CAPITAL BEFORE GENDER: GERMAN INTERVENTIONISM AND THE MAKING OF THE LEBANESE EPISTEMIC REGIME

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, **Maya Zebdawi**, candidate for the MA degree in Critical Gender Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role of three specific German foundations (Stiftungen)—the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS), the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS), and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)—in shaping Lebanon's civil society, with a focus on gender and sexuality. The study tracks the contemporary knowledge production efforts of these organizations from 2019, marked by the Palestinian refugee camp protests, the migrant domestic worker uprising, and the broader Lebanese revolt, through to the current israeli aggression on Lebanon as part of Operation Sword of Iron, passing through the Beirut port explosion, which triggered the largest surge of international aid capital to Lebanese NGOs. The timeline is delineated to argue that these Stiftungen's fluctuating engagement with gender issues is intricately linked to the political economy of Lebanon's epistemic regime, which shifts in response to looming mass insurgencies.

Using critical discourse analysis and insights from my experiences as both a translator and an activist, I explore how HBS, RLS, and FES, aligned with German political parties, have communicated and translated themes like gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and feminist histories in Lebanon. I also investigate the role of language in knowledge production within Lebanon's trilingual academic environment, revealing how these linguistic choices both reflect and reinforce existing social hierarchies.

This work posits that the strategic focus on gender and sexuality by these Stiftungen is a calculated response to the potential for political organization and insurgency in Lebanon, highlighting the power dynamics that underlie the country's epistemic regime.

Keywords: Political Economy, Gender and Sexuality, Translation, Epistemic Regime, Civil Society, Discourse Analysis, Germany, Lebanon.

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I acknowledge that at the time of submitting this thesis, the largest israeli military operation in the West Bank since the Second Intifada in 2002, has begun. The operation, termed "Sword of Iron" by the colonizer, continues.

Thank you to the comrades who prefer to remain unnamed—just as I prefer it for them.

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TABLE OF ACRONYMS

HBS	Heinrich Böll Stiftung	A German political foundation affiliated with the Alliance 90/The Greens, focusing on environmental, human rights, and gender issues globally.
RLS	Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung	A German political foundation affiliated with the Left Party (Die Linke), focusing on democratic socialism, social justice, and political education.
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung	A German political foundation affiliated with the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), promoting social democracy, workers' rights, and political dialogue.
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit	The German Corporation for International Cooperation, main German development agency that implements projects in various sectors for the German government worldwide.
BMZ	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung	The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, responsible for Germany's development policy and international aid initiatives.

SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Social Democratic Party of Germany
BDS	Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen	Association of German Foundations
OS		Open Society

INTRODUCTION: THE GERMAN CONTINUUM IN THE LEVANT: FROM A HOMOPHOBIC SETTLER TO A RAINBOW DONOR

This thesis is an attempt to study the discursive practices of three German foundations operating in the fabric of Lebanese civil society. The main focus is on examining the use of gender and sexuality as a theme of inquiry and the political context in which it surfaces in the research agendas of German foundations. To that regard I am studying the present, but this German presence is not novel to the region neither are its ideological waves and to that I choose to start with a glimpse of the past that shows the continuum embedded in my present analysis.

According to historian M. Yazbak (1999):

> In 1872, they (the German Templars) savagely beat an Arab youth who had allegedly, in the words of Hardegg, "introduc[ed] homosexuality in our colony" (land occupied by Germans in Haifa, North of Palestine). [...] When the following year another youth was accused of having assaulted German women and was severely beaten, Die Warte concluded that this kind of treatment was "more effective than ten years of morality [preaching]" (p. 46).[1]

From describing us as the blasphemous figure threatening to contaminate European communities with deviant behaviors, to the extremist, intolerant, and uncivilized modern subject, the German discursive machinery has long fixated on the people of the Levant. This shift—from perceiving the Arab as a clashing "other" to a destitute, backward consumer of modern markets of aid, security, and sexual awakenings—mirrors the rise and fall of empires within Europe itself.

The German presence in the Levant, particularly in Lebanon, traces back to the 19th century, initially taking shape through agrarian colonies that undeniably bore a resemblance to proto-Zionist kibbutzim, arguably laying the groundwork for later *Aliyah* movements, as Yazbak notes: "[t]he Zionists were soon paying frequent visits to the Templar colonies 'so as to learn how to avoid making the same mistakes they had made'" (Ibid., p. 50).

[1] Parentheses are mine.

The German settler presence in Lebanon predates even some of the most prominent American missionary institutions, such as the American University of Beirut (AUB), founded in 1866. This came after the missionaries were denied permission to settle in Jerusalem and Damascus, as both Muslim and Christian Arab communities strongly opposed their presence. The Germans, meanwhile, often found themselves in strategic alliances with British forces and sometimes in uneasy cooperation with Ottoman authorities. Secured in these relationships, they assumed roles as tax collectors and, at times, as armed harassers of local farmers, fostering an atmosphere of tension and hostility. German influence in Lebanon manifested in various ways, from film projects to post offices and exclusive spas for German arrivals, all established as early as the beginning of the 20th century. However, the relationship between the indigenous Arab population and the German settlers was anything but cordial.

The usual story about German foundations (called Stiftungen in the German language) paints them as dusty relics of a bygone era, supposedly losing their relevance by the 1920s. But if you dig into urban and foundation history, you'll find that these institutions have quietly kept their foothold in the welfare system, especially among the social circles closely linked to state institutions and financial powerhouses. These studies, while often fixated on the hyperinflation era, tend to miss the more tangled tale of Germany's neoliberal twists and its largely ignored ties to overseas colonies.

One of the rare deep dives into foundations across various historical eras is Andreas Ludwig's study on Charlottenburg's social foundations (2005). From the days of the German Empire to the National Socialist period, these foundations were not just sitting around collecting dust; they were busy playing a key role within the ruling class and the larger superstructure, keeping the economic and geographic connections with the Levant and colonial territories alive and well. These relationships were all part of a mixed economy of welfare, orchestrated through the ever-bureaucratic Stiftungen, those clever little entities that knew how to keep things running smoothly, as they are the state but they are also the civil society.

The academic spotlight is currently shining on the distinctions between "eine selbstständige Stiftung bürgerlichen Rechts" and the "unselbstständige Stiftung," or charitable corporations, as scholars seek to decode their significance in light of global political shifts and Germany's evolving stance on migration and international conflicts. Richter and Gollan (2024), in their forthcoming article (which, regrettably, remains behind a paywall that's a bit too rich for my blood), reveal that as of 2024, the formal definition of a foundation has finally been clarified:

"a foundation is a memberless legal entity endowed with assets for the permanent and sustainable fulfillment of a purpose stipulated by the founder, and is subject to state supervision by the competent foundation authority" (p. 323). I mention this in the introduction not because this thesis will dive into these legal intricacies, but keeping them in mind might offer some valuable context as we navigate the complex legal and economic landscapes under analysis.

A notable shift in the German institutional footprint in Lebanon kicked off at the dawn of the 21st century, starting with the establishment of the Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB) in 1961. This initiative, spearheaded by the German Oriental Society (Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft or DMG), was intended to serve as the go-to hub for research on the Arab region, aiming to streamline collaborations with the local academic elite. While Damascus was initially on the table as a potential location, Beirut ultimately won out, thanks to the Lebanese authorities rolling out the red carpet for the institute. This move paved the way for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) to open its Beirut office in 1965—marking the arrival of the oldest Stiftung in modern Germany, originally founded in 1925. The German presence in Lebanon continued to grow, with the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) setting up shop in the 1990s, and the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS), founded in Germany in 1983, joining the party in 2004.

Each of these Stiftungen, believe it or not, are the offspring of political parties back in Germany. Take the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS), for instance—born out of the German Green Party (Alliance 90/The Greens), it functions as a think tank with a mission to champion the party's ideals both within the EU and beyond. In this adventurous spirit, HBS doesn't just cozy up to local organizations in non-EU countries; it actively dives into the deep end, forging connections with targeted social strata, and even playing midwife to grassroots organizations and knowledge production projects in the countries it is keen on "helping." FES is an offshoot of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), much like HBS it is interested in networking with the grassroots initiatives in the intervened countries but unlike HBS it is more interested in union work. None of the Stiftungen collaborate on the same projects with native (to Lebanon) organizations or projects.

Though these Stiftungen are financially tethered to their respective political parties, they stand as pillars of German civil society in the form it mutated into after the neoliberalization of the 1970 crisis decade (Germann, 2014) —quite the opposite of how they might be perceived

under Lebanese law. A quick perusal of their official websites reveals that their missions are a curious blend: FES, for instance, is all about cozying up to specific segments of the global south, like the institutionalized working class, while RLS waves the banner of internationalism, claiming to battle the many-headed hydra of capitalism on a global scale.

In pursuing their interventionist policies, these Stiftungen adopt a variety of thematic focuses, strategically positioning themselves in sectors of society where their political objectives align. Since 2003, coinciding with the rise of civil society activities in the realms of gender and sexuality — an independent yet interactive dimension of Lebanese society, encompassing even those outside the formal citizenship structure — the Stiftungen have zeroed in on gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, legal reforms, women's rights, and local feminist histories as focal points for their financial and discursive missions. This thesis delves into the how, when, and why of these Stiftungen's engagement with gender and sexuality. The investigation will employ critical discourse analysis, complemented by autoethnographic data drawn from my unique position as a native translator[2] who has freelanced for several of these Stiftungen, clashed with them as an activist, and managed a grassroots queer journal that navigated the complexities of financial intervention by two of these organizations.

This thesis argues that the introduction, dismissal, and subsequent revisiting of gender is deeply tied to the political economy of the epistemic regime. Essentially, the closer people get to political organization and potential insurgency, the more interested German Stiftungen

[2] I use this alluding to the native intellectual and the organic intellectual. The concept of the "native intellectual" was developed by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. According to Fanon, an intellectual from a colonized society undergoes three phases of consciousness development, where consciousness itself is shaped by the material conditions of existence and survival, as argued in Marxist literature. In the first phase, the intellectual rushes toward "unqualified assimilation" (Fanon, 1963, p. 222) with the values, qualifications, and knowledge structures of the colonizer.

In the second phase, the native intellectual, disturbed by memories of their people's past, begins to question the colonial status quo. However, despite this disturbance, the means to process and express these memories are still confined within the colonizer's aesthetic canon, leaving the intellectual's relationship to their people external and mediated by colonial structures. Yet, it is not merely a question of aesthetics; it is about the conditions that transform this intellectual unease into commodities of epistemic consumption. The financial, thematic, and disciplinary conditions surrounding the intellectual shape their path towards realization—often an individualistic one.

In the third phase, which Fanon calls the "fighting" phase, the native intellectual sees themselves as an "awakener of the people," a revolutionary whose duty is to mobilize and agitate the masses towards anti-colonial struggle (Fanon, 1963, pp. 222-223). In this phase, the native intellectual aligns closely with the Gramscian concept of the organic intellectual, who seeks to assert the unity and consciousness of their class (Cammett, as cited by Ramos, 1982).

become in the issues of gender and sexuality. To grasp the utility of gender in this context, it's crucial to examine the language in which knowledge production occurs in Lebanon, a country where the academic and societal structures are trilingual due to its colonial legacy. While Arabic is accessible to most social classes and legal statuses, English and French are notably prominent and actively promoted as languages of research and epistemic production in institutions. Although this thesis does not delve into translation theory, it does trace the linguistic trajectories of produced material, arguing that these linguistic choices illuminate the social classes involved in the German Stiftungen's knowledge production, as well as those intended as their audience. In this way, I use translation movements, or rather the linguistic movement or stagnation of the produced reports and research as a tool to unravel the broader actors within this epistemic regime, which is carefully nurtured within the concept and structure of what German Stiftungen refer to as civil society.

From settler to savior, from agrarian colony to knowledge production Stiftung, our investigation begins in the present with a keen awareness of the past. We embark on a journey to uncover the gendered dimensions of German interventionism within Lebanese civil society's epistemic regime.

How do the activities of German Stiftungen that engage with the topics of gender and sexuality reproduce the neocolonial power relations in Lebanon? This constitutes the main research question that I address along with multiple supportive questions:

When and why do these organizations engage with gender?

When and why do they abstain?

Why has gender become a focal point of institutional knowledge?

Positionality: A Palestinian Translator in the Germani-c Lebanon

"Grammar is politics by other means." (Haraway, 1991, p. 3)

"Consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute. Identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic." (Haraway, 1991, p. 155)

This thesis tries to narrate the story of how and when gender and sexuality as themes and tools of analysis are used by German political parties' foundations in Lebanon. Who else

would be more sensitive to the question of the epistemic regime in a nation state, than its longest residing refugees belonging to the in-betweens – the land on the one hand, and the sea of languages its dwellers use to translate her with on the other? I am the Palestinian refugee, a comrade within the ranks of the organized in the Lebanese uprising of 2019 and the stateless Arab-ic translator; I am here to offer an account of a German-ic intervention in the land I grew interpreting –to foreign and local agents, simultaneously and consecutively–, translating, conveying and transforming its political dynamics.

In embarking on this MA thesis journey, it is crucial to delineate my positionality and the driving force behind my investigation into the production of knowledge concerning gender and sexuality within German political parties' foundations. With a background spanning eight years as a translator, interpreter, and unofficial research assistant—often underpaid due to my status as a stateless Palestinian[3] — I have navigated diverse positionalities while bridging the linguistic and cultural gaps between German researchers and managers, and Arab-speaking audiences.

