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Pretty interventions and good intentions

Northern European cultural institutions in Cairo's contemporary culture scene after 2011

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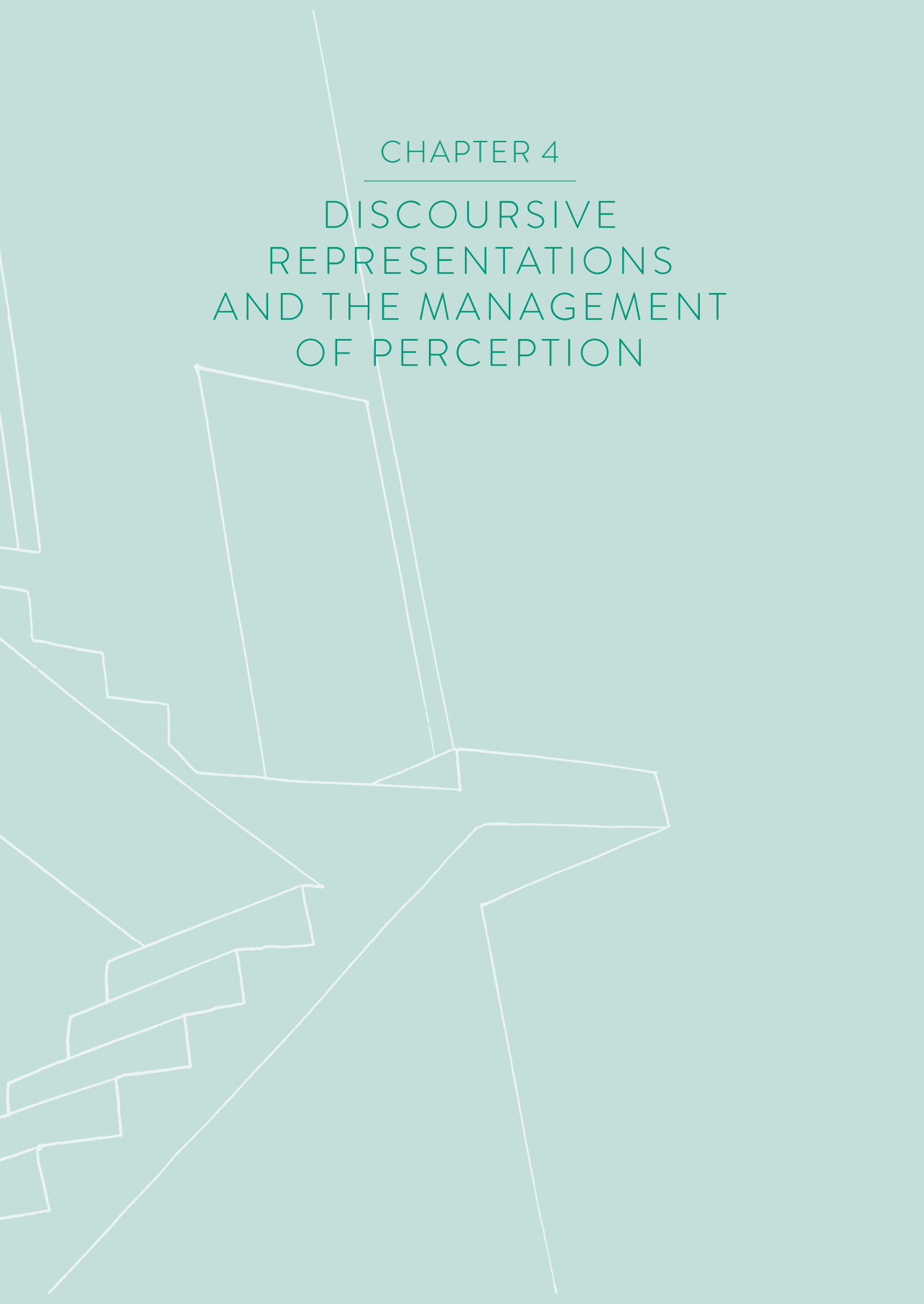
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CHAPTER 4

DISCOURSIIVE
REPRESENTATIONS
AND THE MANAGEMENT
OF PERCEPTION



4.1 Introduction

After describing the architecture of state representation, we will now enter the architecture itself, and take a look at how the cultural institutions represent and refer to themselves. This chapter outlines the institutionalized discourses of European cultural institutions and their projects from two interlinked perspectives: the role of discourse in itself (text), and in the (re)productions of and challenges to dominance during interviews and conversations. To set the stage, the chapter introduces the notion of cultural diplomacy and soft power – a concept initially developed within the United States’ foreign policy agenda. In doing so, I take a look at the macro perspective of the institutional setting that constructs the institutions and what they do: how are they represented in texts, how do they refer to themselves, and how does academic literature describe what these institutions are doing? I then move on to evaluate promotional material produced by the institutions, which contain program descriptions, annual reports and references to self-perception. Of particular importance here is terminology embedded in the texts that is used to justify and legitimize politics.

