staying true to her Christian faith. Some transwomen and Shemales I spoke with (Christian, Muslim, and secular) see Saint Barbara as a powerful female figure who disguised herself through cross-dressing as a man in order to stay alive. Many claim her cross-dressing and celebrate it; for others, it is primarily a

[51] For a short history of the Monot street see chapter 4 "Queer Performances and the Politics of Place: The Art of Drag and the Routine of sectarianism" in Sofian Merabet's Queer Beirut, 2014, (91-111)
[52] The term "cis-gender" is not part of the used vocabulary in The Room. Instead, they are referred to either as "tabeei'i" meaning "normal", or less commonly as "straight."

religious holiday. Overall, for transwomen and Shemales who are part of the partying crowd, these two occasions are ones when they can allow themselves a day of dressing in accordance with their gender identity –glamorously so – without drawing traditional forms of harassment they would face on other days when out in public. To the cisgender heteronormative eye, seeing transwomen and Shemales in public on those two nights might only draw a conclusion that they are in 'costume' in line with the performance associated with these festivities. Although Halloween is dominated by dressing up in costumes of scary and fictional characters; Disney princesses, bridal wear, and imitations of regional female celebrities, among other symbols of heteronormative femininity, are common on both occasions.

As I was inquiring about the history of The Room, I learned that it was preceded by a series of less frequent dress-up parties with pageant-like contests at rented spaces in the city, organized by the bar's current Lebanese owner, Jameel, and by one of his long term Lebanese friends and top frequenters, Kevin. Kevin identifies mostly as gay; he often dresses in drag and makes dresses for others as well. He once described to me how successful the events were with hundreds of participants attending. The largest event he organized was the annual Saint Barbara day party, for which he charged a high entrance fee. "Now every day is Saint Barbara day," Kevin sighed, reflecting on the fact that a bar like The Room is open three nights a week and the large number of transwomen and Shemales frequenting the bar. Kevin stopped organizing his parties when Jameel opened The Room independently in 2006.

Jameel himself appears in the community mainly as a businessman, interested in steady profit. Jabir, who is friends with some of the other bar managers and himself manages EX bar – a gay bar neither in competition with The Room nor Fancy – remarked: "I have personally heard voice recordings of Jameel [voice text messages] saying 'these trans built me two apartments, don't touch them,'" referring to Jameel's business profits and motives to keep his bar the primary venue for transwomen and Shemales. Similar opinions about Jameel, as a person primarily interested in turning a profit, were shared among many of my interlocutors. Even when footage from a party in his bar was allegedly leaked to an Egyptian media channel for sensationalist depiction of Shemales and transpersons, and for inciting a moral panic about deviancy and immorality in Egypt, the prevailing perception was that

Jameel agreed for his bar to be filmed in exchange for monetary compensation, with little concern for his clients or the possible consequences.[53]

The Room entertains transwomen and Shemale clients with regular beauty contests or pageant parties, with titles such as "Miss Lebanon," "Miss Room," "Miss Bikini," and "Romeo and Juliette." These parties and beauty pageants are indeed reminiscent of the Ballroom culture of Black queer communities in New York, famously depicted in Jennie Livingston's documentary "Paris is Burning" (Livingston et al. 1992). Nevertheless, Sofian Merabet (2014a) notes the presence of drag performers and queer parties in Beirut already in the 1970s, over a decade before the filming and popularization of the documentary.[54] What these pageants indicate, however, is the comparative similarity in creating queer communal spaces in which queer persons practice and reaffirm their queer selves and belonging through mimicking or parodying elements from classed, straight, cis-gender, and heteronormative culture.

In later weeks I was told that several of the trans persons associated with the bar called Jameel for help whenever they were arrested at a checkpoint or harassed by the police. This is in comparison to the fewer calls that HELEM is perceived to receive on its hotline from trans persons overall during the period of my research. In fact, in my conversations with transwomen and Shemales as well as activists, a direct comparison was drawn between what HELEM provides (as a declared and assumed representative of the 'LGBT community') and what The Room offers. For example, during a casual conversation with Rosette, a transwoman and bartender in The Room, she discovered my friend Ahmad was a volunteer with the NGO. She immediately switched from a friendly demeanor to what I found to be an uninhibited critique of HELEM, directed at him. Facing Ahmad she asked: "What has HELEM done for us? Nothing. Some of my friends even called you guys about a case of a friend with AIDS and got no help." After inquiring further about other details of this case, Ahmad explained that when the case involves a criminal act such as a robbery or murder, HELEM cannot assign a lawyer as it is no longer a case of LGBT discrimination. In other words, the fact a person may be HIV positive, gay, or trans is not in itself reason enough for

[53] I will not cite the provocative news report containing the footage out of protection for anyone filmed without their knowledge.

[54] It is not possible for me to trace this connection historically as part of this research or evaluate the extent of any communication between the two scenes. Today, several drag performers have been in touch with queer bar scenes in Europe and are working on popularizing drag and vogue as a form of paid entertainment including in heterosexual party scenes.

the organization to support them if they commit a crime that is perceived to be unrelated to discrimination on the basis of non-normative gendered sexuality.

Rosette was not convinced. To her, there was no use for an organization that does not help individuals on all levels of their needs, a form of support that she believes to have found in The Room. Doris, another self-identified Shemale later explained, "How do you think she [Rosette] got her ID changed? Jameel helped her," referring to the difficult process of changing one's biological sex on the official state-issued ID card. In a city checkered with shifting checkpoints, presenting an ID on which a person's officially declared sex does not match their gender presentation immediately raises suspicion and provides ground for further questioning, if not arrest (Qubaia and Saleh 2015). Thus, obtaining a correct ID can lower the chances of police harassment and arrests at checkpoints.[55] However, while sex-transition is legal as I explored in chapter 4, it often requires a full sex re-assignment surgery, evaluated by a court-assigned forensic doctor, as well as a series of expensive legal and medical steps that can take several years to complete. At the time of this conversation, no advocacy or activist work had been done to change these procedures or to support individuals through them, including by HELEM.[56]

The assertion that Jameel can "help" other transwomen and Shemales with changing an ID clearly suggests that the relationship between the customers, Jameel, and The Room is more complicated than simply a dance in a bar. The bar provides a space to practice one's non-normative gendered presentation through contests, opportunities for sex work,[57] and support for some transwomen and Shemales in navigating arrest and detention and access to administrative services. Evaluating Jameel's precise role was beyond my access, but it is clear that to have a relationship with Jameel is more beneficial to many of these trans persons and Shemales than relying only upon NGOs and other comparable actors.

[55] As does obtaining a doctor's note explaining the person's gender presentation in medical and psychological terms.

[56] Indeed, Rosette was proud of her ID and showed it to me and Ahmad as proof of her gender identity. When we referred to another friend of ours with the politically correct term "Transwoman", she asked us whether the person had their ID changed. We said no, and Rosette casually responded "then she is not a woman." To Rosette, her gender identity was reaffirmed through this state issued paper, a process she knows is incredibly difficult to complete. On this basis, she said she used to be "trans" but is now a woman, but still used both terms in conversation.

[57] While I do not have direct information on whether or not Jameel controls sex-work and the women's access to male clients, at least two interlocutors mentioned to me separately that Jameel allegedly takes part in arranging access to sex-work for some of the trans persons and Shemales. Establishing the truth of these claims was beyond my ability. However, I mention them because they add layers to the social imagining of The Room.

The point I wish to highlight is that The Room, though defined in part as an economy of relations, cannot be reduced to these exchanges. It is at once a party place and a temporary zone of encounter shaped by the momentary presence of queer bodies in it. The Room, as well as it owner Jameel, are invested in a certain politics of 'trans' and/or Shemale subjectivity performance, not for reasons of 'liberation' according to NGO priorities, nor even for providing a friendly space open to sexual non-normativity. Jameel's motives are primarily guided by a logic of profit-making and retaining a specific clientele. For Shemales and transwomen, The Room offers a social space for practicing their gendered subjectivities through themed parties. It also potentially provides opportunities for sex work, as well as access to figures like Jameel who can potentially "help" with social and legal situations, as opposed to NGOs believed to be ineffectual.

6.1.2 Fancy: Profit and Policing

Amir and I visited Fancy shortly after hearing the story from George about the mistreatment of a transwoman client. Given its remote location in Karantina – a rather quiet industrial area just off the main Charles Hillu highway leading out of Beirut's center – we took public transportation as far as we could, then continued by taxi. Unable to return with public transport late at night, we stayed with Amir's friend, a young man from a neighboring area who visited Fancy for the first time with us.

Fancy is primarily a male-dominated space and is referred to as a gay party by the community of partygoers. During our exceptional outing, I only saw a small group of highly-coiffed (lesbian and queer) women in one corner, taking over a section of the couches on the rooftop. The remaining attendees were mostly cisgender-looking gay men, with various gendered and sexual masculinities, including "bears" (McCormick 2011), feminine men, and "straight-acting" men (Moussawi 2011). The dynamics were significantly different from The Room. Loud techno music dominated, with breaks of Arabic music to entertain various tastes. At the end of the night, the DJ shifted to primarily Arabic music for those who would spend the night partying.

Switching to Arabic music marks class.[58] This is because partygoers who stay for the remainder of the night are perceived to be primarily non-Beirutis who live outside of the city and cannot afford to pay for a cab to take them home, Syrians who are under curfew in their area and do not want to be caught by any authorities in the middle of the night and/or also live too far, and working men who could not afford to pay for accommodation on top of the party's entrance fee so would rather spend the night partying. The DJs' common perception of these groups of non-Beirutis, Syrians, and working men is that they are not inclined towards English techno music as much as Arabic tunes. Thus the party would only intersperse the occasional Arabic song in its soundtrack during the night's busiest hours, and then switch fully to Arabic in the late hours, once the middle- and upper-class Beirutis have departed.

Inside the party space, we noticed that Fancy employed private and trained security personnel who heavily policed elevators, bathrooms, and interactions inside the party. Taking pictures or videos was strictly forbidden, as was any form of same-sex kissing, 'close' dancing, or any display of same-sex intimacy. The bathroom stalls were meticulously monitored to ensure that two people did not enter the same stall together. This was practiced so systematically that male staff member assigned individual stalls to persons in line and regularly walked into both men's and women's bathrooms to check clients' conduct. This form of stringent internal policing allows Fancy to avoid uncalculated interventions from police authorities. Stories and rumors of secret videotaping in party spaces such as Fancy, for the purpose of inciting a raid or moral panic, have permeated among bar owners and bar-goers alike. But while many Fancy clients showed little restraint and looked for ways to circumvent the party's restrictions, bar owners and managers did not want to take the risk. Although Fancy's managers were rumored to have good relations with the police, it was only one entity they had to worry about. Other competitors could benefit from a large party like Fancy shutting down. Fancy made a clear decision to not tolerate any behavior that would place it at a risk, even if it meant heavily restricting their own clients' access to a queer space allegedly catering to them.

Fancy's existence as a queer space is hence enabled by its remote location, one that is uninviting of police interest and of residents' complaints. While Fancy surely has a relationship with police and state authorities, it also implements very strict interior

[58] I credit Ahmad Saleh for pointing to the classed dynamic in Fancy and helping me develop this analysis.

surveillance that in practice bans public displays of non-normative sexual conduct, while mostly catering to cis-gender men and some women. Fancy's reproduction of a queer space hence relies on policing queer sexual conduct in order to ensure profit and its continued existence. Rather than reading the existence of a mostly gay party in Beirut as a sign of raising tolerance and Lebanon's progress, I have argued it is more accurately read as an outcome of cross-braced factors – profit, self-surveillance, and a remote location – which Fancy managers hedge in order to create and maintain a specific type of for-profit queer space.

6.1.3 Bardo: To raid or not to raid?

How is it that a bar like Bardo – described in the opening of this chapter – has never dealt with moral panic? Despite its location in a residential area, it has never been raided, and has never had to enter into a bar deal. How has it been able to hedge these cross-braced conditions? Bardo is located in what is referred to by my Lebanese interlocutors as the "security square" of Walid Jumblatt's residence, the political leader of the Progressive Socialist Party of Lebanon. As one of the bar's managers explained to me, this means that a police intervention in the area would have to have approval from Jumblatt himself, otherwise it can be very easily misinterpreted as a political provocation. As per the manager's assessment, Bardo also has good personal relations with the political family, whose members are often seen dining in the neighborhood. Such a sectarian-marked geographical condition therefore inadvertently also guarantees protection from unwanted police and state intervention.

But beyond the specificity of Bardo's sectarian geographical location, the bar's manager believes that the establishment has dodged the possibility of a moral panic for two reasons: the *kind* of bar they decided to be and the persons they catered to. He explained:

> Manager: I made the place more democratic. My whole body would revolt when someone would tell me that Bardo is "classy." No, Bardo is decent; not classy.
> Me: What's the difference?
> Manager: Classy is based on classes.
> Me: As in upper class?
> Manager: Yes. [Inaudible]. Classy is a very ugly word. It shocks me that someone uses that word. "Decent" is respectful, it is a respectful place. It has

> a standard. It respects the people who come to it. Regardless of who comes to it, they would get the same treatment […]. This is the culture of Bardo.