My experiences have exposed me to the intricacies of power dynamics within the realm of knowledge production, particularly in the context of German organizations' engagement with Arab communities. As a translator, I witnessed the disciplining (e.g. shaming the performance in front of other colleagues, threatening to expel, etc.) of teachers for failing to *translate*

[3] Lebanese law does not provide refugees with a special legal status distinct from other foreigners. According to a 1962 Minister of Interior decision, foreigners in Lebanon are classified into five categories, with Palestinians falling into the third category. This category includes those without documents from their country of origin who reside in Lebanon with a residence or identity card. Palestinian refugees fall under Decree 17561/64, which governs foreign participation in the Lebanese labor market. This decree imposes three main restrictions on Palestinian employment: the requirement of a work permit, national preference, and the principle of reciprocity of treatment—a condition impossible for Palestinians to meet due to the absence of a recognized Palestinian state. Palestinians are still excluded from liberal and syndicated professions like medicine, engineering, and law, as membership in these professions' syndicates typically requires Lebanese nationality or reciprocity of treatment, effectively barring Palestinian participation. The average monthly income of Palestinian workers in Lebanon is 537,000 LBP, which is significantly lower than the minimum wage of 675,000 LBP and 80% of the average monthly income of Lebanese workers. Notably, half of employed Palestinians earn less than 500,000 LBP per month (ILO and CEP figures from 2012). This is all taken directly from the International Labour Organization's (ILO) 2014 policy brief *The Work of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon is a Right and a Common Interest*, found in: https://www.ilo.org/publications/work-palestinian-refugees-lebanon-right-and-common-interest. These facts could however be retrieved from UNRWA reports, Lebanese Palestinian dialogue committee reports, Lebanese labor law and as many secondary sources, academic and media based, as you may possibly think. This is an over researched topic that is still apparently a monopoly of the people expert on the matter, making its dissemination mere spectacle as it mobilizes no change, neither institutionally nor on the level of international leftist organizations. The Lebanese-Palestinian is not the amusement of the international community's moral radar.

German principles of a “peaceful” pedagogy[4] to their students in refugee camps, I witnessed the editing of translations to align with the preferences of German donors. In essence, I became a conduit for disseminating the ideological[5] agendas of German entities within Arab-speaking spaces, thus positioning myself as a "native intellectual" in Frantz Fanon's terms and a “merchant” in Trouillots’ terms, and here is an essential conceptual junction.

The concept of the merchant as exhibited by Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1990) is very useful in understanding the position or epistemic function to which the translator in the civil society structure of Lebanon belongs, and her/their role in the contemporary epistemic regime. In Trouillot’s analysis, the “merchant class” mediates the relationship between the state and the peasantry, positioning itself as a crucial intermediary that holds significant socio-political and economic power. This dynamic is mirrored in the role of translators within Lebanon's civil society.

Translators, akin to Trouillot’s merchants, function as intermediaries who do not facilitate necessarily but ultimately ensure the transmission of concepts from the metropoles of former colonial powers to the "post-colonial" nation-states. They occupy a specific epistemic function, and dare I say class if we are to define class as a relation drawn by labor power and capital movement, that not only mediates but also shapes the flow of knowledge and capital. Translators in Lebanon’s civil society are integral to the contemporary epistemic regime, as they move and translate concepts that are transmitted by particular bodies of expats from global centers of power to local contexts and back.

In Trouillot’s "republic for the merchants," the state’s exploitation of the peasantry was mediated through the merchant class, who acted as the state’s agents and benefitted from their

[4] In 2019, I participated as the chief interpreter and consecutive translator at a teacher summer school held at the Wavel (Al Jaleel) Palestinian refugee camp near the Lebanese city of Baalbek. The training, focused on Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf education, was led by the NGO Just Childhood (https://www.justchildhood.org/) and funded by GIZ (German Cooperation Zusammenarbeit), IASWECE, Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiner, and Skateistan. These organizations are either German or German-based and operate under German law. Waldorf education aims to “shield children from concepts of confrontation, violence, enmity, oppression, and loss” (German pedagogical trainer), a definition shared off-record during the training sessions. The lectures were conducted in English and occasionally in German, while the trainees were Palestinian and Lebanese teachers proficient in Arabic. My role was to facilitate communication by translating the lectures into and from Arabic as the interactive nature of the setting demanded, ensuring that the educators could fully engage with and understand the principles of Waldorf education.

[5] Ideology here can be seen as a creature supported by three pillars. First, it involves a particular understanding of concepts, providing a clear delineation of conceptual frameworks. Second, it encompasses a well-framed executive mechanism that maps out the components translating and legitimizing these conceptual manifestations within specific contexts. Finally, an overarching institutional and capital structure in the belly of which the dialectical reproduction of reality’s manifestations reside and are contained.

intermediary role. Similarly, translators in Lebanon serve as agents who mediate the import and localization of global epistemic frameworks, ensuring these frameworks are adapted to and adopted within local contexts. They are instrumental in legitimizing and contextualizing these imported concepts, playing a critical role in the reproduction of the contemporary epistemic order.

Therefore, by employing Trouillot's concept of the merchant as one of the core ones in my thesis, I argue that translators in Lebanon's civil society structure are analogous to the merchant class. They operate within a complex network of power relations, mediating between global epistemic authorities and local realities. This class of translators is essential in maintaining the influence and dominance of global knowledge systems in Lebanon, acting as both conduits and transformers of epistemic power. Understanding their role through the lens of Trouillot's merchant class provides a deeper insight into the mechanisms of contemporary knowledge production and dissemination. We are postcolonial/colonized subjects, and we are our colonizer's merchant.

This intersectionality of being both a refugee woman and a linguistic intermediary endowed me with a unique vantage point—a position of leverage that surpassed the stigmatization faced by Palestinian men within the knowledge production industry. Following the 2019 revolution, characterized by shifts in employment dynamics within EU-funded institutions, individuals like myself, embodying the dual identities of revolutionary "faces" and marginalized non-citizens, became sought-after assets for European-funded projects.

In the aftermath of this year's genocide on the Palestinian people, Kohl Journal[6]—an academic journal on body and gender research—was defunded by both its founding German donors HBS and FES. I have been the translation manager of this Journal and witnessed the behind-the-scenes of the defunding reasoning, the discourses arising in the backstage of sister or counterpart journals, of Arab subjects working as employees in the local regional bureaucracies of HBS and FES.

[6] Kohl, a powder made from the timid or galena stone mixed with water, has been used for thousands of years across Asia and Africa by both men and women to paint their eyelids, believed to protect and improve eyesight. Today, commercialized as "Arabic eyeliner," kohl is embedded in Orientalist stereotypes of "Arab" women, who are often depicted as either hypersexualized belly dancers or oppressed figures behind veils or burqas, both invariably with dark, kohl-lined eyes. The name "Kohl" is chosen by the journal editorial team to reclaim its history and counteract these exoticized images, offering a fresh perspective on feminism, gender, and the body. Source: About Page. (n.d.). *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research*. Retrieved June 26, 2024, from https://kohljournal.press/about

Thus, my trajectory of professional and political engagement compels me to probe deeper and formulate the following research questions:

I the translator, the native translator — it is from the vantage point of the "within" and the "in-between" that I embark on this inquiry — a quest to unravel the complexities of linguistic-political interventionism within the realm of gender and sexuality.

CHAPTER 1: GERMAN TRENCHES IN LEBANON AND THE TELEOLOGY OF CIVIL SOCIETY

1.1.Theoretical and political legacies of the civil society

> The superstructures of civil society resemble the trench system of modern warfare.
>
> (Gramsci, 2011, p. 162)

In the following section, I aim to demonstrate how the concept of civil society has emerged along with the formation of modern European nation-states and how therefore, the history, legacy, and the modern-day condition of civil society bears the legacy of European modernity and coloniality, as well as how theorizing on civil society and the international proliferation of NGOs can be utilized to analyze the political economy of international power relations.

It is worth focusing on the above-mentioned aspects of the concept of civil society and its legacy, even though it appears to be clear that the current meaning of civil society has evolved from guilds and voluntary associations and various property owners to the wider petit bourgeois initiatives –because, first of all, it shows that the relation between the state and civil society has been of importance since the very emergence of the concept. Secondly, such thinkers as Marx and Hegel were thinking of or within a Germanic context –where today the state is clearly an integral part of the NGO industrial complex.

Firstly, it makes sense to look at the origins of the term of civil society, as the way in which it originated relates to the political meaning of civil society institutions today. The modern concept of civil society originates in the period of early modernity in the Western European states of England, Germany and France (Habermas, 1992; Wood, 1990). Regarding the definition of civil society and the relations that constitute it, I offer to adhere to the one formulated by the Marxist historian Ellen Meiksins Wood: “civil society represents a separate sphere of human relations and activity, differentiated from the state but neither public nor private or perhaps both at once, embodying not only a whole range of social interactions apart from the private sphere of the household and the public sphere of the state, but more specifically a network of distinctively economic relations, the sphere of the market-place, the

arena of production, distribution and exchange" (Wood, 1990, p. 61). The formation of the modern state with its separate capitalist economy and "corporate identities" were among the essential prerequisites for the phenomena of civil society to develop (Ibid., pp. 61-62).

The fact that civil society was shaped within the process of creation of modern Western nation-states means that this concept bears the legacy of the "dark side" of modernity – namely, it is also shaped by Western-centrist, colonial ideologies. To illustrate this claim, one can turn to one of the most significant theorists of the "public sphere" (which I will allow myself to roughly and in a generalized manner equate to civil society, or, depending on how narrowly one would define civil society, the public sphere can be viewed as a space within which civil society functions), who by no coincidence comes from Germany – Jürgen Habermas. In his work "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere" (1992) Habermas claims that one of his aims was "to derive the ideal type of the bourgeois public sphere from the historical context of British, French, and German developments in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (p. 422). Here Habermas proves that his concept of the public sphere is truly Eurocentric, firmly rooted in the logic of European Enlightenment and modernity, taking the British, French and German societies as an example. He writes that by the end of 18th century in Germany there had developed "a public sphere, although a small one, where critical-rational discussion was carried on" (Ibid., p. 423) — here, again, emerges an enlightenment-modern concept of rationality and moreover a characterization of "rational discussion" as a universal value. Habermas draws a clear boundary between "Western type" democratic societies and others, in this case, "totalitarian" ones, with the German Democratic Republic serving as a main example of a "totalitarian" state. This means that the totalitarian space in Europe for Habermas starts, as is typical for the liberal approach, at the border of the Warsaw Pact countries. Habermas writes about citizen movements in state-socialist countries, such as the human rights groups, church associations, ecological and feminist associations that countered the "totalitarian public sphere" and pursued democratic revolutionary changes. According to him, a "totalitarian" state and/or a "totalitarian public sphere" can only react to such movements that represent the oppositional democratic public sphere by using force, while in "Western type" democratic societies such associations exist "within the institutional framework of the democratic constitutional state" (Ibid, p. 454-455). In fact, he defines what structural elements compose the civil society, and associates the arrival of the civil society with the democratization that is associated with westernization. In these ways civil society is conceptualized as a universal phenomenon that develops in various spaces, Western and non-

Western. Nonetheless, the origins of a democratic civil society are inherently Western and functioning according to the logic of liberal democracy that originates in the West.

Moreover, for Habermas it is possible to assume that there can exist "the forms of interchange and organization, the institutionalizations of support of a political public sphere unsubverted by power" (Ibid., p. 453), which demonstrates his commitment to the idea of neutrality, on which the public sphere would vitally rest. However, as can be argued based on the critical feminist decolonial position, such "unsubservience by power" is an illusion, and civil society and/or the public sphere is a power structure with multiple hierarchies reproduced within and through it. Furthermore, the innate openness and the transparency of the public sphere are to be questioned as well, as its organizational structure is convoluted, bureaucratized and consists of multiple multifaceted links. That condition of existence is even more complicated if one takes into account the aspect of coloniality. In a colonial locality, with civil society institutions representing the (neo)colonial tool that bridges the governmental and non-governmental institutions within the metropolitan and colonial contexts — and the structure formed within such social conditions is indeed a complex one.

To sum up, Habermas' concept of the public sphere, within and from which civil society emerged, asserts the Western (and here "Western" represent exactly the "core" nation-states of the Western modernity) way of societal developments as universal. Thus, "implementing" or "developing" the civil society in the Global South, particularly by German institutions (as we can claim that Habermas is a valid representative of German discourse) is about the relations of Western dominance.

The idea of differentiation between the state and civil society (the differentiation between social and political society is well worth noting, as political society is how the state is called in the liberal tradition (Buttigieg, 2005, p. 39)) has been important for multiple scholars that have developed this concept. Such perception of the civil society rests on the existence of private actors (holders of private wealth and/or property) that are distinctly different from the state, but which exist within the state boundaries, which again, signifies the existence of a distinct state economy. Hegel identified civil society with the bourgeois, corporate one, and for him the emergence of civil society meant the creation of the sphere of mediation between the private and the public, between particular individual freedoms and the universal state apparatus (Ibid.). According to Hegel, the existence of civil society, meaning certain collective organization such as guilds or corporate unions of citizens and/or owners could

counter the effects of individualization by reconciling somewhat consolidated private interests of groups within newly emerging bourgeois classes of the modern society – while the role of the state (also known as the political society) is to overcome the contradictions within civil society and to preserve itself as a united structure that resembles an ancient polis (Coletti, 1975, pp. 33-34).

Marx for his part, in his "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State" criticized the universality of the state and the idea of separation between the political society and civil society and stressed on the nexus between the private property (owners) and the representative state. For Marx, to theorize on civil society means to develop the critique based on political economy and class analysis (Coletti, 1975; Wood, 1990). Thus, Marx stated that "'*civil society* is the *class of private citizens*', in other words *the class of private citizens* is the immediate, essential, concrete class of civil society" (Marx, 1975, p. 141). Moreover, in the same work he elaborated on the relation between bureaucracy and civil society, stating that "the bureaucracy is the state which has really made itself into civil society" that also serves to represent the particular as the universal (Ibid., p. 107). I choose to include the notion of bureaucracy into this text, as it, though developed by Marx in the middle of the nineteenth century, offers a theoretical path to conceptualize a much later emerging phenomena such as the NGO industrial complex, to which I will revert later in the text.

The Marxian approach, shaped by the debate with Hegel, was also adopted by Gramsci, who used the concepts of civil and political society to theorize the relation of the civil society to hegemony and state. In Gramsci's definition of the state given in the *Prison Notebook 6*, civil society is one of its integral constitutive elements: "state = political society + civil society, that is, hegemony protected by the armor of coercion" (Gramsci, 2011, p. 75), explaining that along with the government apparatus, the state also consists of the "'private' apparatus of hegemony or civil society" (Ibid., p. 108). For Gramsci, the civil society can not be separated from the state or government, or from the political society (Buttigieg, 2005, p. 37). Furthermore, Gramsci has written that in states advanced enough, civil society has turned into a complex structure, resilient to economic crises. This claim can be further used to argue that such complexity eventually transformed into the even more complex phenomena of the NGO industrial complex that we currently have in our day and age.