4.2 The Discourse and Communication of Social Representations

Entering the new GI in Dokki, visitors are confronted with a large, decorative wall piece. It is the result of a closed competition, in which eight invited artists proposed their ideas. The wall piece that won the competition is described as follows on the website of the German Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning:

Pictures of real places, objects and sights are put together with invented, hybrid characters to a [...] collage. The photographs fixed on acrylic glass are cut into various shapes and attached to the wall at close distance in the foyer and in the garden. The photographs are made by the artists on a research trip on site during which cultural, religious and political visual worlds are examined, and preconceived Western images of Egypt are self-critically questioned. The work tells of the encounter of different cultures and would like to contribute to an open and humorous intercultural dialogue. [...] The contribution meets the historical and cultural complexity of Egypt and the Arab World with great openness. It corresponds to the principles and working methods of the Goethe-Institut and its function in international cultural exchange. (Website)⁵²

52 See website of the German Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning, <https://www.bbr.bund>.

Image A is the architectural model for the artwork⁵³ and Image B is the artwork realized inside of the architecture of the institute.⁵⁴



Image A



Image B

In connection with the celebration of the opening of the new premises in October 2016, a journalist commissioned by the GI wrote an article praising the unique openness of the institute in a similar vein:

Here in Egypt, where cultural work is increasingly restricted and cultural workers are being persecuted and threatened, the Goethe-Institut has sent a clear signal with its celebration: it still exists, the open place where everyone is welcome, where art and culture can unfold freely. These places have become scarce, but the reaction of one of our approximately 4,500 visitors shows how important [these spaces] continue to be: “After these two days here with you at the Goethe-Institut I feel that there is still hope for my country.” (Naceur, 2016)

There are several interesting references in these two discursive examples of representation and perception of the GI. The institute is referred to in the first quote as being open and inviting of intercultural dialogue, referencing an awareness of “the cultural complexity of

de/BBR/DE/Bauprojekte/Ausland/KulturundBildungseinrichtungen/GoetheInstitutKairo/KaBWettbewerb/ergebnisse.html?nn=554112 (last accessed August 5, 2018).

53 Image: J&K (Janne Schäfer & Kristine Agergaard), Foyer, Modell Quelle: BBR/Foto: *Winfried Mateyka, Berlin*, bbr.bund.de/BBR/DE/Bauprojekte/Ausland/KulturundBildungseinrichtungen/GoetheInstitutKairoKaBWettbewerb/ergebnisse.html?nn=554106 (last accessed August 5, 2018).

54 See <http://www.jk-world.net/project/glory-to-the-unknown/> (last accessed February 15, 2019). J&K, *المجد للجهوليين / Glory to the Unknown*, permanent art work, 2016, Goethe-Institut Cairo, photo: S. Genge, Worschech Architekten.

Egypt and the Arab World.” The second quote references a self-perception of the institute as being one of the last remaining open spaces in Cairo, where “everyone is welcome,” without any political restrictions. The writer refers to “our” visitors, and to a visitor speaking of being “here, with you,” indicating a ‘we’ or ‘our’ in terms of brand identity and marketing language. It is a corporate identity – ‘us,’ the GI – and ‘you’ are ‘here with us,’ on our premises and in our free space. Consequently, the ‘us’ and ‘we’ create a ‘them,’ a non-us, an actor that is outside of this circle. Also the description of the artwork refers to a self-imagination (open, flexible) and a constructed ‘us’ (inviting, exceptional) which constructs an unspoken, receiving ‘them,’ or ‘other.’

Discourse, communication and other forms of action and interaction mediate between micro and macro levels of representation – between the texts of websites and reports, and the speech act and performed habitus of people. Discourse manages social representations and vice versa: social representations are expressed through discourse. This means that it (the discourse) gives insight relating to the production, understanding and influence of dominant texts and speech, including attitudes, norms and values – these last being increasingly reflected in the texts and representations of European cultural institutions. Therefore, while the first part of this chapter concentrates on the textual representations, the second part takes the micro level into consideration, and looks at the role of texts in informing, constructing, and reproducing self-representations. Cultural diplomacy, soft power, and institutional desires for good practice are reflected in the perceptions of self that are projected by bureaucratic state brokers operating in and on behalf of European cultural institutions. Here, it is the cultural brokers – employees as well as artists – who declare and negotiate what they are doing and how they manage their positions. The ways in which they navigate these are informed by written discourse. I am particularly interested in how employees of the institutions, as well as the artists, manage their roles (performance) in my presence, and how perceptions of the institutions regulate the positioning of various state brokers in the field, which is characterized by inconsistency, fragmentation, and contradictions.