Part of that respect and 'decency,' despite of the manager's disagreement in the above interview, is in reference to the middle- and upper-class norms informed by circulating ideas about Western gay bars. For example, Bardo never played Arabic music, explicitly refused to play birthday song requests (a common practice that draws attention to a specific person, perceived as of 'common' or lower-class), and specialized in cocktails and foreign cuisine. All these practices indicated that Bardo was not meant to be considered as a 'common' Lebanese bar. Rather, as the manager described, it was to be a bar upholding a specific idea of 'culture,' drawing a respectful and 'decent' clientele.

An important part of this 'culture' was the floor manager himself, who was invested in knowing the customers personally and intervened in any disputes. Much like how Nancy Achilles described of the emerging gay bar scene in San Francisco in the 1960s – a time when raids were prevalent and gay bars, identities, and their politics were multiplying – the figure of the bartender gave the bar its character: "the bartender has an important symbolic function, serving as a mark of identification" (1967, 180). In Bardo's context, rather than the bartender it was the floor manager who gave the bar its character. By welcoming straight clients, transwomen, and persons who could not afford to have more than one drink in Bardo, and intervening in disputes without the use of a bouncer, he personalized the atmosphere and captured the affection of many patrons. The floor manager expressed pride in how this helped establish a reputation for the bar abroad:

> For me the fact that there is a gay decent bar that respects people enough to present them with quality stuff; that was enough. Because gay bars everywhere, *everywhere* in the world, they are known to be trashy. Foreigners who would come to Bardo – people from France and Germany – they would tell me 'we wish we had such a bar in our countries.'

For the floor manager, 'decency' and 'respectability' marked a victory both over Western gay bars and the local queer night scene, but also over local notions of non-normative sexuality seen as indecent or unrespectable. The manager was not alone in placing the bar in relation to the map of European and Western gay nightlife. In fact, through several media accounts celebrating the bar as a sign of progress in Beirut, Bardo has been held up as

proof of Lebanon's gay-friendly nightlife, with an emphasis on its role in propagating a specific kind of 'decent' performance of gay sexuality. Take for example this excerpt about Bardo published in the New York Times under the title "Beirut, the Provincetown of the Middle East," in which the author quotes "Raed, a young man who works in Beirut" as he describes leaving Bardo and passing by a police booth:

> When I go out from Bardo I always feel at ease hugging my friends – of course *in a decent way* – in front of the police. This is the kind of change I am talking about. Although the laws still incriminate homosexual acts, we as gays here don't feel that much threatened by it anymore. (Healey 2009 – *emphasis added*)

A sense of progressive "change" is made possible here through generalizing one's perceived ability to pass a police booth without being policed, and through Raed's expression of just the right amount of 'decency' when expressing a non-normative sexuality. Crucially, Bardo's sectarian geographic specificity is actually rendered invisible in such a narrative of progress, and an emphasis on respectful decent self-presentation is emphasized instead.

In sum, what is apparent then is that the existence of bars like Bardo is structurally possible due to several cross-braced factors, including sectarian geography, an investment in personalized relations, and the expectation of 'decently' classed clientele. Being conveniently located in a securitized area and with good relations to local politicians, creating a personalized, friendly, but clearly classed atmosphere, and making profit through encouraging specific ideas of 'respectable' sexual behavior, all enabled Bardo to avoid moral panics, state interventions, and competition with other bars. Therefore, contrary to a Western narrative that equates the presence of gay bars in Beirut with progress, openness, and modernity – a narrative that the bar manager himself as well as "Raed" are invested in – the presence of some bars like Bardo is made possible precisely because of the cross-bracing of favorable sectarian geographical locations, investment in an idea of profitable respectability, and a communal relationship harnessed by the floor manager. The bar, the manager, and its specific clientele benefit from hedging these cross-braced structures in creating a specific kind of classed gay leisure.

The point I want to highlight in the preceding three ethnographic accounts of queer bars and spaces is that these bars exist within a cross-braced web of relations and factors that reproduce them as queer for-profit entities. This web includes police authority, potential for

profit-making, geographical-sectarian location, and managerial relationships with clients. Their functionality depends on their ability to hedge and maintain a bar/party space in a city where space is privatized and often divided in line with sectarian geographies, thus imposing specific communal norms, loyalties, and various modes of policing (Harb 2001; Bou Akar 2018). It also means that negotiating competition with other bars includes negotiating security and protection *both* from competitors and from state organs. Securing a profitable queer business further entails tactfully avoiding becoming the target of national and communal narratives on deviancy and moral panic, namely through hedging one's social clout and capital. Finally, it means making concessions and dividing clients along profit priorities and compromises, in this case by dividing clients into respectable and profitable genders, namely Shemales and non-Shemales, in the bar deal. This final point will be explored at greater length in the next section.

6.2 The Police and the Neighbors: Bar Raids and Bar Deals

As I explored in the opening of the introduction, in late April 2013, shortly before a round of municipal elections, police raided a local gay and trans friendly bar named Ghost under personal orders from Antoine Chakhtoura, the Dekwaneh municipality's mayor. Located in the North of Beirut, Dekwaneh is mainly a residential Maronite Christian neighborhood, bordering the Tel al-Zaater Palestinian refugee camp established in 1948. To quickly recall the incident; four Syrians were taken to the police station where they were beaten and stripped, and pictures of their bodies and full names were circulated publicly in a deliberate shaming effort, all without formal charges of any particular crime. Ghost was ordered to close down the next day. In a widely criticized statement justifying the illegal raid, Chakhtoura infamously defended his actions as follows:

> Yes we took their clothes off – we wanted to know what they were, is this a man or a woman. Turns out: half woman, half man. I don't accept this in my Dikwaneh. Dikwaneh is known as the castle of resistance [..] we fought in the [civil] war for our land and honor, and we didn't do it so that some people – with my respect to them, maybe now I will be told about [breaking] human rights and whatnot – can practice these things here in my Dikwaneh. (LBCI Lebanon 2013)

While it was clear that Chakhtoura's raid was to incite a wave of popular support ahead of election time – successfully accomplished and visibly signified by the overnight mushrooming of sectarian political banners supporting Chakhtoura's action against "corruption" and "deviance" all across the neighborhood (Rizk and Makarem 2015) – both public opinion and media coverage questioned the raid's legality, criticized the unethical treatment of those arrested, and examined the raid in the context of anti-Syrian discrimination in Dikwaneh, one of the first municipalities to implement a 7 pm curfew for Syrian residents. Even a local TV host, George Ma'louf – known for inciting a raid against a local gay cinema in Tripoli a few months earlier after airing a damming report on his show "*Inta Hur*" (You are Free) – criticized Chakhtoura's decision and invited Ghost's owner, Rabee' Dagher, to tell his version of the events and his bar's closure on live air.

While characterizing Chakhtoura as a senseless man spreading false accusations, Dagher nevertheless chose his words carefully and mentioned that no proper "raid" had happened, and that it was normal for the police to be present around his establishment. Clearly aware of the state and police's power over him, he did not speak of those arrested or the manner in which they were treated. He mentioned he only found out through the media that Chakhtoura ordered the closure of his business, sealing the order with "red wax" – used to signify the gravity of offense – and the hanging of a list of the arrestees' full names on the door, thereby outing them publicly, shaming their families, and exposing them to threats of harassment and violence.

The usual police presence near Ghost, frequent surveillance and arrests outside the bar, Chakhtoura's opportunistic, highly publicized, and illegal raid, the local support for it in Dikwaneh but a larger public outrage against it in other parts of Beirut: all these tell a complex story of the functioning of regimes of state power and surveillance in the policing of non-normative gender and sexual behaviors, persons, spaces, and establishments. It is a story of inciting a well-crafted moral outrage against perceived 'deviance' for the purposes of maintaining territorial power (local elections), upholding a hetero-sectarian-national narrative of belonging (fighting in the Civil War), and in a particular moment of crisis (the presence of a very high number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon who are subsequently blamed for moral decay). As Anthony Rizk and Ghassan Makarem explain, this fabricated moral outrage is gendered and indicative of a crisis in Lebanese masculinity: Chakhtoura is invoking past narratives of armed and protective masculinity that will cleanse the Dikwaneh territory of

deviance (2015). This time, however, the deviance is not another sectarian group, rather a sexual and gendered deviance of a different nationality – Syrian. Thus, the discourse of sectarian threat is employed in framing gendered and sexual difference as an urgent threat to national morality, lending legitimacy to the municipality's use of force and violence in shutting down the source of this deviance (the Ghost bar) and protecting Lebanese cis-gendered heterosexuality.

However, as some activists have pointed out,[59] and more intimately related to my arguments in this chapter, the raid also tells of another story: that Dagher did not have the proper social and territorial capital and proper police connections needed to maintain his business out of such direct and hazardous interference from state and sectarian bodies like the municipality and the police. Therefore, it is in this context of cross-braced conditions that include an incited moral panic, threat of closure and policing, contestation of sectarian power through municipal elections, and the Syrian refugee crisis, that Ghost's owner and the Fancy organizers hedged their bets and struck a deal. The two sides would merge as partners in one location—Fancy would inherit all of Ghost's clients, opening for an extra night in the week, which would thus allow Ghost's owner to not lose his business profit entirely. Importantly, Dagher would no longer worry about aggressive competition from Fancy since they are now partners, nor about another politically-driven raid. After all, Fancy had not been a stable bar space, and prior to this deal it frequently changed locations when holding Saturday night parties every week or every other week. When the two joined, they agreed to hold rooftop parties in the empty building in Karantina. The location meant that they were far enough from disturbing any residents who may have a problem with seeing gay, lesbian, and trans clients and complain to the authorities, thereby decreasing the chance of political opportunism and state intervention due to an incited moral panic.[60]

In order to avoid a conflict of interest and sidelining an important competitor, another openly-known agreement followed, this time with Jameel, the manager of The Room. In this deal, Fancy (now including Ghost) agreed to no longer welcome transwomen and Shemale clients so as to not hurt Jameel's business, who was perceived as having strong connections

[59] I thank Ahmad Saleh for his input.

[60] According to one of my interlocutors, one of the reasons behind the closure of another gay and trans bar called Acid in 2010 was a complaint from residents in a newly constructed residential building, who allegedly filmed the bar's clients outside of the bar and submitted a complaint to the municipality, arguing that the neighborhood was no longer safe due to these sexual practices. The pressure from the residents was successful, and the municipality ordered the bar to close without a raid.

to state entities such as the Hbeich police station and detention center specializing in morality cases. Hence, his bar was never under the threat of a raid. The bar deal could have then helped further shield Fancy from any unexpected raids or hostile competitors. As the previous manager of EX bar, a gay bar outside of the deal, explained: "Jameel has connections with Amal [Shi'a movement and political party]. Ghost [did] not have this thing. He made a deal with Fancy: we become partners, I protect you and give you my contacts, but you don't come near the trans." These spatial conditions and the reconfiguration of business relations around shared profit were enough of an incentive for Ghost to stay with Fancy in partnership, and then to agree with Jameel on splitting the clients. In other words, Dagher let go of his Trans clients in exchange for protection from Jameel (or at minimum, a promise of non-intervention) and profit from Fancy. None of these agreements were negotiated with any of the clients, and certainly not with any Shemales or transwomen who did not want to go to The Room.

Thus, the definition process ensued. Who is a Shemale according to the bars? Who is barred entry from Fancy under the bar deal and how? I take up these questions in the following section, arguing that this imposed division leads the bars to police people at the entrance and engage in defining who is Shemale and who is not. Hence, it is not enough to argue that the bar deal is transphobic or that it is in line with dividing clients according to "G" and "T" categories that are taken to represent separate and different clients. Such a reading discards the social relations attached to these bars and overlooks the deal's cross-braced conditions that I analyzed above. Taking a closer look at who is a Shemale under the bar deal reveals the subsequent hedging of this combination of conditions by the bars in order to make profit, and by the clients in order to gain access to a space of leisure. As I will demonstrate, building a difference between Shemales and non-Shemales occurs chiefly through applying a classed narrative of gender respectability.

6.3 Clients: Who is Shemale?

Fulla, a few friends, and I met in her apartment to talk about upcoming activist events in Beirut. A self-identified Shemale, Fulla rented a room in a shared apartment on the outskirts of Beirut. As we recounted the story we had heard from George, of a transwoman verbally insulted and violently dragged out of Fancy, Fulla agreed that some transwomen and

Shemales have a harder time getting into Fancy now, and that Fancy seems to reject them because of what the managers see as their extravagant performative behavior. In the context of Fancy, this meant putting on massive dresses, high heels, and make-up to showcase wealth, 'classy' status, and femininity. The style also included an exaggerated performance both in appearance and demeanor, not unlike the competitions that Jameel described as taking place in The Room, and not unlike a transnational style of drag that is slowly becoming popularized in Beirut. Allegedly, some Fancy goers see this phenomenon as a distasteful attention contest that dominates the party's mood.

Fulla calls this extravagant dress up "*kteer over,*" meaning, a performance that is too 'over the top' or excessive. To her, this exaggerated display of a high classed feminine womanhood – especially in a place dominated by cis-gender gay men such as Fancy – was inappropriate. The "classy" look was a "bad habit" that, in Fulla's opinion, partially justified why transwomen were no longer welcomed at Fancy. This extravagant look or performance is precisely one she avoids embodying through attire and self-presentation as a feminine Shemale. This is why, Fulla explains, that when she last wanted to go to Fancy, she called the organizers and was subsequently asked what she was wearing:

> I called one of the organizers of Fancy who knows me to ask if I can come and I told him, 'I will come tonight, I will not be wearing anything 'over'.' He asked me what will I wear, I said that I am coming in a sports suit, very casual, with a bow on my hair, and that's all. He said fine. I arrived to Fancy and the security guard did not let me in. I asked him why not, what did he see in front of him? He said "*Mara*" [derogatory term for 'any woman']. […] they don't want us there.