Two important points to acknowledge when utilizing the concepts by Gramsci are, firstly, that nowhere in the "Prison Diaries" does he give exact definitions of civil society or hegemony,

so to a certain extent my interpretation is formed by my positionality. Secondly, while Gramsci (as well as Marx and all the theorists I have so far mentioned in this section) looks at the functioning of civil society within a (separate) state, I transpose them to conceptualize the power relations between states within the context of neocolonial international NGO-ized governance.

Having outlined some theoretical foundations regarding the issue of civil society, its legacy and the critique of it, it is now possible to move to another relevant formation — the NGO industrial complex. For that I will not focus on the developments and transformations of various associations and organizations that constitute modern-day civil society, but will refer to the post-World War Two situation in the terrain of civil society and progressing NGOization of the public sphere.

Referring to the words of Marx from the paragraph above, bureaucracy has become a feature of civil society. The process of bureaucratization was happening along with professionalization and institutionalization (Lang, 1996, pp. 114-115) of social movements and any non-governmental political activity. With the NGO industrial complex all of it becomes a project funded by NGOs that are a part of international multi-level donor financing schemes with the involvement of major international actors that represent foreign, and mostly Western, governments, financial institutions, development agencies, the UN and such other similar structures.

The mass proliferation of NGos after the 1970s correlates with the global-scale adoption of neoliberal reforms within the global process of capitalist development that David Harvey calls the accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003, p. 167). The NGO industrial complex is one of the tools through which this accumulation is exercised within the world system of unequal and combined development.

As Arundhati Roy puts it, NGOs are “a buffer between Empire and its subjects [...] They have become the arbitrators, the interpreters, the facilitators” (Roy, 2014), the layer of protection for the interests of the ruling classes and of capitalism (Joan Roelofs, as cited by Arena, 2012, p. xxvii). Civil society, indeed, is the myth that organizes social space (here I am referring to the concept I introduced in the section on the methodology of critical discourse analysis). The NGO industrial complex aims to institutionalize and industrialize the liberal dialogue — in order to discipline, contain, co-opt and de-radicalize politicized stratas of population (Arena, 2012; INCITE, 2007). Therefore, the NGO-ization through the above-mentioned tools of

professionalization and institutionalization produces the comprador intellectual — that one working for the benefit of the ruling classes and being the representative of hegemonic power (Arena, 2012, p. xxviii). The international donor NGOs are a part of contemporary ruling classes. The workers of local recipient NGOs "on ground" in recipient countries, though often existing within vague material conditions of being wage project employees and not having their own resources, still have the characteristics of a class and are a part of the local elites or at least stand in proximity to them (Sampson, 2002, p. 7).

One notable scholar –notable in the sense that he creates or navigates through the creation of material conditions parallel to his theoretical work– who challenged the orthodox views of neoclassical economists on capitalist crises is George Soros (1998). Diverging from the conventional models that rely on equilibrium and perfect competition, Soros introduced a model of boom-and-bust cycles grounded in the concept of reflexivity. This model posits that market crises should be analyzed by acknowledging that the expectations of market participants themselves influence the fundamentals of financial markets. In this view, speculative products like futures reflect back on the prices of original assets, thus discarding the notion of a perfect equilibrium. Soros's approach places social phenomena at the forefront of understanding capitalist crises, arguing that predicting market movements is akin to preparing for an insurrection—no matter how much foresight one has, the unexpected force of reality often renders these preparations futile. He advocates for a decoupling of economics from the natural sciences, suggesting that markets are best studied through the lens of social science. So it is "the making of an equilibrium" which Soros strives for through the concept of civil society as he explains that "[t]he concept of open society is based on the recognition of our fallibility" (Soros, 1998, p. 4).

Soros's contributions to the critique of political economy and the critique of market fundamentalism are less recognized, perhaps because the latter informs the former—a dialectical relationship, if you will. In Lebanon, his foundations, with over $4 million in treasury, focus on economics, equality, and democratic practices, with a significant interest in alternative journalism and discourse building. Notably, there was a significant spike in funding in 2020, following the October 2019 Lebanese uprising and the preceding Palestinian refugee camp uprisings. This surge in financial support, particularly after the Beirut port explosion, reflects a broader trend seen among other foundations, including German ones.

For example, according to OECD data, German financial assistance to Lebanon—including bilateral official development assistance, country programmable aid, and humanitarian aid—totaled $546 million in 2020. By 2021, this amount had increased to $633 million, up from $469 million in 2018 and $434 million in 2019. This trend suggests that sociological approaches to understanding market crises, much like Soros's reflexivity model, are gaining traction among international foundations, including those of German origin.

A significant portion of the aid was channeled towards the establishment and support of feminist organizations, serving varied roles within their respective communities. Substantial funds were directed to large-scale, well-established Lebanese NGOs, such as KAFA, which collaborates with the Lebanese General Security to address women's issues, particularly in labor sectors like migrant domestic work, with a focus on undocumented employment. Additional funding was allocated to initiatives recognized in Lebanese public and official discourses as *alternative* media outlets, such as Megaphone, as well as journalistic and research-focused endeavors like the Kohl Journal. These allocations reflect the thematic and genre preferences of German organizations' research projects. While RLS prioritizes support for "feminist aid" NGOs with security affiliations, HBS and FES emphasize textual analysis, research, or research outsourcing. In contrast, the Göethe Institute maintains a distinctive approach, focusing on German authorship and catering explicitly to a German audience.

In this complex landscape, questions arise about how gender and sexuality are positioned, narrated, and possibly instrumentalized by these Stiftungen as they articulate the conditions of the states they aim to "emancipate." Rather than posing a question, it may be more apt to make an observation: both German Stiftungen and entities like the Open Society Foundation seem to gravitate toward themes of gender, equality, justice, and women's health, particularly during times of economic crisis and infrastructural disaster, a focus that, as Soros suggests, is to be understood sociologically. I am not tossing the open society reference abruptly, Stiftungen and open society are a modern enterprise, allow me to explain. The Open Society Foundations established a regional headquarters in Berlin in 2018, transferring operations from Budapest after being forced out of Hungary. Their entrance to Berlin came through the Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen (Association of German Foundations), they were welcomed by the latter’s secretary general who said “We aim to harness the power of the civil

society in Germany to become jointly engaged worldwide for democracy ."[7] The Association claims that their work is constrained by "political radicalization and polarization." Both Open Society and the German Stiftungen maintain that the righteous societal path can only be achieved by distancing action from any subjective positioning, ideological campuses, or collective consciousness. Individualism, they fight for in this context, exists in a realm of in-betweenness—neither anchored to a place, a position, a campus, a frontline, nor an antithesis. The only true antagonism lies between the philosophy of the Stiftungen and Open Society, and the concept of a radical political subject.

In this framework, identity politics, LGBTQ+ discourse, and academic queer theory (despite being anti-identity politics identity politics) serve as fertile ground, from which this doctrine of in-betweenness can be nurtured and presented as the source of true authenticity. In OS/BDS logic; Wars shall only be cultural and communitarian ideals only despotic. That is how individualism is reared under the slogan of fighting the system, but the system from within its material regulatory frameworks, dissent is only discursive.[8] "Only" is controversial but I shall not indulge.

These Stiftungen are central to the process of NGOization, which, as Massad explains in *Desiring Arabs* (2007), began in the 1990s with the emergence of NGOs advocating for LGBT issues on an international scale. Massad describes this new Orientalist discourse on Arab sexuality as the "Gay International" (Ibid., p. 161) FES, which has been active in Lebanon since the 1960s, initially focused on labor unions, the vibrant political players during the Chehabi era. However, the focus of FES and other Stiftungen has since shifted from traditional political engagement towards identity politics. Massad might argue that this shift represents the instrumentalization of gender and sexuality as tools for producing a

[7] Felix Oldenburg, as quoted in the website deutschland.de, which is officially linked to the German Federal Foreign Office. Source: https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/life/george-soros-foundation-starts-over-in-berlin

[8] I am motivated to draw these comparisons and emphasize the contrasts between the conformity subtly promoted by Open Society (OS) and the German Stiftungen through their advocacy of individualism and identity politics on the one hand, and genuine dissent against normative doxa in a specific geo-temporal context on the other. This distinction is illuminated by Holy Lewis's (2016) nuanced differentiation in how "the system" itself is defined. She argues that for feminists, "the system" refers to patriarchy, while queer theory perceives "systemicity" as discursive structures deliberately maintained by those who benefit from the system. In contrast, the object of Marxist epistemology is the material organization of society (Henning 2014).

These divergent understandings of the term "system" lead to a situation where Marxists, queer activists, and feminists (particularly second-wave feminists whose feminism is not aligned with queer politics) often talk past one another in their critiques of identity politics.

Foucauldian subservient actor to imperialism, where individuals are encouraged to internalize and domesticate Western categories that define their sexuality, thereby perpetuating neoliberal practices. These Stiftungen introduce a binary between the "Gay International" and "authentic categories of desire," complicating the definition of civil society, which increasingly appears as a creature of the superstructure.

1.2. Global value and the state of civil society

The post-1968 era in the global North saw a rising interest in the relations of power and domination between advanced capitalist states and the so-called “developing” nation-states, one such scholar was Immanuel Wallerstein. He and others proposed a World-System theory (in varying formulations), where institutionalized exploitation nationally and the global division of labor internationally posed new categories of study. The logic of a World-System was proposed, it avoided restricting social inquiries to the scale of the nation-state. Furthermore, neo-classical notions of “development” and “underdevelopment” were understood as concepts emanating from global power relations that had been formed over centuries. The global division of labor was bound together by a single world market, the core states (of the North) were able to maximize accumulation of profits through the exploitation of the periphery (Amin, 2010; Wallerstein, 1974; Wallerstein, 2004).[9] This newly conceptualized dynamic is enforced and tightly controlled by institutions of capital, those adjacent to the global market, those that ensure the swift flexibility of capital, and changes within labor processes, they are the nation-state governments, international financial institutions, supra-national unions, and increasingly, non-governmental organizations. They control not only the movement of capital but also that of human bodies and consequently of language. They organize and respond to inter-class antagonisms but also contradictions between capitalists (Amin, 2010; Mau, 2023; Wallerstein, 2004). It follows that the study of epistemic markets and their actors conceptualized in part by a material/economic analysis takes an international scale informing as we will see in coming chapters the characteristic of

[9] Wallerstein’s approach albeit being extremely useful as an analytic tool lacked in terms of holisticness, it kept within the limits of eurocentric epistemology which will eventually be challenged and critiqued by nascent (in the North) decolonial scholarship as we will see in section 1.2 of this exposé, however for the time being, and for the sake of clarity we will make abstraction of these critiques.

gendered subject and the subjective construction of the ideal subject of gender/queer/or feminist intrigue - one which is in accordance with the needs of capital's accumulation.

Civil Societies cannot be as easily compartmentalized as belonging to the Global South or North. Civil society as a base and superstructure is the result of capital and discursive constructs. The Lebanese civil society appears to be shaped by German civil society's political agenda, particularly in the areas of gender-related humanitarianism, epistemic production, and vocational training. It is crucial to assert that the focus here is not specifically on German or Lebanese civil societies but on the broader dialectics at play. The focus here is on how gender as a field of inquiry and study functions as a corridor for capital and epistemic flows, shaping the relationship with these two civil societies. However, this is too simplistic. It is more about how the gender epistemic sphere is simultaneously utilized and molded by German capital, which is injected from the German structure of civil society and government into the Lebanese sphere. It is about how the German civil society and state understand the demands of a democratic civil society in the Global South and use the gender research sphere as a means of shaping both the micro and macro dynamics of Lebanese civil society. Therefore, it is imperative to define the structural concept at stake: civil society.

Speaking of construction, the analysis shall commence with brushing off the structures at stake herein referred to as "cannon German organizations". The structural layout of German organizations, akin to civil society structures in many federal states, features a semi-hierarchical pyramid structure with the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) in this case, at its apex. The primary entity commissioning GIZ is the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) of Germany, serving as the nexus for international cooperation initiatives. Other entities contributing to project commissions span European Union institutions, the United Nations, private sector conglomerates, and governments of diverse nations. In its collaborative endeavors, GIZ engages partners ranging from national governments and private sector entities to civil society organizations and research institutions. Additionally, in synergy with the German Federal Employment Agency (BA), GIZ oversees the Centre for International Migration and Development (CIM), dedicated to orchestrating efforts addressing the complexities of global labor mobility. Now that I got this straight, GIZ is the octopus head, however as every large supranationally operating organization, its actions on ground and its discourse are implemented and disseminated respectively through sub-organizations that become the permeable membrane through which

capital, infrastructure, strategy, discourse, policies and working force flow. This membrane is this thesis' interest sphere.

The focus of my forthcoming analysis, slated to be explored through the theoretical constructs articulated by Bartunek and Moch (1987) and Virginia Valian (2005), revolves around the auxiliary organizations serving as conduits between GIZ as an overarching entity and the stratum of knowledge producers, commonly referred to by scholars as the gatekeepers shaping the discourse within recipient countries. Those gatekeepers are nested in structure, function and relationality, because they also hold hierarchical positions from one another on the one hand and in the eyes of the German organization on the other. GIZ forges alliances with various Stiftungen or Foundations some of which even have direct links to the BMZ, leveraging their financial and infrastructural support to facilitate the execution of projects by local entities or official state bodies. Sometimes though the Stiftungen choose to produce the local organizations themselves when the terrain seems barren or not to their liking. Prominent among these intermediary organizations in the Lebanese epistemic domain are HBS, RLS, FES, and the Göethe Institute. Among their concerted efforts a varying amount of capital and planning is dedicated to generating the intellectual framework that delineates the discourse surrounding gender and sexuality in Lebanon through a distinctly German lens.

Drawing upon the theoretical constructs posited by scholars such as Bartunek and Moch, the notion of cognitive schemata, or cognitive blueprints, emerges as a fundamental component in structuring and synthesizing complex phenomena or experiences for facile comprehension. As articulated in Virginia Valian's work "Beyond Gender Schemas" (2005), cognitive schemata are conceptualized as mental frameworks encapsulating abbreviated representations of individual concepts or collective phenomena. These schemata, whether of a cognitive or organizational nature, wield considerable influence over audiences/readers' cognitive processes, selectively shaping their perceptions and directing attention towards certain facets of their experiential reality while relegating others to the periphery.

At this point, we arrive at the idea elucidated by Dotson (2014) regarding epistemic violence - both reducible and irreducible. Despite the rhetoric espoused by the aforementioned organizations, such as "raising awareness," "empowering," "reforming," and "democratizing," their discourse perpetuates a subtle validation/legitimation of an epistemic agency, contingent upon the specific profiles of knowers, producers, and actors involved in their projects. While these foundations provide the necessary infrastructure to practically leverage and disseminate

epistemic resources within a designated community of German and/or native intellectuals, they concurrently cast shadows over or obscure alternative layers of knowledge producers, thereby impeding the possibility of revising these resources from perspectives beyond the established cadre of producers. Such a scenario, characterized by the monopolization or sectarianization of epistemic agency, epitomizes a form of epistemic violence—an encroachment upon the autonomy and pluralism inherent in the knowledge production process. Within the context of my analysis, this phenomenon underscores the interplay between power dynamics set by the German Stiftungen on the one hand and knowledge construction on linguistic and representative levels on the other, elucidating the mechanisms through which dominant epistemic paradigms assert their hegemony while sectarianizing dissenting voices and divergent (from the delineated cadre criterions) perspectives. They are a European civil society giving rise to an-*other* civil society, of a particular socio-epistemic sphere, that they choose/select to intervene in and through.

Civil society represents an "island of meaning," as conceptualized by Zerubavel (1991, p. 5), within the contemporary landscape of social science and policy formulation. Alongside the 'market' and the 'state', 'civil society' has emerged as a distinct concept, utilized within everyday discourse. Organizations such as RLS, HBS, Goethe Institute, and FES constitute integral components of what Germany denotes as its global civil society. These entities receive financial backing from their respective federal governments while adhering to specific ideological paradigms regarding strategies and tactics of civil action, operating within a framework of both global and local considerations.

Within the context of ordoliberalism, a variant of neoliberalism which entails an economic and consequently social structure wherein non-governmental projects and institutionalized actions conform to budgetary commitments and financial accountability, the role of central banks is primarily limited to maintaining price stability rather than mitigating macroeconomic fluctuations. This framework fosters the establishment of infrastructure governing the proliferation of professional associations, consumer organizations, and interest groups transcending national boundaries.

Rooted in a socioeconomic tradition, these organizations are purportedly dedicated to ensuring a "functional and humane order" (Eucken, 1952, as cited by Horn, 2021, p. 548) glocally, guiding the infrastructure essential for the promotion of democracy and development. Ironically, they operate within a framework characterized by a "strong state

doctrine" in postcolonial/ former colony nation-states, wherein an unfettered laissez-faire economic model is applied. The case of Lebanon, where banks possess unions that challenge the government and confront social movements that fight against inflation utilizing their own private security forces alongside state-backed apparatuses under legal protection, serves as a striking illustration of the un-antagonist contradictions of this phenomenon. Consequently, the belief espoused by these organizations in a limited government and strong semi-interventionist state, devoid of corruption by private interests, becomes particularly salient in contexts where the prevailing antagonist of that ideological mission is the status quo. This positions Germany as the de facto "national funding treasury" for the market of democracy and justice initiatives in countries where these organizations intervene. This explains Germany's participation in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee, which comprises major donor nations. The epistemic production of those organizations is highly tied to their development projects hence what is seen as a theme imperative to be pondered upon is one that serves a corner of that interventionist developmental paradigm.

To delve into the intricate dynamics of why European entities engage in the study of former colonies, employing diverse research strategies and personnel including research assistants, linguistic gatekeepers, translators, and occasionally researchers from the ex-colonies themselves (i.e native intellectuals), prompts a contemplation of what might be termed as a gradation of the "Orients" (Bakic-Hayden, 1995, p. 918). Drawing upon Bakic-Hayden's concept of "nested orientalism" (Ibid.), albeit with nuanced variations from her Balkan analysis, this inquiry unveils a pattern of reproduction of the original dichotomy underpinning orientalism. Here, nested orientalism denotes the perpetuation of dichotomies inherent in orientalism, positioning the intellectual colonial subject (native) within a stratum contrasting them from their wider national mass.

The approach to gender within this framework often oscillates between a macrocosmic perspective and individual existential encounters, situating the subaltern "colleague" in a distinct stratum of people. This discourse, arguably derivative, is rooted in an epistemology that assumes the backwardness of gender liberties and security in regions like the "Middle East" as framed by organizations such as RLS and FES, or North East Asia and the Levant as portrayed by entities like the Göethe Institute (GI) and HBS.

CHAPTER 2: FROM THE CHANTS OF PROTESTING WOMEN (2019) TO THE SWARMS OF ISRAELI DRONES (2024). HOW DID THE STIFTUNG(EN) WRITE LEBANON?

2.1. On methodology

In this research, I employ critical discourse analysis particularly to reveal and analyze the discursive practices of German foundations in Lebanon. Sometimes, and in treason to our adopted methodology of abstraction, theories are better exposed by first presenting concrete examples. I start with first explaining the methodological considerations.

In this thesis, I rely on the critical discourse-analytical approach. The legacy of discourse as a concept goes, among other roots, to structuralist linguistics and following studies of language and meaning (Hall, 1997). As Stuart Hall states, meaning is produced by the practice of interpretation. To interpret means to encode (by an actor who initiates the communication) and to decode (by the recipient of communication) the meaning (Ibid., p. 62). Both of those processes are productive and creative — the meaning is to not a lesser extent produced while it is decoded (interpreted), than when it is coded initially. So, this idea allows to affirm once more, in line with the focus of this thesis, that a translator is a key mediating agent of the meaning production and, consequently, discursive production.

Discourse analysis is not a methodology in the strict sense of the word, it is an approach that combines theoretical and methodological foundations, “a field of scientific practice, an interdisciplinary project common in all humanitarian and social sciences” (Van Dijk, 2009, as cited by Ryabchuk and Khurtsydze, 2023, p. 8).

Discourse can be narrowly defined as “a unit of language larger than a sentence and which is firmly rooted in a specific context” (Halliday, 1990, as cited by Ağçam, 2017). Social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and meaning are all discursively constructed (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p. 67). The guiding questions during discourse analysis can be borrowed from Foucault: “according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other similar statements be made? [...] How is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?” (1972, p. 27).

I adhere to the approach of critical discourse analysis based on the five principles formulated by Jørgensen & Philips, which are in turn based on the works of Fairclough and Wodak (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, pp. 61-64). On some of those principles I will elaborate more extensively.

1. Linguistic and discursive practice is social practice; therefore, discourse analysis is the analysis of social structures.
2. Discursive practices are ideological; therefore, a discursive space is the space of power relations.
3. Discourse constitutes social reality and is constituted by it, thus, discursive practice is in dialectical relations with other aspects of the social reality. Judith Butler wrote about performativity as the "iterative discursive power" (Ryabchuk & Khurtsydze, 2023, p. 5) that produces social reality. Knowledge production, and thus discourse itself, is performative - meaning that they "do things with words". Thus, theoretical developments of performativity and linguistics are linked to discourse analysis. This is why I refer to Butler's elaboration on performativity, even though they focus a lot on the aspect of embodiment that is not relevant to the focus of my thesis. In how things are reiterated, the discourse is molded and transformed. In this thesis, I am looking at the iterations of knowledge production of gender and sexuality by the German foundations in Lebanon - this, in fact, constitutes the very process of discourse analysis. When Butler criticizes Bourdieu for perceiving social institutions as static, they stress on the importance of reiteration in the reproduction of a performance - thus, of a discourse and of social institutions (Butler, 1997).
4. Textual analysis is always contextual: text as empirical data needs to be analyzed within its social context, not in isolation with only focusing on its inner structures. The meaning is created within the nexus of text and context. It is the dialectical process of analyzing what is explicitly said, as well as the unsaid, directly unexpressed assumptions (Fairclough, 2003)[10] that constitute the context — in fact, the context in relation to the text itself usually stays in the realm of unsaid. As Foucault puts it, "'already-said' is not merely [...] a text that has already been written, but a 'never-said', an incorporeal discourse [...] everything that is formulated in discourse was already

[10] Fairclough differentiates three types of assumptions: existential (ones that state the fact of (in)existence of a phenomenon), propositional (assumptions about what can possibly happen) and value assumptions (ones that state that something is good, bad, desirable or not) (2003, p. 55).

articulated in that semi-silence that precedes it, which continues to run obstinately beneath it, but which it covers and silences." (Foucault, 1972, p. 25). The origins and authorship of a text, its genre, all the conditions of its production, its relationship with economic processes and various sources and types of capital, its connections with other texts (here is where the concept of intertextuality[11] comes in handy) — all those aspects should be included in the discourse analysis.

5. Discourse analysis is the space of "exploratory critique" (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p. 64), the purpose of which is to expose power relations which are (re)produced by discursive practice, the researcher cannot stay a neutral documenter. Moreover, the political positionality of a researcher is, in fact, an integral constructive part of the research (Ryabchuk & Khurtsydze, 2023).

In addition to those principles that inform my research, I employ the methodological considerations that Jørgensen & Philips develop from the discursive theory of Laclau and Mouffe (2002, p. 50). According to them, there are three core discursive categories that "refer to key signifiers in the social organization of meaning" (Ibid.):

1. nodal points that organize discourses;
2. master signifiers that organize identity;
3. myths that organize social space.

Furthermore, those categories exist as "chains of equivalence" (Ibid.), where one concept is linked to the chain of others (for instance, the concept of the West is linked to the one of civilization and barbarism, liberal democracy — obviously, this chain can be continued in line with the multitude of colonial discourses). A chain of equivalence can be viewed as a set of assumptions (under which I mean exactly the concept of assumption developed by Fairclough that I mentioned in principle 4 in the previous paragraph).

To briefly illustrate the generalized schematic usage of those categories in the context of my thesis, gender and sexuality are the nodal points around which discourse is organized. Among the identities organized by master signifiers are: activists, humanitarians, members of LGBT+ communities, feminists. Within the category of myths that organize social space are such concepts as civil society, Middle East, or Europe.

[11] According to Faircloiugh, intertextuality is "a matter of recontextualization – a movement from one context to another," it also means to bring "other voices into the context" (2003, p. 51).

In practical terms, I am undertaking a critical discourse analysis of the knowledge produced by various German actors, particularly foundations (Stiftungen), operating in Lebanon. This study focuses on examining their discursive practices during a pivotal period characterized by the Lebanese uprising and the subsequent Beirut port explosion. This period is notable for the surge in international interventions, capital inflows, and social projects orchestrated by the European Union and other foreign entities within Lebanon's complex socio-political landscape. Our analysis is centered on discourse as a function of crisis management, specifically within the framework of foreign intervention in civil society development.

The primary objective of this investigation is to explore how issues related to gendered labor and women's rights are addressed—or potentially neglected—within the evolution of this discourse. To achieve this, we will critically examine the knowledge produced over a three-year period, during which gender emerged as a central focus, either as an analytical tool or as an argumentative focal point. Our approach involves scrutinizing this material through two primary lenses:

First, we will analyze the linguistic outlook of the foundations towards Lebanese society, identifying the key terms employed to describe this society. Second, we will investigate how and when the issue of gender is addressed, in what contexts, and within which disciplinary frameworks.

The second phase of our analysis demands a more extensive examination through six key considerations during our close reading:

1. The framing of the topic and the stated objectives of the material.
2. The genre choice employed to present the topic.
3. The methodology utilized to investigate the topic.
4. The language employed, including the source language of production, available translations, and potential comparisons between translation documents, with particular attention to how key conceptual terms are treated both visually and lexically.
5. The editorial structure under which the material is produced and translated.
6. The frequency and context in which gender is centered in the material produced.

Through this comprehensive analysis, I aim to uncover the underlying dynamics in the use of and approach towards gendered topics and women's rights within the context of German interventions in Lebanese civil society.

Given that we posit 2019 as the onset of a new civil society resurgence, driven by an influx of international aid—manifested through charitable contributions, capital inflows, the proliferation of NGOs, and the expansion of foreign-administered social programs—it is reasonable to anticipate that this crisis-induced political economy will continue to drive transformative changes in the years ahead. Initially, the decision to conclude the analysis in 2021 appeared methodologically sound, as this was the year marked by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent debates surrounding shifts in the German political economy concerning foreign intervention. However, this temporal marker now appears misaligned with our broader thesis on political economy, as the projects funded in the wake of the Lebanese revolution and the Beirut port explosion only began to fully materialize, with corresponding knowledge production being analyzed and published, particularly in the post-pandemic context.

Thus, it is methodologically prudent to extend the scope of our analysis until a point where the political economy of aid and intervention undergoes a discernible and radical restructuring. Such restructuring began to take place in late October 2023, marked by waves of defunding initiated by German foundations against Lebanese civil society constituents, following the outbreak of Operation Sword of Iron[12]—otherwise referred to as the israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip and West Bank. This extension not only aligns with the temporal dynamics of political economy shifts but also serves as a critical self-reflection on the initial limitations of my temporal analysis, particularly regarding the interconnectedness of civil societies and the discursive formations they produce or engage with.

In each chapter focused on a particular Stiftung, I will identify the key themes relevant to that Stiftung, meticulously derived from a thorough and comprehensive analysis of all official publications available on their website, specifically those related to their Lebanon office. These thematic frameworks will be compared only after we have provided a critical analysis

[12] The defunding procedures and the discursive debacles between funding German players and funded queer and feminist Lebanese organizations floated on the surface only towards the last week of October, which is after the Israeli prime minister declared the "full scale ground invasion of Gaza" on October 27, 2023 under the name "Operation Sword of Iron".

of the political contexts within which each research initiative was conceived and conducted, as well as the factors informing the annual research agendas. This approach will allow us to trace how and when these Stiftungen integrated gender into their research, policy, or inquiry, and to critically examine the strategic purposes behind employing "gender" as an analytical tool or focal point in their work.