I was confused. Why did the guard refer to Fulla as a *Mara* as opposed to the more commonly used term "Shemale" or the less common term "trans"? *Mara* means woman, but can also mean 'any woman,' which denotes an unrespectable woman without social status or clout, without affiliation to anyone. It is a gendered and classed term that denotes unrespectability when used by itself, as in this situation.[61] So had Fulla "passed" as non-Shemale or as non-transgendered (Davis 2009), as per the guard's own acknowledgement of her as a woman, albeit as an unrespectable one? Erin Davis uses the concept "passing as nontransgendered" in order to showcase that trans persons in the US are seen as inauthentic

[61] I thank Ahmad Saleh for pointing the nuanced difference of the meaning and use of Mara to me in the Lebanese context.

in both their sex and gender presentations and assumed to be 'lying' when their bodies carry trans-sexed histories (ibid). It is easy to assume at first that the guard neither questions Fulla's authenticity through gender nor sex, since he acknowledges her as a woman. However, he dismisses Fulla's gendered self-presentation on the basis of a classed respectability that she allegedly lacks, though this lack is due specifically to her gendered self-presentation; Shemaleness. It appears then to be a self-canceling, simultaneous acknowledgment and rejection of Fulla's Shemale self-presentation. In my reading, it is an act of transphobic rejection, but, crucially, through the application of a classed value onto gender.

But what of Fulla's reading? Fulla explained that what the guard meant by the term "any woman" is that he found her to be, in fact, too visible a Shemale – her Shemaleness was considered disrespectful, partly to the gender binary that she was transiting, but also, partly to what Fancy itself wants to pass as in light of the bar deal with The Room: a non-Shemale party space. At the same time, Fulla knew that transwomen and Shemales still go to Fancy, but only as long as they stick to a certain 'look,' one that makes them look 'less Shemale,' not 'over the top' or too 'classy.' Part of the requirement is a concealment of a visible gendered-as-transwoman (or more accurately in Fulla's case, gendered-as-Shemale) self-presentation.

In his ground-breaking study of transgender communities and politics in New York City, David Valentine pointed to the centrality of a binary of "softness" and "hardness" as a measure of "realness" among fem queen sex workers (2007, 112–113). Under this binary, "looking like a man" is often a feared judgment, as it denotes looking "hard" (and masculine) and therefore failing at some level to pass as a fem queen in a hetero-cis world (ibid). A fear of looking fake and not passing is present among some of the trans persons I met in Beirut, and is sometimes used to draw boundaries between 'real' and 'not real' women and men, including through practices such as *Shakher*. If we extend this binary to Fulla's case, we see that the reverse dynamic occurs. Embodying or performing too much "softness" here was a failure of passing in a mostly gay male crowd that includes cis-gender lesbians and straight females but bans visible Shemales as part of the bar deal. In order to get into Fancy then, Fulla was asked to conceal this "softness" and its gendered and classed markers, and hence retain parts of her male gendered identity (coded "hardness") that she did not want to, all in order to appear in a body that can be read as specifically non-Shemale and allowed entry. Fulla had an impossible task of presenting herself as a non-Shemale in a context she was

known to be one. Doing so still gained her a refusal of entry, not because she was dressed extravagantly, but because she failed to pass as non-Shemale and instead passed – at least according to the guard – as an (unrespectable) 'any' woman.

What becomes evident through Fulla's denial is that the bar deal in effect created a new system of "queer checkpoints" (Ritchie 2010b) that monitor which bodies are properly profitable. Jason Ritchie (2010a) develops the metaphor of the checkpoint in place of the closet to draw attention to the workings of the Israeli settler colonial nation-state in its practice of systemic violence against its racialized others, namely Palestinians. He argues that the metaphor of the closet masks state violence entirely through individualizing the "coming out" experience as a citizen's demand for inclusion into the nation. In reflecting on the moment a gay Palestinian friend is denied entry into a gay bar in Israel and conceptualizing it as yet another checkpoint experience, he explains:

> that moment cast into sharp relief the discursive framework that governs sexuality and race in Israel-Palestine: the entrance to the bar was a sort of checkpoint, like so many others queer Palestinians regularly face, in bars, saunas, parks, Web sites, and other "egalitarian" gay spaces; it was manned by a queer agent of Israeli nationalism, whose job it was to determine who belongs in this gay/Israeli space and who does not. (Ritchie 2010a, 557)

The checkpoint Fulla experienced was not about the application of state racism; she is Lebanese, as are the managers of Fancy. The man at the door was not so much an agent of a Lebanese nation state, or a queer agent of Lebanese homonationalism, but rather a worker for a set of oligarchic businesses interested in splitting clients into various genders to secure their profit making. Although Shemales, transwomen, low-income workers, and internal others such as Syrians and Palestinians are at a higher risk of state violence as they pass through regular police and military checkpoints in Beirut, these checkpoints are not a simple analogue to the denial of entry of a Shemale at a gay bar. The former is about the policing of non-normative bodies in an imagined Lebanese nation (see chapter 4) and reminding citizens of the state's and the sects' right to violent intervention. The latter, in the above case, is about maintaining a profitable relationship with other bars. If bars are under threat of state intervention or of becoming the target of a moral panic, they can then choose to hedge and sometimes cooperate with their competitors to ensure everyone's survival. The way the bars in the bar deal have chosen to do so is through adopting a system of internal policing that

registers Shemales as belonging to one bar, and all others as free to go to Fancy. In using a cross-braced approach and applying a classed narrative of gender respectability to this division, we then observe the creation of a system of profitable genders that appear to map onto the transnational G and T categories, where in fact it operates using a Shemale/non-Shemale binary.

6.4 Post Research: Still Classy?

"I don't want to go to Fancy for Saint Barbara's Day, I'm going to go to The Room," said Violette when I asked her about her plans for the holiday this year. Violette sometimes identifies herself as a woman, as a Ladyboy, as trans, and sometimes as straight. I asked her if she's been to Fancy before and why she wants to go to The Room instead. She replied saying that although Fancy is more "classy" and respectable as a party place – because it is well organized and has security personnel, as she described – The Room is smaller and more casual, and is known for its Saint Barbara's Day party. She continued explaining that the last time she was at Fancy she could barely move because it was so full, even though the party had expanded and opened an entirely new floor in the same building in Karantina. Although The Room is not "classy" – because it is run down and not well taken care of – she still prefers something more casual. Surprised that she was let into Fancy, I asked her if she knows whether Shemales and other transwomen attend Fancy now. She replied that the bar deal was terminated and that Shemales can go wherever they want.

Furthermore, Fancy had allegedly not only cut its ties with Jameel, effectively breaking the bar deal, but it has also begun intimidating other queer party spaces and bars they thought are in competition with them, such as EX, another rooftop party just outside of Beirut. Fancy's quest to take over and monopolize the business of queer parties allegedly led them to film undercover footage in EX of gay men being intimate with each other on the dance floor and send it to Hbeich, in hope of inciting a raid or closure of business (such as what happened with Ghost). Fancy miscalculated, and the organizers of EX managed to reach an understanding with the police station without risking closure or a raid, primarily due to their own personal ties.

The breaking of the bar deal further affirms my argument that client-division is not simply based on a politics of discrimination against "Transwomen" in favor of "Gay" men.

Rather, it is driven by a calculation of risk – hedging – of raids, moral panics, and profit gain or loss, and through instrumentalizing already circulating ideas about classed gender and gender respectability. Without examining the local political economy of relations among these bars and the cross-braced factors that determine their existence, it appears as if Fancy made contradictory decisions, once barring transwomen, and once granting them entry. However, what appear as contradictory strategies is only part of a process of hedging for profit, status, and security. Therefore, the presence of queer bars and nightclub scenes in the city cannot be read in the framework of signs of a progressive modern, queer-friendly Beirut. Doing so masks the entirety of the system of cross-braced conditions that enable the bars' existence through hedging.

6.5 Summary

I have argued that telling the story of bars and the deals between them reveals three dynamics that challenge prevalent depictions of non-normative gender and sexuality politics in Beirut. First, they reveal the necessity of combining cross-braced factors of sectarian and socially-marked space and state authority in securing a queer business. The existence of bars such as Ghost, Fancy, The Room, Bardo, or EX is bound by a negotiated relationship with the state and police, clients, competition, spatial/geographic politics, and profit. While some bars are susceptible to state policing and raids (*e.g.* Ghost), others, such as The Room, Fancy, and Bardo rarely run into conflict. Each has hedged its relationship with policing organs, space, and other competitors differently. Reading these bars' existence in relation to these cross-braced factors shows that raids are selective, and that a simple narrative of state-run homophobia or bar-imposed transphobia does not explain why some bars operate for decades and others are raided.

Second, the bars' story reveals the clash of ideas about class and gender respectability that renders specific forms of transness – specifically Shemaleness – as temporally non-respectable. As suggested by Fulla's story and Ghost's merger with Fancy, clients are classified into Shemale versus non-Shemale by employing ideas about respectable class and gender self-presentation. These in turn serve to grant or limit a client's entry. In this way, bars are actively involved in producing exclusionary dynamics on the basis of classed and

gendered self-presentations and for the purpose of profit making, while clients hedge their gendered and classed self-presentations in order to be granted entry.

Lastly, these bars reveal that the key dividing categorization is not simply between identity categories of Gay and Trans as per Western models of LGBT identity politics, which understand both to be stable and coherently separable. Rather, it is (at the time of research) between Shemale and non-Shemale, (and sometimes between Lebanese and Syrian – see next chapter) which are defined through interactions between communities of transpersons and the bars they frequent. I do not want to argue that difference-making is solely led by queer-businesses in Beirut. Indeed, transwomen and transpersons create several layers of differentiation among themselves often based on the types of bodies and surgeries one has performed, whether a "bottom surgery" took place or not, whether one engages in sex work or not, and whether one has received official state acknowledgement of their passing (*e.g.* in Rosette's case, cf. fn. 3). I have argued it is more accurate to read the (re)production of gendered sexualities in Beirut through studying the cross-braced dynamics in which this exclusionary categorization occurs and their hedging by both bars and clients. Doing so requires looking at the categories of Shemale and non-Shemale as hedged embodied identities, co-construed by bars and bar-goers, to maximize profit and fun, respectively.

Chapter 7: 'LGBTI' Refugee or an Alternative Mother? Queer Hedging for Survival

In this chapter, I return to the moment of crisis I examined in chapter 4.[62] I argued that the state employs a narrative of crisis–one that specifically relies on gendered and sexualized ideas of security threat and social immorality–in order to justify its violent interventions in the lives of those whose gendered sexualities it deems as threateningly non-normative. Yet, the state's suppression is never total, as it is forced to negotiate several cross-braced factors, including its own competing attachments to secularism and sectarianism, and modernity and tradition. I argued that the state appears as contradictory as it simultaneously employs strategies of policing *and* allowing, depending on its perceived risk of losing monopoly over power. Through this process of hedging, the state reproduces itself and its right to violence; defining, and sanctioning gendered and sexual non-normativity. My reading of the state's functionality therefore offsets narratives about a developing postcolonial and post-Civil War state that is assumed to be continuously moving uni-directionally towards progress, measured by its degree of tolerance or suppression of gender and sexual non-normativity. Instead, my proposition shows how the state actively engages in the production of friction between local and transnational ideas about gender and sexual non-normativity which it then hedges to maintain power.

So how does this narrative of crisis unfold among persons that the state targets? In order to address this question, I turn my attention in this chapter to a newly-arrived group in Beirut: displaced Syrian refugees. I look at how the narrative of crisis unfolds among gender and sexually non-normative Syrian refugees who suddenly find themselves in precarious conditions of displacement due to the war in their home country. Crossing from one place to another may undoubtedly mean that one must alter their perceptions of self, body, identity, desire, and community. Yet, I find that Syrians face another, more particular challenge. When seeking refuge in Beirut, they become caught between several cross-braced conditions: an expectation of performing and embodying a specific victimhood and vulnerability as an "LGBTI" refugee propagated by humanitarian INGOs and local ones, Lebanese national imaginings of gender and sexuality, as well as the loss of their biological and "alternative"

[62] I thank Leila Younes, Rasha Younes, and Celine Cantat for discussing some of the chapter's ideas with me, and for their feedback and comments.

families, queer ties and relations. So how do these Syrian refugees navigate their conditions of displacement?

In what follows, I first examine the unfolding of the narrative of crisis among this new group, which manifests as a crisis of gendered sexual subjectivity articulated through contestations of masculinity, mapped along Syrian-Lebanese national difference. I then turn my attention to two responses to the crisis. First, a new humanitarian project (Whispers) that becomes an "LGBTI" NGO (Proud), and second, the revival of queer community relations in the form of "alternative motherhood" kinship systems. I reveal the ways in which these Syrian refugees begin to hedge the various cross-braced systems in which they find themselves in order to live through displacement in Lebanon; while betting on an opportunity for resettlement abroad.