Regarding the thematic analysis, it might seem methodologically sound to extract and apply uniform themes across the various Stiftungen under study to facilitate text analysis. However, this is not the objective of our research. The goal is not to compare how themes are addressed differently across frameworks but to investigate how the German Stiftung(en) approach the gendered society of Lebanon. Specifically, the focus is on when and how these institutions use gender as an analytical category, for what purposes, and under what circumstances.

Thus, gender is not the *subject* of analysis, it is however the *tool* used to illuminate the underlying intellectual dynamics and the prevailing political environment in which these organizations operate. This approach allows us to understand how political identities navigate and shape the social spheres they engage with. Therefore, the emphasis is on critical discourse analysis, not merely text analysis, as we aim to uncover the deeper discursive interventions and political undercurrents within the literature.

2.2. Data and what it means

The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's (FES) sustained focus on unions, workers, education, and the economy is rooted in its strategic establishment in Lebanon during the latter half of the 1960s,[13] particularly following the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) headquarters in Beirut. The PLO's presence, closely allied with Lebanese communist forces, reinforced the integration of political and socio-economic movements during this period.

[13] "The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) established its office in Lebanon in 1966 and remained active throughout the civil war (1975-1990). Initially, the foundation focused on fostering social democracy through local cooperative projects and supporting workers' rights by aiding the trade union movement of the 1970s and 80s. Over the decades, the FES has aligned with German foreign and developmental policy, prioritizing social justice, democracy, peace, and security, while also promoting democratic forces globally and shaping the future of the European Union". Taken directly from the following sources: https://lebanon.fes.de/about-us/fes-in-lebanon.html and https://www.fes.de/en/stiftung/international-work

FES's initial mandate was purportedly centered on the reform and strengthening of labor unions, a focus that coincided with Lebanon's wave of union strikes and a decade-long period of relentless social mobilization led by the Communist Party of Lebanon and its affiliated factions. These unions were not merely economic entities but served as vital allies to the militant grassroots political organizations of the time.

The German foundation sought to strategically embed itself within the union structure, aiming to recalibrate the unions' relationship with the Chehabi state, which was locked in an existential antagonism with the local communist forces. This intervention was far from impartial, as it introduced concepts such as "democracy" and "civil justice" infused with a foreign ideological framework, positioning these ideas as counterpoints to the militant communist discourse. In other words, these concepts were framed in a way that reflected external values and interests, contrasting sharply with the locally-driven narratives of the time. By doing so, FES appeared to position itself as a "market rival" to the communist movement, rather than an alleged neutral actor.

To clarify the focus of FES literature between 2019 and 2024, I categorized their research and policy work into eight main themes, six of which are consistently examined through a gendered lens. The two exceptions — "Economy and Energy" and "Youth" — do not employ a gender-focused or feminist perspective. Although the theme of "Youth" does mention "women" and "female citizens," these references are not used as analytical starting points or subjects of critical inquiry. Instead, youth is often treated as a generational category capable of transcending political and class distinctions, which is why it receives significant attention.

Allow me then to repeat, yet intentionally: A key aspect of this analysis is to discern the specific moments when gender emerges as either a research focus or lens. When examining data from 2019-2020 — years characterized by the Palestinian refugee camp protests, Lebanese uprisings, and migrant domestic workers' movements, or as the Stiftung refers to it, "In times of crisis"—the process of knowledge production often vanishes in its usual form. Instead, it shifts under new material conditions, becoming less visible as it is displaced onto actors who are foreign to Germany, meaning local to Lebanon, or onto more grassroots-based efforts. This shift is particularly evident in conferences and interviews where local voices are allegedly foregrounded. Yet, the influence of the Stiftung remains both administratively and executively present, as they continue to shape the agendas and serve as the sole source of funding. Rather than producing knowledge directly under their own name, these Stiftungen

often allow the "selected" perspectives to surface, with the Stiftung's involvement being ever visible as the endorser whose presence is always acknowledged verbally and by writing as existentially essential. Through this approach, we can unravel the strategic purposes behind employing "gender" as an analytical tool or focal point in their work, and how these choices reflect broader political and ideological agendas.

It is crucial to consider Adriana Qubaiová's (2019) examination of the "NGOization in Lebanon." She contends that NGOization, alongside the donor structures that infiltrate and institutionalize activism—especially in the criminalized and tabooed realms of gender and sexual activism in Beirut—is "intimately related to war events and post-war conditions" (p. 94). Qubaiová employs the concept of "hedging" to describe the dynamics of risk and profit that emerge from the selective public visibility produced by this foreignized NGO industry incursion—an analysis that resonates with Butler's theoretical framework. Qubaiová further argues that sexuality-related movements and organizations became a realm of investment interest during post-war relief periods. While I concur with my fellow Palestinian scholar, I assert that post-war and relief frameworks alone are insufficient to trace these institutional incursions. A more accurate depiction emerges when considering this phenomenon as a form of "crisis management," as evidenced by data presented in the FES tables (1.1, 2, 3).

Moreover, as the case of KAFA elucidates, donor structures do not merely complement or rival the state; rather, they serve as an executive extension of its apparatuses while maintaining their ties to gender and sexuality activism, alongside movements of workers and local communities. Funding channels operate through banking institutions, and surveillance is maintained through direct connections with security apparatuses—in KAFA's case, the Lebanese General Security. KAFA collaborates with Lebanese Darak and internal security forces on issues such as human trafficking for sexual exploitation, particularly in the context of the Lebanese anti-trafficking law (2015, with further developments in 2018, following the national general elections). Similarly, in Jordan, the Jordanian army was trained by Austrian forces under the guise of the "First Advanced Gender Focal Point Course" (February 2024), shortly after security forces clashed with the teachers' union and several tribes during election-related turmoil, and just months before the events of October 7th. These examples suggest that this is not a sequential post-war process but rather a continuum of control, as Cynthia Cockburn (2004) might argue.

Given Lebanon's historical backdrop, where the state was constructed in opposition to persistent anti-colonial insurgencies, countering this structural composition necessitates transforming the public sphere into a controlled space for activism. In this context, the public sphere outside state institutions is permitted to expand following each "crisis," effectively containing and preventing anti-establishment forces from organizing. The NGO sector and state apparatus thus become focal points of the empowerment mechanisms embraced by the Stiftungen and broader Germanic interventions (as evidenced by the Austrian example). Contrary to popular belief, or the Soros model of an "open society," the relationship between the state and civil society does not follow a negative linear correlation. On the contrary, it aligns with the objective to "build (or rebuild) a political machine from the population upward," as articulated by Galula (1964, p. 65) in "Counter-Insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice." Gender-based violence (GBV), an element of community development, parallels counterinsurgency strategies, ultimately extending the state's geographic reach, expanding its range of social services, and deepening its presence in the daily lives of citizens. By doing so, the state integrates opposition and marginalized societal strata within its institutions, transforming them into a benign opposition that stabilizes the masses. This strategy neutralizes potential threats by co-opting dissent, ensuring that resistance remains within controllable and non-disruptive channels.

Consequently, this dynamic should be understood as a counterinsurgency structure, ingrained in the political economy through the hyper-privatized banking system that has shaped Lebanon's civil society since 1959. The Chehab period, culminating in the 1963 resolution that established the Private Bank Association of Lebanon, laid the foundations for Lebanon's neoliberal civil society and its NGO sector during the first decade of the country's independence. The focus on gender and sexuality, as hyperbolically exhibited in Qubaiová's narrative of Helem, is a predetermined component of these counterinsurgent strategies.

This counterinsurgency manifests in various forms, including what my Palestinian professor refers to as the "competing transnational ideas of sexuality politics and local practices" (Qubaiová 2019, p. 94) The resulting clash produces a stratum of knowledge producers and reproducers who elevate the epistemic regime through their networks and practices.

The discussion about the Stiftungen's role in knowledge production, particularly how they allow "selected" local perspectives to surface while maintaining their own administrative and executive control, resonates with Spivak's critique (1988). Spivak argues that when dominant

actors attempt to "speak for" or "give voice to" the subaltern, they often reinforce the very structures of power that silence those voices in the first place. The writers are Arab, the conference is a German-catered interaction between local groups that have been unable to interact with one another before this German initiative came to be. In this context, foregrounding local voices becomes a need to fortify the predetermined thematic lining of the research agenda, because as you notice, yes, there was a pause in research but the material and events produced were still confined among the same identified themes, but now with the “uprising” added unto them. The subaltern (local subject) speaks only within a framework the Stiftung controls, thus perpetuating a form of epistemic violence where the subaltern’s ability to truly "speak" is mediated and constrained by conceptual “principles” tied around those of German-ic defined democracy and empowerment demarcated by the funding source. We have here a developmental process that is combined with local developments in the intervened society, but to which the theoretical conceptual understanding is not a product of the material alterations of the collective consciousness of that society.

Spivak's argument also sheds light on the process I describe, where knowledge production vanquishes from its original rules of (dis)engagement and is displaced onto local or grassroots actors. While this might seem like an empowering decentralization, Spivak would caution that this displacement might not actually enable the subaltern to speak on their own terms. Instead, it may result in the subaltern's voice being co-opted or appropriated by the dominant structures (the Stiftungen in this case) that continue to set the terms of discourse. This reinforces the need to critically examine whether these local perspectives are genuinely subaltern voices or merely reproductions of the dominant narrative under a different guise. The fact that most of the English material does not have an Arabic translation but vice versa is always available, there is one sense of directionality which signifies that information is always extracted out of the Arabic language and remodeled into the lingua franca but never the other way. The unidirectional flow of information, exhibited by the translation directionality, signifies a particular rite of passage, where the holder of the lingua franca gains the right to receive and control data generated by and about the population of the intervened country. At the same time, the local populace's knowledge production agendas are inevitably constrained and dictated by the thematic frameworks established by the Stiftung. Notably, there is not one Arab who edits or revises the German and English versions of the research, unlike the reverse situation. The one-way flow of information, shown by the direction of translation, represents a significant power dynamic, where those who speak the dominant

language control the data about the people in the intervened country. This control extends beyond language; it also influences the way ideas and concepts are transmitted. As a result, the knowledge produced by the local population is often limited by the themes set by the Stiftung. This is what translation studies call directionality. It is not just about language but also involves the transfer of concepts. Judith Butler, for example, highlights the complexity of translating concepts like gender across languages. Traditional views hold that translating into one's native language is superior to translating into a second language, a belief reflected in terms like "inverse" or "reverse" translation. However, in many parts of the world, translating into a second language is common, especially where less widely spoken languages are involved.

I am not speaking solely about gender here, but directionality necessitates that we remember the following: When the term "gender" is introduced into another language, it signals not just the entry of a single word but the re-entry of the English language itself—a language that has already permeated these linguistic spaces long before. The introduction of a term like "gender" does not mark the first encounter with English; rather, it occurs when a new word is crafted in a second language to approximate the English concept of gender. This process, as Judith Butler describes, is emblematic of English's "incursions" into other languages, and by extension, into the lives of people and their moments of social upheaval.

While we often critique the power dynamics and hegemonic influence of dominant languages, we seldom consider the nuances of how these incursions are resisted, normalized, or perpetuated. Who is responsible for reproducing these incursions? Who is complicit in normalizing them? And who holds the power to resist them?

In Arabic versions of research, parentheses are frequently used to include the original English or German terms, highlighting the intended conceptual meaning. Conversely, the German and English versions of these texts often presume monolingualism, assuming that concepts such as "gender," "women's rights," "democracy," "justice," and "equality" are universally understood as they are in the Stiftungen's lingua franca. These concepts are often treated as generalizable across diverse contexts, disregarding the specificities of the subjects and temporalities being addressed.

The transformation and development anticipated to enhance the societies under intervention are rooted in inherently foreign concepts, introduced by the intellectual markets of the

Stiftung. The demand-supply chain for these socially transformative ideas is managed by commissioned native (Arab) writers and translators, who play a crucial role in either reinforcing or resisting these linguistic and conceptual incursions. Their position is pivotal in determining whether these foreign terms are seamlessly integrated into local discourse or met with resistance, ultimately shaping the trajectory of social movements within their societies.

Having mentioned the Arab paid writer and underpaid translator, calling them “natives”, let us go back knowingly to Spivak. Her work is deeply concerned with how Western feminist frameworks often fail to account for the complex intersections of gender, race, class, and colonial history in the subaltern experience. It prompts a critical examination of whether the use of gender as a category of analysis by these Stiftungen truly reflects the lived realities of subaltern subjects in Lebanon, or whether it serves to further entrench the dominant, Eurocentric narrative. But maybe not that simply, it is how the eurocentric narrative is in fact a product of the foucauldian-ly obedient local writer, researcher, translator… the local knowledge producer working “in collaboration” or in contract with FES. This would involve questioning whether the deployment of gender as a lens by the Stiftungen genuinely disrupts hegemonic power relations or subtly reinforces them by framing gender issues within a pre-existing, Western-oriented agenda. I say this to speak of "strategic essentialism" that explains the Stiftung’s selective engagement with local voices and gendered perspectives. While Spivak herself critiques the risks of essentializing the subaltern, she also acknowledges that under certain circumstances, it might be strategically necessary for marginalized groups to adopt a unified identity to make themselves heard in dominant discourses.

In all its research endeavors, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) has consistently sought to integrate Lebanese state institutions into its projects. This integration includes collaboration with the Lebanese University, ministry employees, municipalities, labor unions, and at times, the state's security apparatuses. FES’s focus is not directed toward community-based organizations but rather on producing narratives that connect these state institutions within specific thematic frameworks.

The strategic alignment between the Stiftung and state institutions is further highlighted by how the state itself engages in producing knowledge that underscores the importance of these foundations in sustaining Lebanon's “democratic processes.” For instance, a researcher, writing for the Lebanese Army’s website, concluded that:

> "as discussions continue about democracy, good governance, accountability, equality, and social justice, it becomes increasingly clear that NGOs have a vital role to play. Globalization has created both cross-border issues that NGOs address and cross-border communities of interest that NGOs represent. National governments cannot do either task as effectively or as legitimately. In the globalizing world of the twenty-first century, NGOs will have a growing international calling" (Basbous, 2007).