7.1 Returning to the Crisis

"We have a crisis of tops. I truly think that in five years, there's going to be no top left," announced Queen in a room full of Syrian men. Queen is a very outspoken, loud, attention-seeking young Ladyboy who sometimes identifies as male (usually in front of authorities and in line with her identification papers), but most times as a woman or a Ladyboy–and rarely as trans.[63] I asked Queen what she meant by this crisis; "There are no men! Look, I go to Fancy and I see all these big muscular guys, when I get closer, I only find out they all call themselves women! What is this? There are no tops left! I rarely ever find a top, we can't go on like this, soon there won't be any tops left in Beirut!" Queen's vocal words received a nodding acknowledgment from a couple of men in the room, but were ignored by the majority (rendered to be part of her usual loud and entertaining performance, known as her brand mark). How is it that Queen, a known feminine Ladyboy, can critique all the men around her for supposedly being "bottoms," or in her words "women"? What is at the heart of "the crisis of tops"?

[63] Every time I asked Queen which she prefers, she insisted on "he" although she would speak of herself in the feminine grammatical form without exception, and would never correct me if I used "she" either. I believe asking directly for the pronoun was not proper of me in this case, and thus, out of respect to Queen's gender performance I will use "she".

It was only later that I realized she was not necessarily or only critiquing the Syrian men present that day in the room but rather echoing a larger social crisis in Lebanese and Syrian genders and sexualities. The fact she brought this up in relation to Fancy, the largest local gay party series that is frequented by Lebanese gay and sexually non-normative men, is notable. Queen is a loyal frequenter of Fancy where she often picks up clients for sex work.[64] As a Ladyboy, the customers who seek her services are ones who expect her to agree to be penetrated; thereby treating her as a 'bottom' or as a 'woman,' and themselves as 'tops.' This is what makes Queen's previous comments worth noting: she was pointing to something of an inconsistency in Lebanese gender and sexual self-presentation as performed in places like Fancy. To her, masculine appearance – in this case signaled by muscularity and hair – is reserved for straight men and for gay tops, but not for male gay bottoms, who are in her words, "women." She was, on the one hand, criticizing Lebanese bottoms for trying to pass as top men, thereby disturbing a natural order of masculine penetrating tops ("men") and feminine/penetrated bottoms ("women"). On the other hand, she was also signaling a crisis in the Syrian community itself – the loss of real or true masculine top men in this context of war and displacement.

Ideas about what constitutes proper masculinity and manhood in the sexually non-normative community in Lebanon circulate heavily and are informed by interactions with the ideals of heterosexual masculinity. As Ghassan Moussawi (2011), Mathew Gagne (2012), and Jared McCormick (2011) argue separately, a certain form of masculine male identity is generally preferred over femininity in Beirut. In analyzing men's visibility on a gay dating website in Beirut, Gagne demonstrated that: "Users typically regard femininity and flamboyancy as undesirable, and thus antithetical to hegemonic masculinity" (2012, 130). Similarly, in his analysis of the bear sub-culture in Beirut, McCormick (2011) argued that the bear is understood as "one cultural acceptable way of embodying one's proper manhood in larger ideas of heteronormativity" (2011, 86). In turn, Moussawi argued such preferences are linked to the regime of Lebanese compulsory heterosexuality which continues to celebrate a form of hetero-masculinity that is defensive, dominant, and violent (2011). All three authors show the favoring of public non-feminine masculinity and 'hyper masculine' bodies as a sign of manliness. And although more work is needed on understanding queer masculinity,

[64] Despite being of lower economic status and not having enough money for basic needs, some like Queen make a point to either save money to pay for Fancy's entrance fee or strike favors with the management.

especially queer migrant masculinity, the thesis that "masculine" male public visibility is afforded at the expense of devaluing the feminine and feminized bodies holds.

Splits such as 'top' and 'bottom,' wherein a 'top' is considered the penetrator and thus dominant and 'more masculine' and the 'bottom' is associated with passivity and being penetrated and thus as 'more feminine,' are common signifiers of positional sexualities and relations among gay and sexually non-normative men in Lebanon. They are frequently invoked in online chatting and dating applications as signifiers of sexual preferences and expected power roles. In explaining the relationship between tops and bottoms, Jamal, a 42 year old [self identifying] gay Syrian refugee residing in Beirut, who is perceived to be a bottom but does not use the word for himself, remarked:

> The feminine [person] must be a bottom. And the one who is a pure male, has a *Dakar* role; he's a top. It's not the sexual taste, it's the gender. Basically this one presents himself as a female, so… [he is penetrated]. And vice versa. If they try to switch then it's a scandal. Even if a man [top] let's say tries being a bottom and likes it, he can't switch. Because even in our community, we don't want to be called a bottom.

Terms such as *Dakar*, meant to denote a penetrating masculine male and implying the person does not act in a feminine manner, are common among both Lebanese and Syrian gay men and point to the overlap of meanings between binaries of masculine and feminine, male and female, active and passive, and penetrator and penetrated. *Dakar* is likely taken from the formal word for male sex in Arabic; *Thakar*. For Jamal, *Dakar* is both an equivalent of a top (positional sexuality or sexual role) and as he says, "gender." What may appear as conflation between gender and sexual role or taste in his description is rather revealing of the inter-relation between both. To capture a similar inter-relation in the Thai queer scene, Peter Jackson uses "eroticized genders" in framing the interplay between a sexual taste or role or identity on the one hand, and conceptions of gender on the other (2000). Because of the overlaps between gender and sexuality, Jackson argues, Thai queer genders/sexualities cannot be theorized using Western analysis that separates gender from sexuality as two distinct fields of study; a separation informed by a Foucauldian history of sexuality (see for example Rubin 1992). Several authors have questioned this separation even in Western locations such as David Valentine's (2007) study of the category of transgender and its contestations among queers of color in New York (see previous chapter). Although the aforementioned studies on

Lebanese masculinities in particular demonstrate an interplay between gender and sexuality, they fall short of theorizing the kinds of overlap in categories of top and bottom, man and woman, gender and sexual role, etc (Moussawi 2011; McCormick 2011; Gagne 2012). This chapter brings attention to this overlap to show the inadequacy of uncritically using "LGBTI" identity categories as pre-given categories of analysis, as well as to reveal their specific function in resettlement applications, under conditions of displacement. Additionally, and as I argued in chapter 3, through insisting on using my interlocutors' shifting categories as they use them – such as Shemale, Ladyboy, woman, trans – I reveal the cross-braced structures within which their choices of identity labels and performative genders and sexualities are hedged.

Yet, Jamal is only describing 'how things should be;' or what the correct division is assumed to be. Even when interplay occurs between top and bottom roles – as is often the case in online dating as well – it remains tolerated as long as the Top goes back to performing public topness (a "gender" role according to Jamal). However, Jamal also disagrees with this model, and explains the crisis it is facing at this particular moment of displacement in Beirut:

> Now they say all Syrians are escorts [sex workers] because they agree to be tops. There is this image that the Syrian is more masculine, the Lebanese [man] is softer, spoiled in his speech, even the straight ones are too soft. But this is stupid, a man is a man. A man is someone with principles and a word. A man is someone with notable stances.

Jamal is referring to a crisis in the balance and authenticity of tops and bottoms, due to perceptions that Syrians have been instrumentally switching to top roles only to conduct sex work as a means of gaining income while displaced in Beirut. Even if he himself disagrees with the top-bottom division as a presumably natural order that mirrors heterosexuality, he is still marking a crisis in authentically eroticized genders. As he notes, the top and bottom references are also being redrawn along national and classed lines of difference wherein Syrian sexually non-normative and gay men – in line with the mainstream narratives that I outlined in chapter 4 – are depicted as more sexually aggressive, more virile ('top'), and not so fluent with the terms of a global gay citizen as opposed to their Lebanese counterparts.[65] This is while Lebanese men are seen as more cultured, feminine, 'soft,' and

[65] These depictions mirror how low income class men from Dahyeh (a southern suburb of Beirut known to be poor and loyal to Hezbollah) are sometimes depicted as well.

hence 'bottoms.' The "crisis of tops" is thus a crisis of balance in eroticized genders mapped onto discourses of classed and national difference.

More broadly, the "crisis of tops" is also reflective of a regional crisis in Syrian-Lebanese relations, historically marked by Syrian dominance over Lebanese political affairs. Syrian forces under the leadership of Hafez al-Assad's Baathist regime had occupied parts of the Lebanese territory from 1976 shortly after the eruption of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), and again in 1982 to fight against the Israeli invasion, but the forces remained until 2005 (Traboulsi 2007). The Syrian presence, welcomed as 'brotherly' help by pro-Syrian groups inside Lebanon, and criticized as dominant invasive threat by Christian phalangists and anti-Syrian parties, despite using differently gendered rhetoric, still revealed the Lebanese state's and the Lebanese army's weakness in maintaining not only its borders (against invasion from Israel) but also its own internal order. This Lebanese 'weakness' was and continuous to be understood and communicated in feminized terms that cast Lebanon as in need of constant protection, whilst Syrian military presence is conceptualized either in supportive or threatening masculinist terms. As Lebanon emerged from its Civil War, it relied heavily on over a million seasonal Syrian workers in construction and agriculture, who were frequently perceived as more masculine, less cultured, working men (Chalcraft 2009). From 2011 onward, as Syrians fled their homes to seek refuge, the image of 'the Syrian' shifted from the dominant occupier, brother, worker, to the burdensome refugee who threatens Lebanese socio-sexual stability as I explored in chapter 4. In this sense, the "crisis of tops" reflects a crisis in Syrian dominance and Lebanese subordination, and Queen's and Jamal's critique of fake 'tops' can hence be read as reflecting anxiety over the loss of an 'authentic' national dominance.

Both Syrians and Lebanese that I interacted with frequently explained differences of gender self-presentation and sexual practices using the nationality frame. However, for Syrians, their own self-presentation, eroticized genders, and sexual preferences were in the midst of a process of redefinition due specifically to new conditions of displacement. For example, Naser, who was known as a flamboyant feminine gay man and the "mother" of the community in Syria, explains his own break between self-presentation in Beirut and in Syria as follows:

> Here I am not part of the *jaw* [scene]. I was *wadih* [clear or evident – meaning "out"] in Syria more than here. I am afraid. The country is not mine. From a personal security point of view, I am susceptible to being killed, arrested, anything. If something happens to me there is no one to ask about me. In Syria, my family and friends can help me. So I chose not to be what I was there, here. I still follow one thing: I am a *mu'tadel* [balanced] person in my attire, persona, and self presentation. Despite this, I still had problems. I was arrested and detained for 5 years by the Syrian military because I am *mithli* [politically correct term for gay]. Then came a second arrest. Then a third arrest. I was raped by militias. Despite the fact I am *mu'tadel*, I still experienced it. So I don't want to do anything here that I did there. Now I am just in a transitionary phase until resettlement. I don't want it to be a disaster.

Naser draws a link between his "balanced" self-presentation and what he perceives as his temporary crisis of displacement and refugee status. Known as "physiologically feminine" (his words) all his life, he attempts to conceal his femininity by applying "moderation" and "balance" both in Syria and in Lebanon. In his case, it means not engaging in the gay/queer/non-normative scene, paying attention to demeanor and attire, and maintaining a dark beard to signal masculinity and topness – markers that can be read as normative and straight in public. His condition of displacement and the punishment he received for appearing non-normative before and during the years of war, does not allow him to present his authentic self.

Returning to Queen's words of crisis then, in this politically volatile context, her words are first an attempt to flip the lens of threat and perversion that so many Syrian refugees are met with through "discourses of blame" (Nayel and Chit 2013), and point to the fact that a real threat actually exists in Lebanese masculinity and eroticized genders. In other words, she is saying, subversively, that 'there are no real men left in Beirut.' She is effectively subverting a Lebanese national discourse of "masculinity-under-threat;" a discourse that the Lebanese state apparatus has been employing to justify increased militarization in the city and to dismiss demands from "both LGBT and women's activism" (Rizk and Makarem 2015, 106). Queen's declaration that there are no real tops in Beirut has currency because she is criticizing men from the position of a Ladyboy, who, by virtue of being a penetrable figure 'knows' who a real man/top/Dakar is. By so doing she actually reaffirms her own position and identity as ladyboy/woman/bottom while pointing at Lebanese men as the source of imbalance and threat to a sexual order.

At the same time, Queen also captures a moment of gender crisis and sexuality among gendered and sexually non-normative Syrian men. Some Syrian 'feminine' men, including 'bottoms' are resorting to concealing their femininity and acting "moderately" as in Naser's experience, or shifting from bottoms to tops for sex work, or appearing muscular as in Queen's observation, hence contradicting a natural order of masculine penetrating man versus feminine penetrated woman. Bottoms replacing Tops, women replacing men, and the concealment of public femininity and transgressions across gender boundaries, are all part of the condition of displacement and the loss of non-normative/queer space wherein daily or long term transgressions are perceived to have been organized differently before war.

Difference building along national lines of Syrian-Lebanese are also stacked alongside existing sexual categories of top-bottom, man-woman, and masculine-feminine, but not without contradiction and anxiety. Just as discourses of blame circulate in Lebanon blaming refugees for various ailments of society (chapter 4), Queen is blaming Syrian feminine men for disturbing the balance between 'men' and 'women,' while maintaining a critique of Lebanese feminine men for attempting to be 'men' or tops, which they can never achieve according to her. Her words of crisis echo prevailing anxiety over the future of Syria and the regional balance of power, in which Syria's relationship to Lebanon's stability is primary.

In what follows, I closely examine two different approaches towards helping the bodies at the center of this crisis. The first approach develops through an expansion of humanitarian funding for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Western donors requirements of finding specifically "LGBTI" refugees to 'save.' The second approach is the refugees' own efforts at rebuilding queer kinship ties in Beirut through recreating networks of alternative motherhood that they had in Syria. Examining these different approaches reveals that Syrian refugees do not simply or only negotiate their gendered, erotic subjectivities and settle for a "balance" like Jamal; or insist on restoring the top-bottom set up. Rather than only negotiating, which implies reaching one situational compromise at the expense of another, Syrian refugees invest in multiple systems of self-presentation, even if they appear contradictory. By investing in both the LGBTI system of asylum and ties of alternative motherhood, they hedge for survival. Their hedging of two systems that appear as contradictory refutes several interpretive frames used to capture their lives, including the narrative of a unidirectional progress towards a specific Western-based understanding of

gender and sexual non-normativity that is cast as universal. Subsequently it refutes a narrative that reads LGBTI identification as a sign of successfully developing an authentic queer self, rendering it worthy of resettlement. Lastly, the refugees' process of hedging also refutes the Gay International critique which assumes a clean erasure of local practices by Western INGOs, and erases persons' own agency in subverting or hedging the Gay International to their advantage (Massad 2007).

7.2 Hedging the Crisis part 1:

7.2.1 The Building of a new LGBTI NGO

"Can I be a jerk?" Christian wondered out loud as he barged into the main meeting room where dozens of Syrian men were gathered for the evening. Christian was visibly stressed; an important representative from a potential Western embassy donor and another representative from an international NGO were visiting. As a worker in the newly established but still unofficial "Whispers" project, he wanted to make sure the representatives left with an accurate picture of "LGBTI Syrians" specific struggles as refugees in Beirut. Christian proceeded to handpick men from the group who he thought had the most shocking and disturbing stories of life as a sexually non-normative person in Syria. The stories, which would be used for a report by the visiting INGO, needed to fit into a tailored narrative of queer refugee vulnerability. This categorized narrative was still under development by Western humanitarian NGOs such as the UNHCR and IRC, as well as several foreign embassies providing asylum and resettlement specifically to "LGBTI" refugees including the embassies of Canada, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the U.S. among others.

Local NGOs also participated in the crafting of the vulnerability narrative about the newly arriving Syrians. Some drew on past experience with displaced gender and sexually non-normative Iraqis. In 2009, a wave of killings by armed militias targeting men accused of effeminacy spread in some parts of Iraq. Generating from a social panic about the loss of Iraqi 'manhood' and fueled by instability and quest for social control, the violent campaign caused a new wave of migration. NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and several media outlets provided testimonies from Iraqis themselves depicting gruesome details of the torture and murder of those perceived to be effeminate, "not 'manly' enough" or "suspected of

homosexual conduct" (HRW 2009).[66] The targeted persecution of Iraqis in 2009 and their arrival to Beirut subsequently strengthened discursive arguments about gender and sexual non-normativity as a singular life-threatening cause for migration, and hence a valid ground for seeking refuge and resettlement.

In 2012, as the Syrian war entered its second year, the UNHCR in Lebanon issued a list of guidelines on providing protection and processing claims to refugee status based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) (UNHCR, n.d.), later redefined as SSOGI: Sex, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity. These guidelines, alongside the aforementioned HRW report on Iraqi refugees, and several documents produced by local LGBT NGOs in Beirut, were circulated and used to develop trainings for UNHCR's own staff and other humanitarian organizations working with Syrians. This process was hence envisioned as a collaborative effort between UNHCR and local NGOs such as HELEM, Mozaique, LebMash, and others. For the latter, the task at hand was not only to provide contextual evidence that showed that gender and sexual non-normativity were indeed markers of vulnerability and grounds for seeking asylum, but also to familiarize the local and international humanitarian staff with the correct terminology used to refer to sexually non-normative persons. Local LGBT NGOs emerged as necessary context providers, explaining legal and social mechanisms of exclusion and persecution, while also fighting against an Orientatlist perception of Beirut as a site of homophobia. At the same time, these local NGOs often relied on already-circulating transnational terminology of identity-based sexualities and homonormative assumptions about the refugees on whose behalf they were speaking, despite of their own experiences with sexual diversity in their centers and work. This co-constructive process between the local groups and international humanitarian NGOs contributes to producing the Syrian refugee figure as "forward-looking and right-seeking desiring bodies [that] are fixed into timeless and immutable identities that legitimate their claims for refuge" (Shakhsari 2014, 999). While the refugee becomes a particular kind of a vulnerable figure, Beirut itself becomes a zone of temporary transition. This zone is celebrated as a site in which LGBT rights are produced and won, and simultaneously a site of homophobia that renders these refugees' lives unbearable, all while reaffirming Europe and Western countries as permanent resettling zones of "LGBTI" liberation.

[66] These reports are careful to point that those targeted did not necessarily view themselves as non-normative, nor identified as gay or transgender, although a majority of the report's interviewees did (HRW 2009).

It is within this context that the project "Whispers" emerged. Framed as a new project for "LGBT" Syrian refugees (later "LGBTI" as per the humanitarian and transnational use of the acronym), it began with an informal closed gathering in HELEM's main room in 2013. When interviewing Noah about Whispers and his involvement, he mentioned that he had the idea and urge to "help" after meeting and speaking with many Syrian gay friends who were struggling in Beirut. He said: "I saw the need and I saw that no one is answering the need, so that's why I'm doing this project." Noah – himself new to the NGO scene – later qualified this need as psychological assistance, housing, and help in the form of follow-up on case registrations and asylum applications with the UNHCR. Initially, he did not have a particular agenda or a developed program. Rather, as he described to me, he asked the Syrian attendees to write down their most immediate needs on a piece of paper.[67] Thus, in a staggering three months (September – December 2013), what was first an informal gathering of a dozen people grew into an NGO initiative serving almost 50 gay Syrians (mostly men) under the name "Proud" with a significant first trial grant from the Dutch embassy. Proud was registered as an official NGO in Lebanon in 2014, which allowed it to receive funding directly, hire 5-6 full time staff members, and expand its list of "beneficiaries."

As Proud grew to serve more than a few hundred refugees, it became the main distributer of Syrians' personal stories and a key producer of the narratives of victimhood and vulnerability as based on sexual identity, mainly Gay and Trans. Its magazine featured sections including "testimonies" written by some of the refugees themselves. It also opened its doors to a number of media outlets seeking stories and profiles of queer Syrian vulnerability. If Noah could prove that "LGBTI" Syrians were especially vulnerable, he could guarantee them a decent chance at resettlement and continue funding his new NGO.

So how did the gendered and sexually non-normative Syrian refugees in this project navigate the sexual politics and agendas of humanitarian agencies, from narratives of vulnerability to categorizations of gender sexual identities? In what follows, I demonstrate that the Syrian refugees in this project do not uncritically adopt "LGBTI" identities and

[67] One of the needs supposedly communicated in the first meeting was the desire to learn English, which is when Christian approached me to see if I would be willing to volunteer and teach some classes – to which I agreed. My personal justification to participate in this project stemmed from an opinion that knowing some conversational English in a city like Beirut might be useful in some jobs that these men might be able to access, such as a waiter or a cashier. Christian agreed, but in convincing the men to attend, he chose to emphasize that they will need English "when you travel tomorrow," meaning, when they get the chance to resettle—a goal that many of the men hoped for.

politics, and certainly do not do so at the expense of simply giving up local practices. Rather, I argue that they once more invest in what appear to be contradictory systems of identification and relations – LGBTI and alternative kinship – only to *hedge* both as a strategy of survival.

7.2.2 Becoming an "LGBTI" Refugee

Upon my third return to Beirut in 2015, I was asked by a staff member in Proud to give an introductory "session on gender" to some of the current refugees who frequented the NGO's new community center. Perplexed by the meaning of a "session," and receiving little guidance, I decided to use the opportunity to share some basics from gender and feminist studies. As I began our informal chat in Proud's newest basement location, I was surprised that the attendees were fully versed in definitions of gender, sex, and sexual orientation, including new Arabic translations of the terms.[68] This was in contrast to my experience when initially starting fieldwork in 2013. "We've received a few trainings" remarked one attendee, a Syrian who has been a refugee in Lebanon for two years. As our discussion progressed, it soon became evident that some of the same trainings given by and for UNHCR staff were also continuously organized for refugees either by workers in these same INGOs or by local activists and local staff in Beirut-based LGBT NGOs. These included health awareness sessions, psychological support workshops, or regular weekly activities. By virtue of being a gender and sexuality studies scholar, my academic expertise were read as matching the specific LGBTI narrative that these INGOs were working with.

When reviewing the available UNHCR and local NGOs' training material in 2018, a strikingly repetitive emphasis on the distinction between gender and sexual orientation emerges. Almost without an exception, trainings, brochures, reports, and any publicly available educational information in English and Arabic begin with a definition of gender identity and sexual orientation as two distinct and unrelated categories. The material posits that sexual orientation is based on "a person's enduring capacity for profound romantic, emotional, and/or physical feelings for, or attraction to, person(s) of a particular sex or gender," while gender identity is based on a "deeply felt internal and individual experience of

[68] Terms such as *mithli* (gay or same sex), *hawiya jinsaniyah* (sexual identity) were gradually translated by local NGOs.

gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth" (UNHCR, n.d.). The distinction is then used to make sense of the five LGBTI categories, the definitions of which typically follow in the list of terms, and are hence defined as variations in sex, gender, and sexuality with little to no interdependent relationship to each other.

This introduced difference between "gender" and "sexual orientation" becomes the main juxtaposition from which Syrian refugees are guided to fit themselves into one of the five available LGBTI categories. In addition, a step in moving from a sexual "orientation" to a sexual "identity" is glossed over in all this material. In fact, through normalizing "orientation" as something that manifests naturally and only as an "identity," refugees are asked implicitly to name and be named even if they may not conceptualize their "orientation" as an "identity." In this sense, it is the very separation between gender and sexuality – a specifically modern understanding of sexual subjectivity as explored above and in chapter 2 – that facilitates the exercise of naming and identifying as a gendered sexual identity in the limited form of "LGBTI." In other words, the perceived foundational difference between gender and sexuality is central to pushing some refugees toward listing themselves and others under one of the five available LGBTI categories. This dynamic thus insists on a homonormative way of life, wherein one can be claimed as an LGBTI subject, but no other gender or sexual non-normativity, or forms of "eroticized genders" would be recognized as authentic or complete.

Naming of course serves the central basis for asylum and resettlement claims. Examining the Canadian resettlement system – a popular destination among some of the Syrian refugees I have interviewed – David Murray notes not only how "naming and rejecting" the brown non-normative person serves as "gate keeping" to the Canadian homonationalist nation and notions of acceptable citizenship, but also how it creates a particular idea of an "authentic queer" (2016, 22). Returning to Christian's selection of refugees to present to the visiting Western representatives, he was certainly looking for stories that would render the refugees legible as "authentic" both in their gender and sexual non-normativity as well as in their vulnerability as Syrians.

At the same time, the UNHCR training material is equally striking in its emphasis on sexual diversity outside of the LGBTI categories. Trainees are repeatedly instructed, for example, that Transgender refugees may not wish to transition, or that some persons may be leading heterosexual lives and be involved in heterosexual marriages, but that this does not

mean they are not 'gay enough' or not authentic enough. The assumption here is that service providers should be able to recognize "LGBTI" persons even if they do not yet identify as such or lead homonormative lives. The trainings then recognize a diversity in gendered sexualities and vulnerabilities that can be experienced due to this non-normativity. Further, some trainings are accompanied by guidelines and "etiquettes" of interviewing a Transgender person and providing them with services. Part of the instructed etiquette for service providers specifically is to not inquire about bodily parts, past traumas, or pose questions that stem from curiosity, as all service provision should be equal.

Yet, interviews for asylum seeking applications are perceived to inquire specifically about this kind of information, at least as described to me by various interlocutors. For example, Shams – a Lebanese Ladyboy who also sometimes identifies as a transwoman or as a woman, and who was applying for asylum on the basis of threats to her life in Lebanon – recounted to me that she discussed re-assignment surgeries with the case worker handling her resettlement file and was informed about various options and medical coverage. Further, regardless of the guidelines, a refugee seeking re-settlement is expected to prove their vulnerability and is encouraged to recount experiences of past trauma or a serious threat to their life. This assumption – whether practiced or imagined – is what informs Christian's handpicking of refugees to tell their stories to different NGOs, service providers, and media outlets.

An interesting contradiction then emerges between the need to name refugees as specifically LGBTI in order to provide/receive services or apply for asylum on the basis of sexual non-normativity on the one hand, and a code of ethics that emphasizes the privacy of gender and sexual non-normativity on the other. Dace Dzenovska refers to this contradiction as the "Paradox of Europeaness," which she defines as "the imperative to profess and institutionalize the values of inclusion and openness while at the same time practicing – and also institutionalizing – exclusion and closure;" specifically at the borders of the European Union (2018, 176). Hence, as some refugees become labeled as worthy of inclusion through the novel system of LGBTI-specific asylum and resettlement and used to prove Europe's or the US' and Canada's tolerance, "openness," and inclusion; others are excluded.