This statement reflects how state entities are not just participants in FES projects but active knowledge producers who adopt a descriptive historiographic approach to emphasize the essential role of these Stiftungen in maintaining the democratic integrity of the nation-state. In this manner, the state delineates its organic connection with the Stiftungen, positioning them as integral to Lebanon's democratic and political landscape. A good example would be not long ago, July 2024, the "Dialogue for Change" project implemented by the Development Center for Strategic Strategies and Alternative (TATWIR) took place under the leadership, funding and supervision of FES. The coordinator said "the project was chosen under the framework of the memory of the 'camp war' and the efforts to create spaces for dialogue between the different parties involved. He highlighted the specificity of the Tyre region, where there are more than 7 camps and Palestinian gatherings along the coast."[14]

2.2.2. Gendered narratives and histories

In Abou-Habib, L., Akil, C., & Issa, M. (2024). *Reclaiming and decolonizing the history of the women's rights and feminist movements in Lebanon* (Full manuscript, April 14th, 2024). Beirut; the researchers employ a methodological approach that ostensibly combines autoethnography with a historiography of women actors in Lebanon and the Arab world from the 1940s onwards. This approach suggests a blend of personal narrative—anchored in the feminist assertion that "the personal is political"—with a historical analysis aimed at tracing the evolution of women's roles in the region. However, a closer examination reveals significant methodological inconsistencies and an overreliance on Western academic frameworks, which undermines the purported authenticity of the research.

While the authors assert that their analysis is grounded in primary resources, these resources seem to serve merely as a backdrop to a discussion predominantly framed by Western

[14] Source: https://lebanon.fes.de/e/dialogue-for-change.html

scholarship. The legitimacy of the narrative constructed within the manuscript appears heavily contingent upon the validation of Western book reviews, studies, and secondary sources. This reliance raises concerns about the extent to which the analysis is genuinely reflective of the authors' positionalities within the contemporary political landscape of Lebanon and the Arab world. Instead, the work appears "subservient" to ongoing debates within Western institutions, thereby diluting the potential for a truly autoethnographic and contextually grounded historiography. The authors are scared to intervene in a pre-given world of academic analysis and research, hence destroying their subjectivity in the process. Nothing new really has been said, just a remixed narrative through which analysis remains the same. It seems as though they are fighting Butler's (2000) assertion after reading *Hegel's Lesser Logic, Part One* of his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830) that "[w]e do not remain the same, and neither do our cognitive categories, as we enter into a knowing encounter with the world. Both the knowing subject and the world are undone and redone by the act of knowledge" (p. 20).

A particularly telling example of this reliance on Western scholarship can be seen in the manuscript's declarative statements, such as the assertion that "In fact, literature inspired by the civil war sees the writings of women exceeding those of men, and it is 'to these Lebanese women that the Arabic literature is indebted for a 'radical break with tradition'" (Abou-Habib et al., 2024, p.43). This statement, referenced from Cambridge University Press, exemplifies an overarching pattern within the manuscript, where significant claims are supported by references to Western scholars such as Hartman (2020) and Curry (2021), while primary Arabic sources are utilized in a manner that lacks transparency, particularly concerning the translation process. The translations are neither sufficiently acknowledged nor critically engaged with, reducing these primary sources to a secondary status within the research. In this regard it is also important to mention that the language of the research is evidently English and translation was provided by FES in neither Arabic nor German.

Moreover, the initial emphasis on the political identity of the authors—positioned as closely aligned with the activist scene and committed to a feminist research agenda—seems to dissipate as the manuscript progresses. By the third section, this political identity is effectively overshadowed, rendering it a mere appendage to the introductory claims of authenticity. This erosion of political engagement is particularly troubling in a manuscript that begins with a strong political note concerning an ongoing genocide, suggesting a broader

trend within contemporary academic research to revert to the "recognized legitimate" Western discourse, even when addressing deeply politicized and context-specific issues.

This pattern of analysis and presentation raises critical questions about the extent to which the research adheres to its initial claims of autoethnography and feminist historiography. Instead of maintaining a steadfast commitment to the local context and the political identities of the researchers, the manuscript appears to align more closely with Western academic conventions. This alignment, in turn, reflects a broader issue within academic research, where the pressures of global academic legitimacy often compel scholars to orient their work towards Western discourses, even at the cost of marginalizing the very voices they seek to amplify. It seems that thinking does not necessarily mean freedom as Hegel, quoted in Butler, argues.

The decision to neglect translating a historiography that relies on Arabic primary sources, particularly when the stated objective is to make these sources more accessible, constitutes a troubling oversight of the Arab reader. This omission is not just problematic; it borders on the paradoxical, if not outright farcical, when we consider the research's professed aim: to revisit "our history." The claim that "our history may be way messier than what we would like it to be, and a move from one 'wave' to another is probably an attractive analytical model but not necessarily reflective of the nature of the feminist movements and the lived experiences of the various generations of women's rights and feminist activists" assumes a collective "our" that becomes increasingly ambiguous. Who, precisely, is encompassed within this "our" when the language of dissemination is the lingua franca of the elite native intellectuals, rather than Arabic, the language of the primary sources and the broader community?

This choice raises critical questions about the intended audience of the research. For whom is FES narrating the history of gender? The involvement of researchers affiliated with American universities and Oxfam local offices suggests that the narrative is constructed not for the wider Arab community, but for a select, intellectual audience. Consequently, the project risks alienating the very people whose history it purports to explore, undermining its claims of feminist subjectivity and relevance.

It is no longer merely a question of static versus dynamic translation; the concept of a "literary shock," as explored in translation studies, is notably absent here. Instead, what emerges is an embedded unidirectionality within the research process itself, rather than in its dissemination.

This politics of translation neglect can only be understood as an active intention to establish a thematic *statikos*—as the Greek language might describe it. In other words, it is a deliberate decision to anchor the value and weight of feminist historiography exclusively in the English language. Consequently, the working language chosen for this endeavor remains in a static position, disconnected from the dynamic and contested terrain of feminist political history, instead serving the interests of institutions capable of collecting, storing, and accessing its archives. This deliberate immobility of language in matters of history underscores a broader strategy to alienate strata of the contemporary social scene from the trails of their feminist histories. Thus, the choice of the working language remains fixed in a static position, not facilitating movement between the subject of feminist political history itself. This is a reproduction of classical colonial doctrines, there is no trace of the language of the *discovered* peoples while on the other hand research and policy papers written in Arabic for administrative use on reforming gender equality policies, carry a clear visual trail of the European language preaching those reforms and the pathway to their sound conduct.

2.2.3. Gendered civil society and social movements

The research on the “Influence of Women's Participation in the October 17th Uprising on Gender Roles” was outsourced to lawyer Batoul Yahfoufi and Dr. Iqbal Doughan. This research examines women's participation in the October 17, 2019 movement from a gender perspective, focusing on its impact on stereotypical gender roles and women's capacity to enact tangible change. Notably, it stands as the sole publication allegedly addressing social movements through a gender-based lens. However, the study adopts a predominantly legal framework, given the professional backgrounds of the two authors—a legal scholar and a lawyer. No sociological account can be traced interestingly! So, the research begins by categorizing Lebanese law to facilitate understanding the systematic jurisprudential discrimination against Lebanese citizens. The legal scholars then conduct a survey to explore the relationship between participants in the 2019 uprising and women's rights issues within Lebanon's state apparatuses. The sampling techniques are explained through percentages representing various geographical, gender, and international strata. However, and what is worth noting, is that the study does not address potential class variations among the survey participants, which could have provided a more nuanced analysis. This lack becomes deeper once a reader notices that the research is short of a clear theoretical foundation, it just does not depart from a well-defined theoretical premise in its subsequent analysis, which culminates in

a table of policy reform recommendations. Furthermore, the study does not articulate its academic position on feminist jurisprudence or legal theory, suggesting that its primary purpose is to present opinion data in a quantitative format rather than do what it claims to do in the introduction and that is to enunciate how:

"(ليس) في هذا الكلام مغالاة، ولكن الحقيقة أن المرأة كسرت حاجز الخوف والمواجهة النمطية وكسرت الصورة النمطية للمرأة. "[15]

"(There is) no exaggeration in this statement, but the truth is that women broke the barrier of fear and stereotypical confrontation and broke the normative image of women."[16]

Not unlike the nation-state nature of the discipline may dictate, the working language is Arabic, given that the authors are analyzing Lebanese law written in Arabic as the source language, over 60 of the 190 pages consist of quantitative tables describing the sample and survey results. These tables include minor English translations outsourced for various NGO presentations. However, the research as a whole remains untranslated, reflecting FES's ongoing neglect in this regard.

2.2.4. Gendered Rights

In the report "A Report on Violations Affecting the LGBTQ Community in the Workplace" by Naya Rajab and Said Issa (2022), there is an evident translation dynamic at play in the construction of this narrative-based document. The report compiles interviews with members of the LGBTQ community, presenting their stories in the form of a second-person narrative interspersed with direct quotes. This hybrid genre, which intertwines biographical elements with legal contexts, could be classified as a case study-based report or a biographical/ethnographic narrative.

The authors, both affiliated with Helem—the first LGBTQIA+ rights NGO in Lebanon—identify as queer, with one being a trans Palestinian-Syrian refugee. Their positionality places them at the very heart of the community under study[17]. However, this intimate connection is conspicuously absent in the report's tone and conclusions. The authors maintain a second-

[15] Source: https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/beirut/19518.pdf

[16] My translation.

[17] The refugee, the citizen and the civil servant; it all circles back to the conundrum that habermas poses in his elaboration of the nature of civil society. to ponder on the concept of the citizen and its presence in these discourses could be an independent focus for another research paper.

person narrative throughout, which, while adding a personal touch, paradoxically distances their own experiences from the narrative. Remarkably, the language of the report is English, despite both authors' fluency in Arabic, their mother tongue. This choice is particularly striking given their history of writing on similar topics in Arabic, a language they share with the broader community they are addressing.

The decision to write in English, especially within the context of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and its sole queer-themed publication in 2022—two years after the Lebanese uprising and following the Beirut port explosion—raises critical questions about linguistic choices and representation. The term "queer" is notably absent from the report, replaced instead by "LGBTQ," further aligning the report with a more universally recognized but less contextually rooted terminology. The only time "queer" was used is to describe the clothing of one of the interviewees. This shift underscores the broader implications of translation and language politics within the framework of international NGOs operating in local contexts, where linguistic choices can significantly impact both the accessibility and the authenticity of the narrative being constructed.

2.2.5. Rough conclusions

So, let's take a moment to revisit Tables 1.2 and 1.3—seriously, go ahead and admire the connection between the source language, which I'll now refer to as the "working research language," and the genres and topics covered. Notice anything? There's a pattern that practically leaps off the page! It's almost as if the language choice is a roadmap, guiding us through the terrain of methodological preferences and thematic focuses. The way the language aligns with certain genres and topics isn't random; it is telling a story of its own.

The decision to peg the working language to the nature of the discipline speaks volumes about the ideological service that this language renders, both from the standpoint of the writers and, more significantly, the Stiftung. The issue at hand isn't merely a matter of convenience or convention; it's a deliberate choice that reveals underlying power dynamics. Sure, we are well aware that many gender and sexuality analytical categories were originally developed within a Euro-American context. But what we witness here is how a particular language becomes inextricably linked to specific methodological approaches. Arabic is permissible, even expected, when dealing with the legal apparatuses of Arab-speaking nation-states and their institutional frameworks. However, when the focus shifts to case studies, ethnographies,

historical narratives, and the insights of local activists proficient in gender matters, English reigns supreme.

To be academic about it, as Strasser and Tinsman remind us, “how can we make sure that in studying gender systems in other cultures, we do not resort to another form of Eurocentrism, less obvious but more insidious because it is methodological rather than topical?” (Strasser & Tinsman, 2015, as cited by Najmabadi, 2006, p. 18). This cautionary note serves as a critical lens through which we can view the linguistic choices made in these research endeavors. The elevation of English in these contexts isn’t just a matter of global academic norms; it’s a reflection of a deeper, more entrenched ideological alignment that subtly but powerfully reinforces the dominance of Euro-American epistemological frameworks, even in studies ostensibly aimed at deconstructing them.

Masaad has already captivated the reader by addressing queer and feminist issues from historiographical or broader sociopolitical perspectives, as my thematic table clearly demonstrates. Here’s where it gets intriguing: an Arab writer, native to the region—in this case, the Palestinian-Syrian author of the LGBTQ rights report—chooses to write in English about their community, and the futures they envision in a time of revolution that they partook in. This isn't just about reaching a broader audience or identifying with Western norms, as Massad might argue. It’s a reflection of the deep-seated helplessness in the face of the seeming impossibility of nurturing queer knowledge and anti-patriarchal history in anything but the lingua franca.

But let me go further. This isn't just about identity or anti-identity ideological stances, nor is it merely a return to the age-old debate about the capacity of the Arabic language to articulate the sociopolitical complexities of sexuality and feminist liberation. That's why I’m not quoting Najmabadi (2008) or Frederic Lagrange (2000) here. This feeling of helplessness—or rather, this consistent retreat to English in more grounded genres outside the legal realm—also reflects a subordination to the rules of the knowledge production market.

As Riad, one of the translators in my Kohl translation team (previously funded by FES and HBS), insightfully remarked, "the more you produce in the lingua franca, the more opportunities unfold. The more visible I am as a serious writer about my community and my people, the more likely I am to be accepted into universities abroad." This obsession with

escaping socio-legal immobility pushed this middle-class Palestinian translator to write their article in English, despite being one of the best Arabic translators on the team I oversee.