Notably missing from these trainings and guidelines is the "Q" in "LGBTQ" which, although an equally "Western"-originating category of identification and analysis, it is nevertheless conveniently omitted. "Queer" as an identity category is viewed with suspicion

given its perceived inclusion of both gender and sexual non-normativity that do not always match alongside stable and fixed identity claims such as LGBTI. Therefore, "Queer" poses a crisis of authenticity and disrupts the vulnerability and risk recognition process on which asylum and resettlements claims are evaluated. Alternatively, the "I" for "Intersex" is a relatively new addition to the acronym's use in Lebanon, although the Arabic translation of "Intersex" is rarely used, and the differentiation between Transgender and Intersex is not articulated using the gender vs. sex difference.[69] Instead, Shemales, Ladyboys, women, and trans include persons born with or transiting through various aspects of gender and sexual non-normativity.[70]

Equally absent from these lists are terms such as Shemale, Ladyboy, Top, and Bottom, Dakar, Mara, and any reference to any local terminology used by the various groups and communities of gender and sexually non-normative refugees I have interacted with. The absence is particularly striking in a context in which entire groups – of Lebanese and Syrian persons – refer to themselves as Shemales or Ladyboys (see chapter 6), and when many communicate using terms such as Top and Bottom, Dakar, Mara, etc. Skipping these terms is often justified either through claiming they are politically incorrect (see chapter 5) and thus offensive, or through arguing that they constitute sexual roles which the case worker should not inquire about and which should not be used to asses a person's eligibility to services or asylum as examined above.

Yet, although some of the persons I spoke with had found resonance in the LGBTI system and its categories, others often struggled to fit into one of these declared options. For example, should Queen say she is a transwoman? She only identifies as a Ladyboy, which is not an acknowledged category of sexual citizenship that qualifies one for a claim to queer marginalization in the LGBTI categories of asylum. In one case, a middle age self-identifying woman called Amar, complained to me in frustration over her resettlement application. Amar had been married when she lived as a man, and has three children she wants to have resettled with her. While in Beirut, she gave up her feminine look out of fear of violence in a city she does not know. She was suspected of not being authentically Transgender, and her application, in her view, was taking a longer time out of suspicion for being a cisgender man

[69] As per my observation with my interlocutors while on the field.
[70] The Western identity category of "Asexual" which is sometimes added to the acronym as LGBTIA or LGBTQIA, is not discussed in the material I reviewed. Its omission points to the underlining assumption that a true queer refugee is a sexually practicing one.

taking advantage of the LGBTI system of asylum. Although there was no way to prove her suspicion, she still saw herself as caught in an impossible situation: the obligation to present herself as a visible Transwoman with its accompanying dangers while simultaneously denying a heterosexual and cis-gender past (which in fact serves as the ground to claiming "transition" across the gender binary in itself).

The kind of quest for, and crisis of authenticity was met with much frustration by many of the Syrian refugees (and Lebanese asylum seekers such as Shams). At the same time, however, many learnt quickly that in order to receive what was promised as special consideration for asylum and resettlement, they had to play by these terms and invest in presenting themselves as one of the LGBTI categories (most frequently the G or the T) with the accompanying narrative of a specific threat to life due to their "queerness" from a homophobic regime or extremist armed militias. Under these conditions, it is unsurprising that many sought the services of an NGO like Proud who could teach them how to fit their gender and sexual non-normativity into the frame of acceptable LGBTI vulnerability and victimhood and gain them a chance at applying for resettlement.

It is therefore inaccurate to claim that refugees are somehow completely outside of this process and are only recipients of identity categories and politics. On the contrary, they participate in this dynamic in a multiplicity of ways, including strategically hedging the LGBTI identity categories to argue for a better chance at resettlement, services or representation. In the case that a person does not have a clear link between their mistreatment by the regime specifically for being "LGBTI," then they still must prove their life is in danger *as* Syrians. In one informal remark, Christian reflected upon the kind of advice given to the refugees when they file for asylum and resettlement: "you won't believe how many people have seen chemical weapon storage areas." The assumption here is that if one claims to have such sensitive information, then one's life is surely at risk *as* a Syrian, and not necessarily as an "LGBTI" person. The ability to claim knowledge of chemical weapon storage sites plays into the concern over their use by the Assad regime, which constitutes a war crime, and has been a contentious point of disagreement among all parties participating the Syrian war. Hence, it plays perfectly into not only into security fears, but also into a risk and victimhood narrative, which can establish a refugee's asylum claim as urgent and legitimate.

At the same time, the refugees' and asylum seekers' adoption of terms such as Gay and Trans is never complete or uncontested. As the next section will show, many of the same

refugees hoping for asylum as "LGBTI" refugees also move in between a myriad of local queer relations. They rebuild torn and existing ways of living queer lives that do not ascribe to the Gay International's sexo-political categorization, namely through practices of queer kinship and alternative motherhood, which grants them a system of social support while displaced in a foreign country.

7.3 Hedging the Crisis Part 2: Displaced Queer Motherhood

The first time I found out Queen was a mother I deliberately didn't ask what she meant. Queen and I were standing outside HELEM's office where she had just arrived wearing tight shorts and a tank-top, with her bleached blond hair straightened and loose, reaching her chin. We had not been introduced before but exchanged a casual conversation and she began talking about her sons. She said she had been having a few rough days because she had to take her son to the hospital after he tried committing suicide. Alarmed, I asked her what had happened. In her casual witty way she dismissed his act and said that her other son had tried committing suicide before so this one just saw it and mimicked it. "I have a lot of kids, I'm their mother" she continued. I was lost – not only because at that point I had read her as a gay flamboyant man (a term she would *not* use for herself) but also because she could not have been past 20 years old. She knew I was confused, but deliberately didn't explain, and so I understood her gesture as a possible attempt to elicit a shocked and surprised reaction from me. Later I realized it might have been simply a testing ground to see how "in" on the terminology – and therefore community – I was. Not dismissing her, but still rather suspicious of her story, I asked her how many sons or daughters she had. Laughing, she said she had around 15 and that she is younger than all of them. She spoke more about her son and said she scolded him for mimicking his brother and then moved on to talking to someone else. Why would Queen position herself as a mother to her friends, and what does this relationship mean to her and them? How can we understand this relationship as a form of queer kinship? How does this form of kinship interact with the LGBTI system of identification for asylum that would demand Queen lists herself as a Gay male refugee, and what role does it have in building relations under displacement?

In her groundbreaking work on the conceptualization of queer families in the U.S., Kath Weston traces the socio-historical processes that enabled the creation of the "gay

family" in its modern form (1997). She proposes that "families we choose" is a historically located response to the heteronormative conception of families based on blood and biological ties (ibid). This location reflects a history of building the very categories of straight and gay as oppositional. In her view, given that biological reproduction is structured in a way that "determines kinship," gay families and "families we choose" offer "a more comprehensive attack on the privilege accorded to a biogenetically grounded model of determining what relationships will count as kinship" (Weston 1997, 35). Given that ideas about gay and queer sexualities travel and interact locally and globally, does this understanding of the biological and the queer/alternative family hold in a moment of crisis among Syrian refugees?

Conceptualizations of contemporary queer and non-normative kinship structures in Syria and Lebanon as well as regionally are scarce.[71] Fadi Saleh (Forthcoming 2019) has reflected on the kinship politics among gender and sexually non-normative Syrians in Syria and refugees in Istanbul and remarks that the mother is often a cis-gendered man who introduces other men to the queer scene and community[72]. As Queen's case demonstrates, a mother can also be a Ladyboy or a transwoman who introduces gender and sexually non-normative men and women to the alternative community. Brothers and sisters belong to the same mother and thus have been brought into the circle by the same person. Further, a mother sometimes dictates to her sons who they can sleep with or is consulted about sexual relations. In this sense, a mother is responsible for familiarizing her sons with the community, codes or sets of behavior, and the passing of knowledge, much in the same way a biological and social mother is held responsible for passing family and community values to her daughters and sons in a traditional upbringing.

In addition, from what we've seen in Queen's case,[73] she not only felt responsibility to take her son to the hospital, but the fact she engaged in "scolding" and reduced the

[71] For example, in a brief chapter on Syrian same-sex encounters among a small group of men in Damascus, Gary B. MaCdonald (1992) describes various sexual lives, acts, and desires, but kinship structures do not appear in this group's dynamic. Curiously, however, the term "true" – a reference to penis size – appears as part of this group's vocabulary. The term is still used today by some like Queen in a variety of forms like "*truwat*" to denote the same meaning. In his book "Syrian Episodes: Sons, Fathers, and an Anthropologist in Aleppo", John Borneman (2007) focuses on (primarily heterosexual) kinship structures among men and their families. When briefly addressing motherhood and sexuality in his book, he uncritically employs a Freudian analysis of relationships between mothers and sons and applies the Oedipus complex in his analysis of these relations.

[72] Based on an informal conversation about his unpublished work.

[73] Due to the limits of research, I never found out how she managed to have so many children, and whether any of these kinship ties were sustained from Queen's time in Syria or were new ones that she made while in Lebanon.

seriousness of the decision to "mimicry" was meant to emphasize, at least discursively to an outside observer such as myself, her place as a figure with authority stemming from her power as a mother in this situation. In turn, the sons were expected to inform the mother of their doings and relations in the community. For example, a Lebanese friend once remarked that when he went to visit his Syrian boyfriend in Damascus, his boyfriend took him to meet his alternative mother first; a gesture my friend interpreted as reflective of his boyfriend's acknowledgment and respect for his alternative mother and for her role, and maybe even a quest for her approval of his choice in lovers.

The figure of the alternative mother thus shares a parallel similarity with that of the biological mother in heterosexual families who very often plays a central role in her son's sexual future through participating in his marital decision. A son's heterosexual marriage is in itself understood as a son's responsibility towards his biological parents especially if living arrangements are such where he settles in the same house – a common practice regionally. This is because marriage is one primary way the son ensures his parents are taken care of in old age by his wife, hence obtaining his parents' approval and reaffirming kinship ties and belonging in the community (Joseph 1999). For example, in one of my conversations with Qusai, a cis-gender tall muscular man from a Syrian town close to the Lebanese border, he told me he had just come back from his engagement party in Syria. He had been going back and forth because his mother was sick, but I did not know he had plans to marry a woman. I asked him about his fiancée. Sensing my surprise, he answered that he is his mother's only son, and thus the Syrian military cannot draft him, and so his mother wants to "*tifrah fiye*"; literally meaning to have him become a cause for her happiness, a saying that usually denotes marriage. He agreed to the heterosexual engagement without much questioning. Given that he currently resides in Lebanon, his future wife will be expected to take care of his mother during his frequent absence.

Crucially, Qusai did not talk about his heterosexual marriage and natal family in contrast to his "queer" life and ties. Although he did not speak to me about an alternative mother that he might have, I knew that he had ties not only among the gay men but also a connection with the Room bar in Beirut. In the same conversation, he mentioned he would have loved to spend Saint Barbara's Day in Syria and not in Lebanon as many of his friends observe the celebrations. All this reflects that he has an active life and role in the gender and sexually non-normative groups and communities across Syria and Lebanon. The expectation

to maintain his biological familial ties as the only son, and particularly his obligation to care for his mother, coexists with Qusai's 'queer' life, and does not simply replace it, as Kath Weston's study suggests for the conceptions of "chosen" queer families in the U.S. that often act as a gay person's primary network and serve to question the primacy of biological ties in building families (1997, 34).[74] Qusai's conception of a family joins both biological kin and alternative kin.

Equally surprising for me was that Queen referred to her friend as a "son" and not a "daughter." As I have come to know her, this was a rather unusual exception in her use of gendered nouns. Queen frequently referred to all the men around her as women. She would particularly do this if she knew the men were "bottoms," but she did also tease "tops" with addressing them in the feminine form.[75] However, in this case, her reference to a son rather than a daughter was indicative of his gender. Why would Queen switch to speaking about a son and not address him the same way she addresses the men in HELEM? Here lies a potential second parallel with the heterosexual model of motherhood. In her analysis of the relationship between biological mothers and sons in Lebanon, Suad Joseph offers several observations and insights about the valorization of sons by their mothers as indications of the mother's success (1999). In Joseph's remarks: "in most Arab societies it is by birthing a son that a woman makes her claim to status" (1999, 187). In addition, Joseph explains that "in a culture in which the family is valued over and above the person, identity is defined in familial terms, and kin idioms and relationships pervade public and private spheres, connective relationships may be not only functional but also necessary for successful social existence" (ibid, 189). If Weston's claims that "recruitment" is a way of "reproduction" for queer/gay

[74] In a similar incident, George, a cis-gendered muscular man, once showed me a video of his engagement party where he was dancing with his new fiancée in the presence of both of their biological parents. When I teased him about his dancing and remarked that he is very rigid and "straight looking" in this video but that I know he is a better dancer, he explained that he cannot cancel the engagement "because of his parents and family" that he wanted to satisfy. Leaving the biological family and network was simply not an option for him. Seeing that I recognized and possibly projected a feeling of unfair entrapment (his and his fiancées), Georges jokingly said "Oh don't worry, I can get it up." "Getting it up" was only partly about his duty to satisfy his fiancée's sexual pleasure, it was also about successfully conceiving children and fulfilling what he and his family saw as a determined role.

[75] This was part of her colorful performance but also part of *Shakher*. For example, in one particularly overcrowded meet-up, and after a large Lebanese man made it clear that he was there to look for sexual company, Queen yelled out to the crowd "where is that *La Vache Qui Rit*? Bring her to me I'll show her something" and proceeded to make her way navigating the full room towards the mirror to check her hair while the men who heard her laughed. Feminizing the Lebanese man and mocking him for his overweight appearance and eagerness for a sexual encounter, by a figure like Queen, actually served not only to expose and embarrass him for his behavior, but also to devalue him as feminine.

families in the US (1997, 24) can be extended to our context and joined with Joseph's previous remarks, then recruiting as many sons (and daughters) bolsters a 'queer' mother's status in her community and ensures the building of a supportive alternative family network. Queen's pride for having 15 sons is thus well placed and is legible even when using a heteronormative framework in understanding the meanings of this alternative family and network – a framework that nonetheless "hypervalorizes" the mother in a potential "compensatory" move "to the mother's subordination to father and son and brother and husband" (Joseph 1999, 188–189).

These relations are certainly ignored by the humanitarian INGOs, local LGBT NGOs, and asylum procedures. Joseph Massad perceives ignoring such local practices a part of the Gay International's suppression of local non-normativities (Massad 2007, see chapter 2). On the one hand, Massad is right in that an entire set of practices and identifications, meanings and desires, risk erasure when the Gay International arrives to liberate gendered and sexually non-normative subjects and label them as "LGBTI." Such an alternative kinship structure has little place or productively recognized function in the Gay International and its resettlement arm. For example, when and if a gay Syrian man applies for resettlement in a Western state on the basis of persecution due to his sexual preferences, his partner (if he has one) might be considered, but certainly not his alternative mother. An alternative mother like Queen falls outside of the global heteronormative *and* homonormative order. On the other hand, the state and its interventions in defining and policing gender and sexual non-normativity plays just as significant of a role in a person's choices of hedging their gendered and sexual self presentations (see chapter 4). But are silencing and erasure the only possible outcomes of interaction with the Gay International and transnational humanitarian regimes?

Naser is another alternative mother who never boasted about her children in the same way that Queen did. Although known as a gay man as explored earlier, he now presents himself as a "balanced" middle age cis-gendered male with a beard. Returning to the particularly busy day in the center I described, I happened to be crammed with the other men in the main meeting room with much bustle as interviews were conducted in the two smaller rooms, and some of the men in the group were waiting their turns. After exchanging some chit-chat with Naser, I found an appropriate moment to ask him what it meant to him that he is a mother. Naser smiled and said:

> They're all my siblings. You should have been there yesterday; we were all dancing and drinking. He was there too [points to another man in the crowded room]. You know... at one point he grabbed me by my legs – we were drunk of course – and started yelling 'you're my mother, my mother' and we all broke down crying. I was crying, everyone was crying. You know… it's because we all lost someone. We've all lost [a family member].

Naser's narrative clearly links the effects of war and the state of displacement with the building and strengthening of queer kinship ties, or what he called during our conversation an "alternative family." He made a direct connection between the loss of biological kin due to war and the creation of alternative families in displacement. Even though war has destroyed so many of *both* of the biological and the queer family ties, they were being actively rebuilt and maintained. Again, while here the emphasis on replacement of biological kinship with an alternative one is evident and even parallel to the politics of building queer kinship in Weston's account, the key difference remains in the conditions of the incentive; namely war and displacement. In another account, Nasser adds the heteronormative order as a key factor shaping the building of alternative families:

> This 'small family' or 'alternative family' as I call it comes from the fact we are rejected in our own [biological] family. It's also a bit funny, meant to be fun, so we have a lot of fun with the feminized terms for each other. I always say it is an imitation of the big family…once you lose something, you find an alternative. So this is our alternative family.

And when reflecting on his condition now in Beirut:

> I was dead and came back. I won't forget these years I spent in military prison. Every day I see the same scenes before I go to bed. I need care. I need help. I need medical attention […]. As long as you have the alternative family, people like me who have gone through all of this, of course they will create a mother to be attached to.

When I asked what it is about the figure of the mother that makes it the appropriate frame for structuring the alternative family, Naser elaborated:

> The mother is the one who raises, gives love, *bitsattir* [hides one's secret] and if anything is found out, she is the source of strength for her child. Even in straight families, take any person, their father dies and you see them still standing on their feet. But when their mom dies, they have a deep sorrow, they lost something huge. So the origin is the mother.

Me: How does one get an alternative mother?

Naser: This depends on experience and knowledge. The mother always has to be the one who is an expert, who is *Qadeera* [posses a lot of strength and knowhow], knows how to handle things and how to operate relations in her community. Her strength comes from placing herself in this form, she draws power from this figure. So when a fight happens, you say X is my mom, I took from her *Qadara*; strength. Some people see *Qadara* as *fijir* [obscenity or debauchery]. What is *fijir*? Something being publicly revealed without any sense of guilt, shame, or concern for society. A man wants to do what he wants, without limitation. He wants to dress as a woman and simply does not care about the [biological] family or the police. So the mother's strength comes from here. And when the mother sees a gay guy that still has no power over these conditions, then she takes him as a daughter.

Naser here draws the importance of a mother's "strength" to overcome both; the heterosexist and homophobic society that refuses gender and sexual non-normativity, and to overcome the experiences of torture, war, and displacement. He equates a form of "outness" – being publicly known as a non-normative figure – with that of having survived the Syrian regime and the Syrian war. Therefore, queer or alternative motherhood is not only about the recreation of an alternative family that supports a person when they're rejected from society, but it is also a necessary relation of support at this specific time of war and displacement.

When comparing Naser's definition of an alternative family to the familial system among gay Black men in Harlem as well as the House scene and its queer families in New York, it is evident that Naser is building an alternative family due to loss of biological kin, either through their rejection of him, or through the effects of war and displacement. Hence, his definition of a family does not include both biological and alternative kin; they remain separate even if connected through loss. In contrast, gay Black men in Harlem include both in their definitions and daily practices of family, this is because, as William G. Hawkeswood and Alex W. Costley argue, gay Black men see themselves as Black first before being gay; and because their economic networks are centralized in Harlem together with other non-gay Black men and women (1996). These networks become means of avoiding interaction with the larger White world and surviving racism, poverty, and exclusion together as a "family" through extensive networks of service exchanging and emotional support. Therefore, in Harlem, Black race becomes the main operative marker of difference even for gay Black men, as the authors argue (ibid).

Suddenly, one of the men who was listening to my conversation with Naser came closer and shyly asked Naser: "what about me, do I have a mother?" Naser was not entertained by the question and tried to ignore it. After some insistence on the man's part, Naser finally responded: "weren't you there last night?" The circumstance did not allow me to ask why either of them wanted to be in this arrangement. Naser's indirect claiming of this man as his son/daughter felt like something he was forced to do now that the man presented him with a clear claim. Later I found out that Naser was known as the caring and loving mother, a reputation that claimed him.

It is impossible for me at this stage to draw the map of alternative motherhood networks whether in Syria, post displacement in Beirut, post resettlement in the West, or post return to Syria. While for Naser alternative motherhood is a replacement for a loss, for Qusai, heterosexual marriage and 'queer' life ran simultaneously without cancelling one in favor of the other. Both also were involved in hedging the LGBTI categories of identification. These variations demonstrate the multiple kinds of agentive hedging that Syrians are invested in specifically under conditions of war and displacement. These multiple hedgings also clearly demonstrate the inapplicability and inadequacy of Western LGBTI categories, the Gay International, or even frameworks of queer families elsewhere to analytically capture the unfolding of gender and sexual non-normativity among displaced Syrian refugees in Beirut.

7.4 Summary

Despite being inside HELEM's crammed room waiting in line to perform a narrative of gay victimhood and vulnerability to Western donors and INGO representatives as part of Whispers/Proud, the Syrian refugees in these circumstances of crisis continue to restructure their own sexual and gendered selves in accordance to their needs of survival. Contrary to theories of the Gay International (Massad 2007), these persons are not blindly converted into "LGBTI" persons awaiting liberation, even though most hope of convincing Western authorities they deserve resettlement. Rather, these refugees hedge for survival. In order to survive a heterosexist and homophobic society, to survive displacement, and to survive a crisis of gender and masculinity, they must invest in various cross-braced systems of sexual relations and identification. Hence they adopt "LGBTI" identification and narratives of victimhood and, at the same time, invest in expanding their alternative kinship structures.

Theorists of the local and the global have proposed various frameworks in capturing the unfolding of transnational ideas about gendered sexuality across the globe as I explored in chapter 2. As bodies migrate or are forced into displacement, they develop new articulations of gendered sexualities: "When a practitioner of 'homosexual acts,' or a body that carries any of the many queering marks moves between officially designated spaces – nation, region, metropole, neighborhood, or even culture, gender, religion, disease – intricate realignments of identity, politics, and desire take place" (Patton and Sanchez-Eppler 1999, 3). Such "alignments," scholars have argued, can be conceived of as "hybrid forms that interact with Western or Euro-American sexual ideologies" resulting from the interaction between the local and the global (Manalansan IV 2006, 229). Yet, the above Syrian refugee interlocutors do not display a "hybrid form" of identity. Hybridity presumes the fusing of some parts of the global with some parts of the local while not being considered enough of a part of either. The Syrian refugees insist on becoming part of both: an international LGBTI system that captures them in the form of identity-possessing bodies worthy of resettling on the one hand, and as re-creators of queer and alternative community relations even while displaced on the other. Conceptualizing the refugees' tactics as what I have been terming a process of continuous hedging helps us in understanding gendered sexual non-normativities as not mutually exclusive practices, nor as compromises in negotiation, but rather as concurrent investments.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

I have argued in this dissertation that we are in need of a new theoretical and analytical framework to understand gendered non-normative sexualities and their politics in Beirut today, and in West Asia more broadly. As I have shown, thus far scholarly approaches to 'the sexual' in Middle East Studies have been caught in a debate over either its local authenticity, or its mimicry of transnational ideas and politics. On the one hand, homosexuality's perceived sameness and the claim of its universal applicability renders invisible colonial histories and their modern trajectories of travel, which remain central for understanding the shaping of gender and sexual non-normativity in Beirut today. On the other hand, some post-colonial analyses view 'the sexual' solely as a question of imperial imposition through channels such as Gay International (Massad 2007), while decolonial approaches call for excavating a pure local and authentic form of desire uncontaminated by transnational flows of ideas, claiming a pure origin (see chapter 2). These approaches, while providing very valuable insights, analyses, and trajectories to follow, still trap the persons addressed by them today in a multiple inadequate and incomplete frames. These persons – including activists in HELEM, Proud, and other LGBT organizations, Lebanese and Syrians identifying as Shemale, Ladyboy, trans, LGBT, and/or engaging in gendered and sexual non-normativity whether through active desires, acts, embodiments, or activism – are read as Western agents, incomplete copies, or as evidence of the transtemporal sameness of homosexuality. With the exception of a few notable ethnographic studies of queerness and non-normativity in Lebanon (Merabet 2014a), these debates have not actually centralized the lives, bodies, views, agency and politics of the persons about whom they speak. In doing so, they have left a clear need for a theoretical and ethnographic intervention.

Following a queer feminist ethnographic approach, my dissertation began from the lives and voices of those caught in between fights over the definition and policing of gender and sexual non-normativity in Beirut. I have centralized my interlocutors' experiences and voices, while at the same time, I have also insisted on shifting attention away from them as strange, and rather re-directing it at the systems that produce them as such. These two working principles of feminist ethnography and queer theory revealed my interlocutors' lives as (1) defined by several cross-braced discourses and structures of power, (2) which they navigate using a strategy of hedging. My interlocutors made it clear that in order to survive among all competing powers seeking to define them, police them, or make profit off of them,

they have to hedge their gendered sexualities. In other words, Nancy from chapter 3, Fulla from chapter 6, and Queen and Naser from chapter 7, demonstrate how they are investing in multiple embodiments, self presentations, and identities as strategies of negotiating their daily commutes, access to community and to leisure, and surviving displacement. Their experiences make it clear that not only do we need to understand these strategies of being and living as a continuous process of hedging, but also, that a new approach to theorizing gendered non-normative lives and their politics is pivotal, because existing frameworks have failed to see them as more than contradictions, and hence have failed to critically account for them.

To account for this theoretical and empirical absence and the analytical gap it poses, I have proposed imagining that gendered non-normative sexualities are (re)produced through the cross-bracing of multiple discourses and systems of power. First, I have argued that cross-bracing offers us room to rethink the interaction between the local and the transnational as more than only a clash of civilizations (Huntington 1993), a unidirectional imposition (Massad 2007), or a friction (Tsing 2005). As I have shown in chapters 4 and 5, friction still occurs as a result of the meeting of traveling ideas in tension, either in the predictability of a fight over the meaning of Pride between activists and conservative groups in chapter 4, or in the introduction of neoliberal ideas about respectable LGBT activist norms that clash with local community-building practices such as *Shakher* in chapter 5. Yet, as I have argued, friction is only one type of a possible interaction between the local and the transnational, and does not offer us the full story. It does not show us the structures within which these frictions occur and operate. Hence we need a wider lens to understand these tensions, their genealogy, and possible trajectories.