This economic depravity and subservience to the political economy of knowledge production add a crucial dimension to Massad's (2007) analysis of the discourse on Arab homoerotic desires. Massad argues that categories of gender and sexuality are not universal; they are universalized by "the epistemic, ethical, and political violence unleashed on the rest of the world by the very international human rights advocates whose aim is to defend the very people their intervention is creating" (p. 41). These "creations" are the undeclared and invisible translators, the writers, and the contracted activists that these German foundations seek out. These are the native intellectuals who depart from their closeted, allegedly homophobic communities and enter the world of epistemic industry, where salvation and self-consciousness are woven through the lingua franca of universities and cause-based NGOs. To sustain your in-betweenness and elevate your economic status through paid epistemic production, you yield to the rules of this production and that is a contribution to the reduction of Arabic to a monolithic, single-genre language. The political economy of the Stiftung alienates the writer from their mother tongue—the communities that are underneath their authentic and visible inbetweens-ess. That inbetween-ess as seen in the positionality column, that professes being one of victims in the ranks of the invisible underneath community, but one that survives, into visibility and economic gain as a function of the lingua franca. They are the subaltern who speak, becoming the merchants of the victims' narrative—translating stories from Arabic (the interviews) to English (the Stiftung platform) as colleague Sara Mourad (2013) puts it:

> "The object of study, the research's starting point, should have been my unease with using words such as gay, LGBT, queer, and homosexual and an equal unease with using the Arabic mithli (homosexual) or shadh (deviant) to talk about nonnormative desires, identities, and gender roles in Lebanon…If the Arabic terms were translations from English, is there a guilt associated with the act of translation itself? And is this because translation is the empirical evidence of the cultural inauthenticity associated with these terms? Does the unease stem from a fear that the foreignness of these signifiers betrays the foreignness of what is signified?" (p. 2535).

Where I disagree with Sara, is that the problem is not one of a feeling of unease, it is not the affect that produces methodological and theoretical hurdles, rather it is a political

economy that imposes its donors' methodologies as research doxa and produces a whirlpool of uneasiness for those that will become the merchants of non-normative sexualities in the realm of the epistemic regime.

The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS), in its scholarly and activist endeavors within Lebanese society, presents an ostensibly nuanced approach to addressing the complexities of non-citizen populations—stateless individuals, migrant domestic workers, and refugees. Yet, this approach belies a deeper pattern of essentialization that mirrors the reductionist tendencies critiqued in Johannes Reissner's (1997) analysis of the Persian Gulf, where he argues that these societies harm their own interests by "crossing the limits of internationally recognized civilized behavior" (p. 138). Similarly, RLS's research at times resembles an ethnographic narration of a phenomenon of an essentialized other—the Lebanese citizen who abuses migrant domestic workers, in a country where "rape within marriage is not punishable (homosexuality is, however)."

While the knowledge produced by RLS is notably distinct from that of other organizations like the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)—which fixates almost exclusively on the "citizen" as the essential object of study, despite the country's diverse demographic makeup—RLS still succumbs to a subtler form of categorical essentialization. The Stiftung, in addressing feminist and social movements within the foreign land it has entrenched itself in, builds its framework upon axiomatic assumptions about Lebanese society, viewing it through a postcolonial, Levantine lens. This perspective not only lumps Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and israel into a monolithic "Middle East" category but also fails to acknowledge the rich tapestry of anti-colonial struggles and revolutions that inform the social and historical movements in this region. It is as though RLS, in its eagerness to develop "political education" by emphasizing a critical analysis of society, has turned a blind eye to the very colonial legacies it claims to interrogate.

The essentialization manifests on two levels: microscopically, in how RLS positions the Lebanese citizen as the sole agent of political change, sidelining the socio-political uprisings of refugees and migrant workers, which preceded the Lebanese uprising by mere months. These groups are relegated to the status of passive victims within the socio-legal framework, rather than recognized as active participants in the political landscape. Macroscopically, RLS's treatment of the region as a cohesive postcolonial unit—where accessing content about

one country seamlessly leads to another, often produced in collaboration with the Jordan offices—betrays a broader, Eurocentric essentialization.

Despite RLS's more diverse methodological approach, which includes quantitative reports, opinion articles, and occasional interviews, there remains an underlying assumption that the relevant interlocutors are either civil society actors or the apparatus of the nation-state, with political parties conspicuously absent from the conversation. This oversight is particularly glaring given RLS's proclaimed inheritance of Rosa Luxemburg's legacy—a legacy that, in this context, appears selectively interpreted and only partially embraced.

As Adriana Qubaiová (2019) compellingly argues in her analysis of the "NGOization" of Lebanon, the institutionalization of activism—particularly in the fraught realms of gender and sexual activism in Beirut—is "intimately related to war events and post-war conditions" (p. 94). However, I would argue that this post-war framing is insufficient; rather, it is a situation of "crisis management" that perpetuates these institutional incursions. The relationship between donor structures, NGOs, and the Lebanese state is not one of mere complementarity or rivalry but rather one of deep entanglement, where these organizations effectively act as extensions of state apparatuses, with funding channeled through banks and surveillance coordinated with entities such as Lebanon's General Security.

In essence, the RLS's approach to Lebanese society, while more nuanced than others, still operates within a framework of essentialization—both micro and macro—rooted in Eurocentric assumptions. This essentialization, coupled with the selective application of Luxemburg's legacy, results in a body of knowledge that, despite its intentions, ultimately reinforces the very structures it seeks to critique

The language choices in the publications by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS) are particularly revealing, especially when contrasted with those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). Unlike FES, RLS seems to show an interest in crossing language barriers as part of its mission. Almost all articles are published in at least two languages—English and German. However, the comic book "Where to Marie? Stories of Feminisms in Lebanon" (2019) is an exception, available only in English and Arabic, with no explanation provided for this linguistic shift or details on the comic's translation process.

The language choices get particularly intriguing from a Spivakian or Fanonian perspective, especially in the case of Samira Trad's (2021) law-focused report on "Gender Discrimination Down the Generations" in Lebanon. This report, along with the atlas on stateless people, was not only translated into German but also into French. Here, English serves as the working language, and German as the default for RLS's core audience, but when the target audience shifts to include Lebanese readers, the chosen language is French—the language of Lebanon's former colonial power (as indicated in Table 2.2). This raises questions: Is this simply an ironic twist, or is it a calculated strategy reflecting national and class delineations among audiences?

It's evident that RLS's primary concern is its German readership. As a German organization, RLS is driven by a German motive to "... participate in cooperative development projects and advocate for dialogue between the global north and south conducted on equal footing." However, this notion of "equal footing" begins to seem rather farcical when one considers that Arabic—the primary language of Lebanon—is conspicuously absent from their publications. For an organization that professes Marxist/Luxemburgian values, the vision of the "revolutionary class" appears to be directed at the French-speaking elite in Lebanon. This elite is, after all, the only group that could fully grasp RLS's ambitions to "develop alternative concepts and approaches for a comprehensive process of social transformation, enabling the creation of a more united and just society—fostering dialogue."

This choice of language reveals a clear demarcation of what resembles a comprador class—what Ashcroft et al. (2007) describe as "a relatively privileged, wealthy and educated élite who maintain a more highly developed capacity to engage in the international communicative practices introduced by colonial domination, and who may therefore be less inclined to struggle for local cultural and political independence" (p. 48). In this epistemic terrain, the comprador is the merchant of knowledge, the strata where friction between the Stiftung and the society occurs, and where the assumptions about this social being and the "confrontation" against "the capitalist society as a whole", as RLS claims it aims at, are crafted. But when you have a target class as an ally you are not merely demarcating a particular narrative about the society as a whole, you are also claiming certain rules of engagement for your proclaimed confrontation to come.

Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS) presents itself as an environmentally and socially progressive force with an interface that's notably user-friendly and Arabic-inclusive—though this, it turns

out, is somewhat deceptive. While the interface is welcoming, the bulk of their research is published in English, with Arabic translations conspicuously absent. The absence of any mention of translation in their reports further complicates their claims to inclusivity. HBS, known for its ecological focus, intriguingly dedicates much of its research to refugee issues. However, this focus is almost exclusively on Syrian refugees, despite the fact that during the time this sample of research was produced, the most significant refugee movement in Lebanon's post-civil war history was occurring in Palestinian refugee camps. This selective attention is mirrored in their gender-related reports. Although they address gender-based discrimination, particularly regarding citizenship rights (e.g., the right of Lebanese women to pass citizenship to non-Lebanese spouses and children), these reports fail to acknowledge the demographic most severely impacted by these laws: the long-standing Palestinian refugees.

The subjects of HBS's gender analyses seem to be chosen without clear criteria, leaving significant gaps in their coverage. Yet, despite appearing to have fewer publications on gender, HBS stands out for its consistent outsourcing of gender-focused work, a practice it has maintained over the years, unlike FES, which typically ramps up outsourcing during times of turmoil. This outsourcing has led HBS to financially and legally support the creation of the largest queer magazine in the Arab world, based in Beirut. The magazine's editorial team, while Lebanese and Arab, largely consists of individuals with dual nationality or degrees from European universities or the American University of Beirut (AUB). I emphasize the importance of nationality and university background within the editorial committee to underline how these factors intersect with the political economy of intellectual production. This focus is crucial for understanding how material conditions, especially in the Lebanese context, shape both discourse and identity in academic fields like queer and gender studies.

The emphasis on dual nationality holds particular importance not only from a "standpoint" theory perspective but, more crucially, from a political economy perspective. These two perspectives intersect quite neatly in Marx and Engel's *The German Ideology*, written between 1845 and 1846. When I speak of nationality in the context of Lebanon, I'm referring to the ease of moving between the diaspora and the homeland. This ease signifies a specific economic standing and a particular relationship to language—whether it is the foreign lingua franca, the Arabic mother tongue, or the specialized language of research, especially in the humanities.

The more mobile you are, the closer your relationship to the foreign lingua franca, and the easier your access to the theories and methodologies (and methods, quite frankly) of institutionalized Western disciplines. In the realm of queer and gender studies, this proximity often results in the replication of Western theoretical frameworks, particularly when considering the nature of queer theory and, even more so, decolonial theory as they are applied within the market of the Global South.

Now, when we talk about someone who is not of dual nationality, is not a citizen (perhaps a refugee or stateless person), and belongs not to the private university spectrum but to the National Lebanese University (the only university in Lebanon that uses Arabic as its lingua franca, founded by communist-led student uprisings from 1951 to 1960), we are really discussing how this person's material conditions influence their "material intercourse," and how these conditions “alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking” (Marx and Engels, 1976, p. 42). This is key to understanding the native intellectual—in this case, the translator, translation manager, or editor.

From this standpoint, a feminist political economy analysis can only begin to unpack what is really at stake and what shapes the discourse, or rather, what negotiates (without necessarily confronting) with the Stiftung that dictates the material conditions of that production process. Consciousness under German donor conditions will only remind us that “[i]t is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness” (Ibid.). This insight helps us understand which elements of identity—of the producers and reproducers on the margins and within the Stiftungen—deserve our focus.

But dare not accuse me of being a stone-aged Marxian! Even the much-beloved Cynthia Cockburn in gender studies (2015) clarifies the need to marry political economy and identity in producing a functional standpoint analysis. She tells us that the purpose of 'standpoint' is "to acknowledge that a plausible account of the world can be given from more than one positionality," reminding us of the plural concept of “situated knowledges” most clearly explained by Haraway (Ibid., p. 335). But let’s get back to our case study, so as to not stray away into ungrounded theory.

Notably, this journal and its editorial team we were referring to, prioritize translation as a key epistemic operation, making it the only queer, gender-focused academic publication in the region that centers on translation between Arabic and other languages (English or French).

In collaboration with this journal, HBS funded a booklet on feminist translation, spearheaded by the journal's translation manager—one of only two members of the editorial team who is a Lebanese university graduate without dual nationality. This position was later passed on to me, making me the first Palestinian Lebanese university graduate to hold a full-time role in the team. Together, with the budget provided by HBS, we produced the first and second translation manuals and organized translation labs. Despite these efforts, HBS's broader relationship with the Arabic language remains inconsistent. Most of their authors are German, and their third primary area of focus is electoral politics, which often intersects with the state-centered research that Stiftungen typically conduct in their efforts to "democratize" Lebanon. However, HBS distinguishes itself by consistently emphasizing "queer" as a conceptual term, both in its independent publications and in collaboration with Kohl. but besides Kohl's extended productions, queer holds no clear definition in HBS's independent material. But bear with me, for this is where the narrative takes on an unexpectedly expected twist, one that could easily bewilder anyone navigating its intricacies without the keen insight of a research scholar. In the 2022 report titled "The Realities, Needs and Challenges Facing the Feminist and Queer Movements in Lebanon in Light of a Multi-Layered Crisis," a Lebanese writer, who also serves as a researcher in the Arab NGO Network for Development, writes in English about the Heinrich Böll Stiftung's (HBS) intentions behind the research. Interestingly, the author uses the first person to discuss the Lebanese condition from a distanced, third-person perspective.

The report provides a comprehensive situation analysis of women in Lebanon, examining the intersecting issues of gender, feminism, sexuality, queer identities, and human rights in the context of Lebanon's devastating economic collapse—particularly in the aftermath of the Beirut Port Blast and the COVID-19 lockdowns of the previous two years. What is particularly striking, however, is the declaration that the Stiftung (with the author seemingly included as a voice within it) is conducting this analysis to understand the current gender dynamics in Lebanon for multiple reasons. They state that this understanding is crucial for the Stiftung to "draw an internal institutional plan towards approaching some issues, and to develop a funding vision that meets the urgent needs of individuals and organizations" (Moussawi, 2022, p. 4).