Cross-bracing in turn allows us to see different kinds of flows and structures of power that do not always interact in friction. For example, it allows us to see that frequently, systems of sexual identification and belonging are reproduced concurrently, such as in the case of the Syrian refugees in chapter 7 learning how to fit themselves under Western LGBTI categories while also rebuilding their own systems of alternative motherhood and queer kinship as they deal with war and displacement. Investing in two systems at the same time, these interlocutors show us that the Gay International's reach is not unlimited, and that it can be subverted for their own survival. Likewise, if we only apply a developmental modernist narrative to study the Lebanese state apparatus, we would only see the state's regulation and

punishment of gendered (non)-normative sexualities as an incomplete and contradictory process that places Lebanon on a developmental spectrum; a forever 'developing' state that never quite reaches its target. However, when reconsidering the systems of regulations and punishment, linking them to the logic of sextarianism (Mikdashi 2018) that organizes both sex and religious identities, we can tell a more accurate story. Through seeing these various structures of power as cross-braced, we see a new type of state logic emerge: the state apparatus hedges the contradictory functions of policing and allowing as per its own calculation of which strategy maintains its power and right to violence. Such a view demonstrates that gendered sexual (non)normativities cannot be understood using only discourses of development, or Human Rights, or democratization. We need a wider lens and a more multiple structural view, which cross-bracing offers.

Cross-bracing hence takes us beyond intersectionality in that it offsets attention away from the point of crossing. I have not argued for casting away intersectionality as an analytical tool. Indeed, as I have shown, employing intersectionality is necessary for understanding the mutual constitution of gender and class (producing the notion of gender respectability) in the cases of Shemales navigating the bar deal in chapter 6 for example. Rather, I have argued for widening our view of such an intersection to capture the functions of all of its unequal parts. This meant exposing the economic profit of the bar deal as a business arrangement between various bars, informed by their geographical locations and hence sectarian spatial politics, as well as their susceptibility to raids and policing. The bars became chief actors in the process of defining gendered respectability and in creating a Shemale vs. non-Shemale divide, rendering narratives of identity-based Transphobia insufficient for explaining their hedging. Too often, intersectionality is employed as a default analytical tool formed by a trilogy of gender, race, and class interaction imagined as equally informing a person's experience. Even in its original form – as an intersection of race and gender (Crenshaw 1991) – intersectionality does not allow us to see these very foundational factors that shape the entire situation of a Shemale arriving at a bar and being denied or permitted entry. It is precisely because so few studies have mapped the complex ways in which gendered and sexual non-normativities are articulated in West Asia, that we need a wider approach such as cross-bracing in order to provide an accurate enough of a reading.

In a similar vein, treating these discourses and systems of power as operating in the form of an assemblage – an approach that Jasbir Puar (2007) develops to counter intersectionality's reliance on identity politics, see introduction and chapter 2 – would not suffice for capturing the manifestation of gender and sexual non-normativities in Beirut. An assemblage allows us to combine several elements together that appear at first sight to be unrelated, and reveals the temporal connections between them. It is a theoretically rich approach to studying the various operations of Empire and the new emerging routes that ideas and politics of queer sexuality can take. However, an assemblage is but one manifestation of the operation of power; and as such, it does not always allow us to see structure in the same way that a cross-brace does. An assemblage is interested in connecting seemingly unrelated phenomena and exposing their co-constructive dependency. A cross-brace insists on the frequent predictability of some frictions and flows of power, such as the case of clashes over the various meanings of Beirut Pride in chapter 2. Cross-bracing also insists on the constant relevance of local conditions and structures of power that are so frequently disregarded or underprivileged as relevant conditions of analysis – the systems of sextarianism, the bar deal, the practice of *Shakher*, alternative motherhood and queer kinship under conditions of war and displacement.

As I have shown, cross-bracing demonstrates that in the same given moment, local and transnational ideas and power systems can be running concurrently, clashing in friction, or reinforcing each other; all of which inform the subject's experience, their legibility, and their decisions of hedging. Because cross-bracing offers us a complex view of the flows of power, then hedging offers us relief from determining interlocutors' behavior as illogical or contradictory (adopting trans and straight and Shemale identities at once), as without agency, or as with a specific form of Western-legible agency (self-identified LGBT and Human Rights activists). It is through hedging that we can understand activists' insistence on creating respectable LGBT selves and politics while still configuring their relationships to the local practice of *Shakher*. Likewise, it is through hedging that we can understand Shemales' insistence on their gendered identities and their negotiation of their embodiments as a classed performance intimately informed by the bar deal. And it is through hedging that we can also understand Syrian refugees' simultaneous adoption of Gay and Trans identity categories while concurrently rebuilding fractured queer kinship ties.

What appear as contradictory, incomplete, fragmented politics are indeed a much more complex set of varied personal and political investments and strategies of being. Therefore, cross-bracing and hedging not only contribute to theorizations of the relationship between the local and the transnational, subject and structure, agency and power; but they also chiefly contribute to studies of gender and sexuality in Beirut and West Asia. In insisting on starting from the voices of those caught and defined by these structures, cross-bracing and hedging are critical interventions into the fields of queer ethnography and "Middle Eastern" anthropology more broadly.

8.1 Future avenues for research: Regional Perspectives

Thus far I have looked at the (re)production of gender and sexual non-normativity through the multiple interactions of the local-transnational cross-brace; such as the Lebanese state's negotiation of transnational principles of democracy and Human Rights, versus religious and sectarian leaders denouncing Human Rights as a mere Western imposition. While couching my analysis in the interaction between the local and the transnational, showing its inequality as well as its contingency, I have also referred to the role of regional elements in its operative function. My analysis pushes us toward a more systemic exploration of the role of the regional as a central tenet in a cross-brace for informing the (re)production of gendered non-normative sexualities. Adding the third pillar of 'the regional' helps us complicate the boundaries between the local and the transnational, more effectively showing the permeability of these conceptual borders, while also moving away from seeing their interaction only as only an intersection, assemblage, or a friction.

For the Lebanese case specifically, the sexual is always in conversation with regional power dynamics and political events, including geopolitical relationships with Syria, Palestine, Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia and others. Relations with Syria in particular – as I have briefly explored in chapter 7 – have tangible effects on the lives of persons in Lebanon. Gendered narratives depicting the political relationship between Syria and Lebanon have frequently oscillated between images of the Arab brother and the threatening invading foreign other. For example, in 1991 Syria and Lebanon signed the treaty of "Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination" detailing the nature of their "special brotherly tie" (United Nations 1992). The treaty's text offers an astute depiction of this tenacious duality. On the one hand, the treaty refers to the two states as "brothers" and their relationship as "fraternal"

three times on the first page, citing "roots of kinship, history, common affiliation, joint destiny and shared interests" as the maternal origins for this Arab fraternity, without explicitly making reference to the mother – the Arab *Umma* (nation).[76] In a move typical of modern nationalist discourses (McClintock 1993), the treaty employs pan-Arabist rhetoric and draws an imagined continuum between Syrian and Lebanese pre-colonial Arab unity and a future "joint destiny" to underscore a naturalized movement forward toward progress (United Nations 1992). The brotherhood metaphor is thus useful in normalizing quite serious political and military conflicts between the states – which included Syrian occupation of Lebanon – as nothing more than predictable and inevitable brotherly quarrels; that is, fights that do not threaten the very basis of the relationship, its past nor its future.

Notably absent in this rich gendered and familial imagery are references to sexuality, rendering it an imagined homosocial relation. For example, this relationship is not portrayed as a happy marriage – as the word choice of "shared destiny" might seem to suggest – but rather as a natural result of pre-existing and unchangeable familial ties. In other words, '(biological) brothers will be brothers' despite of any conflict, and the conflict will be a quarrel but not depicted as a "rape," as is common in depictions of Israeli occupation of Lebanon and Palestine for example, or other U.S. interventions in West Asia (Massad 1995). Therefore, even though the unequal power relationship is revealed and acknowledged, it is neuturalized by the absence of a sexual dimension in its portrayal and justified through using the idea of a natural hierarchy between an older sibling and a younger one.

This type of a regional frame then has the potential to complicate our understandings of gender and sexual non-normativity, and offers new avenues of exploration. By tying conceptions of normativity to ideas of kinship, homosociality, and the non-sexual, it is easy to see how conceptions of non-normativity could then include notions of foreignness and the sexual. Indeed, in the same treaty above, once the text begins to address security issues, direct brotherhood references are dropped, and a language of internal and external state threat is adopted instead, in a form that clearly reveals the unequal positions of both states towards each other. While there is no explicit mention of sexualization, the effects as I have shown in both chapter 4 and chapter 7 is the association of the "other" (in this case Syrians in Lebanon)

[76]The slippage between "brotherhood" and "fraternity" is unnoticed due to the word's shared Arabic root, however, it is informative insofar as it is read alongside the absent reference to the Umma, as it denotes a homosocial bond.

as either hypersexual rapists, or demasculinized tops, using clear discriminatory rhetoric. A regional frame would hence shed more light on the building of normativity and non-normativity and the ways in which these notions interact with the hetero/homo-sexual binary, homosocial kinship, and fraternity.

Additionally, a regional view can help us complicate the story of NGOization of gender and sexual rights activism in Beirut today. As I have mentioned in chapters 5 and 7, sexual rights activism is heavily influenced by the Syrian refugee crisis, and several NGOs have offered programs for refugees and assistance in resettlement applications. Funding for refugees is not only coming from Western countries but also from 'non-traditional donors' that mainly include Gulf countries. While LGBT organizations in Lebanon have not directly accessed this funding, they do work with other humanitarian, research, and feminist organizations that have; suggesting more intricate hedging of the very definitions of gendered and sexual non-normativity. More research needs to be done to assess the kinds of gendered and sexual (non)-normativities defined through these funding structures.[77] Given the size of sponsored educational programs, as well as Lebanon's past experiences with post-war reconstruction funds, it is possible that Gulf donors can be just as influential as the Gay International in shaping understandings of normative gendered sexualities through emphasis on heterosexual family-based projects and funding structures.

Lastly, the dimension of the regional has been formative for Lebanese sexuality rights activism. For example, as I recounted in the brief history of LGBT organizing in Beirut, an impulse to formally organize in a group advocating for sexual freedoms was not only the repressive context in Lebanon, but, crucially, the Queen Boat raid in Cairo in 2001, which HELEM activists and others perceived as a very threatening precedent (Makarem 2011). Moreover, during the U.S. military occupation of Iraq, organized murder campaigns against feminine men in Iraq led some to flee and seek refuge in Lebanon, pushing the activists to engage humanitarian funding they have access to in assisting them (HRW 2009). Likewise, frequent moral panics in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and elsewhere around so-called 'masculinized women' or '*boyat*' (form 'boy') were debated in queer women's activist circles to reach a better understanding of the phenomenon and its (in)applicability to the Lebanese context. Therefore, whether directly or indirectly, events and relations with neighboring

[77] I have interviewed a few activists and consulted several academics about this topic specifically, but have found very little information or research conducted. This is a missing gap in the literature that, in my view, needs to be filled in order to complicate the story of gendered funding and articulation of non-normative sexualities in Lebanon.

countries greatly inform the politics of the sexual through (re)defining (non)-normativity and the morally permissible and punishable. Adopting a regional framework of analysis that centralizes regional relations can greatly enrich our understanding of the reproduction of gendered non-normative sexualities and their politics in West Asia.

8.2 Final words: subject, structure, and queer hope

Figure 4: a scene of several rooftops in Akkar, Lebanon. Courtesy of David Haddad, 2012

A familiar sight in congested cities across West Asia is buildings with solid foundations and unfinished rooftops. Families who have built or bought their own homes frequently leave the main house pillars exposed along with tens and tens of iron rods sticking out puncturing the skyline, while hinting at the invisible cross-braced structures that prop them up. The rods become symbols of the family's desire that one day their children will continue the construction of another floor on top of their childhood home, moving in to start their own families. This strategy of living and reproducing is especially observable in Palestinian refugee camps across the region, where one has to expand vertically and not horizontally due to constrictions on space that Palestinians are allowed to use. But it is also observable in many neighborhoods in Lebanon where space is limited or where families still prefer to cluster around a piece of land they own.

Many recent political and social upheavals have challenged this structure. From migration flows that saw young workers move and establish families in the Gulf, in Europe, and in Latin America, to wars and post-war reconstructions that caused the razing of entire neighborhoods and flattening their rubble, to rising costs of living and financial precarity that has stalled people's spending abilities. Nevertheless, in many places, Beirut included, some of these iron rods and pillars continue sticking out, proudly claiming an expectation of a particular type of continuity – a rooted, reproductive, hetero-marital and familial life.

Until that expectation is realized, however, the rooftop from which they stick out is a terrain of its own. Frequently used by women to hang out in the open air especially on breezy summer evenings, the rooftops offer women the chance to not leave their homes but still be part of a semi-public, semi-private atmosphere. Like extended balconies, they become spaces for all kinds of leisure and gendered labor: sipping of tea with neighbors, pitting nuts, the hanging of laundry or the drying of herbs, or simply an endless playground for children. In these moments, the pillars and rods are not more than a promise.

Staying in a state of suspension, pointing to the sky with their rusty rods, these pillars also suggest another kind of a message; a hope that we can envision the structures of life differently, and that we can hedge them differently. Imagining a different future is and has been the basis of feminist 'queer' hope, which we can find even in the most normative of scenes; an unfinished rooftop.

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