Yet, this funding strategy is intrinsically linked to the broader agenda of implementing the "gender vision" adopted by the Foundation across its international and regional offices in Beirut and the Arab world. The report leaves this gender mission largely unexplained, but it does point to the "Gunda Werner Institute for Feminism and Gender Democracy," whose website

prominently declares: "Welcome to the English speaking events and contributions of the Feminist Think Tank of the Heinrich Böll Foundation."[18] An outright institutional intervention drawn under the guidelines of an institute pillared on 'feminist foreign policy" (FFP). In its 2023 publication based on a summer school conducted in Germany in August 2022 in which I worked as a simultaneous translator - a gig so to speak that opened up coincidently for me upon my miraculous arrival to the EU through people I knew formerly online as a translator proficient in political material. Though most participants who contributed in the critiques of the FFP were Arab-ic speakers, the paper that followed the conference was not translated to Arabic. The main objective of the paper was to undergo mapping that explains the development and response of women's organizations and movements. The security theme was very present as a question, a problem and most importantly a pursuit. This paper was the only one that feared the Palestinian refugee camps as a space with feminist concerns in Lebanon. It makes you wonder if it is too bad not to wander in the fields of necropolitics and the gendered epistemic regime –a regime that is ingrained with language, methodology, topic engineering and foreign policy– managing state driven guidelines. How to root this nonnormative right into the trenches of the existing doxa –the epistemic regime, do not topple the regime, the law, the security apparatus– just reform them, tame them if you can. That perhaps is not a gender regime per se, but it is when matters of gender become only realizable as the move from the non-normal to the normal with the premises of the nation state apparatus. That is why "law and gender" is one consistent theme among all Stiftungen. That is why the question of foreign affairs is only produced in English; it is for the English speaking subaltern–the native intellectual,– the merchant. the question of gender in the confines of the state apparatus and its legislative language can only be perceived as Lewis (2016) eloquently summarized "as a conceptual category, serves as a disciplinary apparatus that pigeonholes the fluidity of the self into a politically docile normativity" (p.19).

[18] See https://www.gwi-boell.de/en.

CONCLUSIONS

So, what have I spoken of in this thesis-like semiotic corpse?

Lewis (2016) asserts that "[i]f knowledge is contained within a standpoint, rather than capable of being inflected by a standpoint, then systemic knowledge is not possible and, as a consequence, inequality cannot be fought systematically" (p. 19). To study gender in any of its dimensions—be it disciplinary, theoretical, or temporal—during an era marked by industrial-scale overproduction of everything from data to death, including theory, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of the system that encapsulates this knowledge. This system provides the material conditions for knowledge to exist in a certain form or not at all. We must examine its actors, both institutional and labor-based, and understand their standpoint within the labor process. In Lebanon, German Stiftungen play a significant role in organizing the knowledge production market, which heavily relies on the construct of civil society—a product of the Lebanese state's early decades of privatization and banking on the state.

While the concept of civil society has been generously discussed in German and Germanic history, rest assured that the German structure of civil society under a neoliberal postcolonial welfare state remains perplexing. This confusion is carefully calibrated to maintain the influence of the state in collaboration with capital holders. Through its discourse on morality, justice, and democracy, it exploits the ambiguous uniqueness of what is termed *ordoliberalism* (the state of German civil society) to hyper-clientalize and NGO-ize the civil societies of the countries in which it intervenes. However, both German civil society (under state welfare) and Lebanese civil society (under an unregulated free market) remain structurally faithful to Marx's critique of Hegel's concept of civil society, which is relevant enough to repeat in this thesis:

> "'*civil society* is the *class of private citizens*' [...] Only in the Estates as an element in the legislative power does it acquire 'political significance and efficacy'. The new attribute thus acquired is a *particular* function; for its very character as a class of private citizens indicates its *antithesis* to political significance and efficacy" (Marx, 1975, p. 141).

This structural institutional body, where the market of knowledge production is partially located, is deeply intertwined with legislative power and the legitimacy and continued dominance of the state apparatus, explaining its focus on the bogus notion of *democracy* or

fallibility, as Soros assertively puts it. Civil society's modus operandi can thus be understood as antagonistic to queer theory—If we understand queer theory as a means of continuously deconstructing identity as a conceptual category and contesting its role as a disciplinary apparatus within normative frameworks (Lewis, 2016, p.19). What, then, are the implications of this inherent antagonistic relationship on the discursive interpretations of gender within the knowledge produced by these Stiftungen concerning the question of Lebanese society?

The answer positions us in direct confrontation with several emerging analytical concepts: counterinsurgency, the native intellectual, the merchant, directionality as an audience signifier, and the epistemic regime. These concepts collectively address our central question: when and how is gender foregrounded by these politically informed Stiftungen? To what ends is the subject matter unleashed, as Masaad might phrase it, and with what sub-thematic threads is the narrative of gender concerning the Lebanese 'other' then woven? This is the framework within which we can refine our inquiry in this final recap

While the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) remains committed to its labor union legacy, its conspicuous silence in discourse production during the period between the three major uprisings of 2019 and the Beirut port explosion—coupled with its pivot towards leading community-based organization projects focused on gender—reveals a strategic repositioning. This shift from being a direct engine of discourse on gender, particularly within the frameworks of securitization, labor, civil society, and social movements, to becoming an investor in the recruitment and employment of local labor (both intellectual and otherwise) exemplifies how these Stiftungen actively and infrastructurally seek to build and lead the discursive and organizational activities of civil society amidst climactic mass mobilizations. By retreating as foreign agents, they establish a fiscal infrastructure that *commissions* the native population to become the mouthpiece of their own bodies and subjectivities through the linguistic and conceptual parameters of the Stiftung. Their engagement with gendered aspects of relevant themes and sectors in the post factum of public upheaval seems designed to contain and reshape the narrative after it has been assessed. Gender, in this context, functions as a tool of containment—a revisionist narrative that aligns seamlessly with the ideological foundations of the Social Democratic Party, itself an outgrowth of the General German Workers' Association. Such unionist politics often operate in discursive undertones with a focus on network building and entryism politics during moments of upheaval while returning to narrative restructuring in the stages that follow.

The Green Party's Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS) takes a distinctly different approach to the timeliness of presenting gender discourse compared to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). Unlike FES, which maneuvers discursively in stages, HBS consistently produces gender discourse across the domains of state, social security, and law. This production is carried out through its German authors, full-time native intellectuals, and domestic think tanks, all of whom operate within the framework of a clearly defined gender equality strategy. This strategy involves mapping Lebanon—the intervened country—and strategizing collaborations with civil society and state apparatuses for implementation. HBS's approach is deeply rooted in the concepts of the emerging discipline of German modern governance, particularly its 'feminist foreign policy.'

From the period of the uprisings to the influx of NGOs following the Beirut port explosion, HBS maintained a continuous output and investment in gender-related discourse and outsourced productions, until 2023. This year marked the onset of israel's genocidal operations in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon—a moment when Lebanon's geopolitical and discursive entanglement with the settler-colonial question of israeli military activity became undeniable to the Stiftungen's eye.[19] At this point, a striking silence fell within the sphere of gender, sexuality, and queer discourse, culminating in HBS's defunding of one of its own infrastructural creations, *Kohl Journal for Body and Gender Research*, following the latter's explicit stance in support of resistance against the israeli nation-state. Kohl's transformation from a potential subservient native and contracted merchant to a pole that conceptually opposes the German definition of civil society as a space of non polarized politics and sarcastically enough nonpolarized radical reformism, marks a significant shift. In this process, Kohl emerges as an example of a civil society agent that momentarily defies the standard modus operandi of civil society. As these schisms become apparent, gender—once central—begins to recede to the sidelines, with its urgency diminishing alongside the declining emphasis on social security and democratization.

Die Linke's RLS has not experienced interruptions as vividly as FES, nor is there data indicating a defunding of similar NGO or knowledge production projects that it has supported. The Stiftung's primary focus remains on social movements, with research conducted exclusively in English, German, and French—revealing a specific translation directionality.

[19] Particularly RLS which usually categorizes lebanon and israel on equal footing under the category of the south west asia

This linguistic orientation indicates a particular relationship with the native population: the Arabic speaker is the subject of research on gender and law, feminist history in Lebanon, and social movements, yet is not the target audience. The class of Arabs fluent in English and French, however, is positioned as the intended recipients, suggesting that the production itself is involved in shaping a specific intellectual stratum. This process may be diagnosed as the first and second stages of the native intellectual's development: a complete assimilation into Western norms, regulations, and cultural production via fiscal and capital dependency. Simultaneously, the research's postcolonial focus stylistically and linguistically propels these intellectuals into the second stage of their development, where they wield their power to document their communities' memories—such as feminist histories—in a manner that often veers into self-victimization at times and self-reveering at others with a hint of tokenization that sustains throughout, framed within the Marxian perspective of RLS. That is a process I argue that builds the contemporary comprador of the epistemic regime. These intellectuals frequently emphasize victimhood while stating they refuse such categorization, yet no genuine agitation for organization emerges from the language and methodologies used. Instead, there is mere participation in existing civil society structures, contributing to the formation of a private class of citizens who extract moral authority from an alleged historiography or political analysis of the material conditions of the given period.

This absence of genuine agitation, replaced by the transformation of research subjects into material for foreign and local elite consumption, and of civil society into a barracks for their propagation, is evident in the authorship and content of the RLS-funded research endeavor, *The Lebanon Uprising 2019: Voices from the Revolution*, which started recruiting its native contributors barely a month into the uprising's subsidence, while those organized politically (comrades) forcefully retreated under the yoke of the state's intensified security persecution campaigns. The militant organizers, or those militantly organized and leading confrontations against the state, had no time or space (no material conditions) to partake in the epistemic production process. As state security persecution intensified, so too did the operations of epistemic production—revealing them as intertwined components of a single regime, as I will subsequently argue. That book notably obscures the translation processes underlying the personal articles and testimonies contributed by individuals, selectively chosen by AUB professors, from various regions of Lebanon's uprising. The translation, they claim, is done by the authors themselves, but that in turn circles back to our class/strata diagnosis. Coupled with the intricate relationships of FES and HBS with organizations directly or indirectly tied to

security apparatuses, particularly those operating within feminist and women's rights spheres, this pattern reveals an underlying strategy. It suggests an intent to strengthen the nexus between the inevitability of securitization and the advancement of gender and feminist agendas during periods of mass upheaval. This alignment points to a form of counterinsurgent activity, offering a compelling diagnosis of the complex web of relations that these Stiftungen weave, binding discourse to the political, economic, and institutional frameworks that influence the gender and feminist narratives they propagate.

In this thesis, translation directionality becomes our sleuthing tool, unraveling the topography of the native intellectual—who's just consuming, who's busily producing and reproducing the Stiftungen's discourse, and who's playing the role of the epistemic comprador in the German-funded labyrinth of Lebanese civil society. Now, don't think these civil society troubles are a one-off; Latin American research echoes similar issues. But here's the twist: they don't weave in the intrigue of translation, the native intellectual, or gender as tools for discursive diagnosis—they're stuck at mere inquiry. The nested web of civil society is what slyly connects this research to its Central American counterparts.

A Honduran peasant leader expressed in 2005:

> "Civil society is another invention […] of international financial organizations […] Sectors such as NGOs, private companies, churches and well, everyone are involved […] And under this concept, some people have come to legitimize the programs and positions of international organizations […] I feel that the leadership, struggles and demands of the popular sectors have been supplanted; and that is why in Vía Campesina we do not incorporate this idea of civil society […] I am one of those who say that many of the NGOs do nothing but contribute to strengthening and supporting the system and not changing it […] The peasant movement fights for land, for agricultural financing, for technical assistance, for forests, seeds and technology; and the NGOs, why do they fight? We must seek their vindication." (Alegría, as quoted by Sosa, 2007, pp. 118-119).[20]

However, it must be acknowledged that this thesis does fall short in offering a thorough translation analysis, a dimension that could have greatly enhanced both the discourse analysis

[20] My translation.

and the claims regarding the gender regime. The research would also have gained depth from a more detailed examination of the complex relationships with grassroots organizations and the financial system, especially in light of how these forces redefined the role of the native intellectual in Lebanon during the Stiftungen's influence amidst the dollarization crisis. Such an exploration could have grounded a more robust political economy framework, which my initial draft was heavily hanging from through one independent chapter. Lastly, and perhaps most critically, the role of the *Militant Translator* which I try to coin with the help of Trouillot's *Merchant*—deserves far more attention in this discussion than it currently receives.

What truly holds merit in this thesis are the comrades who lifted it and the past praxis of my body and that of my militant comrades I left back home under israeli drones that brought those scattered ideas to an encounter. Nothing else is complete, fruitful, or worth reading.

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DATA TABLES

Table 1.1: The thematic content of research and policy papers produced by FES between 2019 (Lebanese revolution) and 2024.

		Year						
		2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	TOTAL (by theme)
	Themes							
1	Unions and workers (general)	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
2	State and Security (general)	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
3	Civil society , solidarities and social movements (general)	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
4	Education	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
5	Law	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
6	Economy and energy	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
7	Narratives and histories	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
8	Youth	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
9	Gendered division of labor	**1**	0	0	0	0	0	1
10	Gendered Civil society and social movements	**1**	0	**1**	0	0	0	2
11	Gendered Education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	Gendered Law and rights	0	0	**1**	0	0	0	1
13	Gendered narratives and histories	**1**	0	**1**	0	0	0	2
14	Gendered state and security	0	**1**	0	0	0	0	1
	Total Publications (by year)	6	3	12	3	0	0	**24**
	Total Gender publications (by year)	3	1	3	0	0	0	**7**
	Percentage of gender topics (%)	50	33.33333	25	0	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	**29.16666667**

Table 2.2 : The thematic content of research and policy papers produced by RLS between 2019 (Lebanese revolution) and 2024.

	Year						
	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	TOTAL (by theme)
Themes							
Environement	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Feminist/gendered social movements	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
social movements	1	2			1	1	5
Narratives: History and ideology	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Law and gender	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
							0
Statelessness							0
Gendered division of labor	**1**	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total Publications (by year)	4	2	1	1	2	4	**14**
Total Gender publications (by year)	2	0	1	1	0	1	**1**
Percentage of gender topics (%)	50	0	100	100	0	25	**7.142857143**

Table 3.3: The thematic content of research and policy papers produced by HBS between 2019 (Lebanese revolution) and 2024.

	Year	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
	Themes						
1	Environment and the state		2	2		1	1
2	Refugees and human rights		2		2	2	3
3	Culture		1			1	
4	Law and gender			1			1
5	Queer knowledge production			2	1		
6	Feminist translation						
7	gender and war						1
8	electoral politics	1			1		1
9	social movements		1				
	macropolitics and civil society						1
	Total Publications (by year)	1	6	5	4	4	8
	Total Gender publications (by year)	0	0	3	1	0	2
	Percentage of gender topics (%)	0	0	0.15	0.04	0	0.16

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