Discourse analysis is a method by which to conduct social research based on “a body of empirical knowledge about how talk and text are organized,” and how they construct and reproduce social realities. (Cameron, 2001, 17) The critical discourse analysis throughout this chapter has two aims: to analyze “what structures and strategies of text, talk, verbal interactions or communicative events play a role” in the ways in which bodies such as state cultural institutions exercise social power; and to “examine the role of social representations in the minds of social actors,” in order to gain greater insight into the role of discourse in the reproduction of social power. (Van Dijk, 1993, 250, 251)

Social power is linked to access: access to resources, income, position, status, membership in a community, education or knowledge (the last two being directly connected to cognitive power), not in the sense of manipulative conspiracy theories or a ‘hidden agenda,’ but influenced by the functions of text and talk, of discourse: what seems natural or common

sense, what are the subtle routines of everyday forms of text and talk that are acceptable, and hence display the various social orders? (Van Dijk, 1993, 254)

The texts and voices of cultural players are linked and constituted by one another. Discursive psychology bridges text and voice, which links the first part with the second part of this chapter: "...critical discursive psychology aims to capture the paradoxical relationship that exists between discourse and the speaking subject. It acknowledges that people are, at the same time, both the products and the producers of discourse..." (Wetherell, Taylor, Yates, 2001, 190) Yet, identities are incoherent and fragmented, and it is an imagined integrity and consistency that creates a rupture in what is perceived as static in texts (ibid). It is exactly these ruptures within the repertoires of interlocutors that links texts and voice: how are activities constructed, what are the repeated patterns that construct a certain community? This happens, for instance, when blame is shifted, and when one group points out a structural problem and accuses the other group as its source. For example there may be statements such as, "Funding always reaches the same group of people," or "They have a monopoly on the contemporary art scene, and we have to fit into their programs no matter what," on the part of the local artists, and "No one forces you to take the funding!" or "If you don't like it then don't work with us again!" on the part of the European cultural institution's employees.

The distinctive way in which cultural brokers, funders and artists speak about 'the other side' points to a particular understanding of the self in the world that is tied to ideology. Discourses, in the Foucauldian sense, are based on power structures and the construction of institutions that subjectify people. Interpretative repertoires emphasize the fragmented, rhetorical opportunities for people to have a voice within these institutionalized discourses of power, and allow them to not just be recognized as passive subjects (ibid, 202).

People are embedded within these institutions, and they propagate their discourses in their interactions with me – whether as employees, artists, or cultural practitioners. In each case, the institution functions as a unit of analysis, and the tension is evident between what is said in the documents of the respective institutions, what their employees say, what artists say, and how they each act and perform their positions. State brokers commonly see themselves as 'do-gooders,' not as bureaucrats within a state institution. Being a cultural broker today is a career move, and it comes with a normative pattern of behavior due to its links to cultural diplomacy. The sum of the practices and characteristics lies in the status of the various activities undertaken: being an organizer, a curator, someone who selects people to participate in programs, who allocates money is linked to a relatively high salary, and is hence less exposed to uncertainties such as unemployment or lack of income.

Having said that, the attention that cultural diplomacy receives with regards to foreign cultural relations and soft power is fairly recent, and the employees' respective habitus of the various cultural institutions differs between them according to their age, class backgrounds and education, and their ideas of cultural diplomacy as a career path. Some (mostly younger) employees came across as competent with a high level of self-esteem, and are adequately

dressed in a diplomatic style (casual smart). Others stood out in relation to demeanor and general habitus and dispositions, and distanced themselves somewhat from their professional role – “We are not like that” (see Chapter 2, Bird, 2014). Others who have a higher status within a powerful elite commonly feel more entitled and at ease regarding their positions and the roles they play within institutions. However, denial is a strategy of the reproduction of dominance – it negates the fact that not everyone has equal access to social resources, it justifies inequality and positively represents one’s own social group. (Van Dijk, 1993, 263) In my fieldwork, I communicated mostly with employees who were in the middle and upper sections of the institutional hierarchies, and only rarely with those positioned at the top – directors and other employees with high symbolic power. This analysis is not meant to depict one group in a negative light, but rather to focus on their roles “in the discursive management of the public mind.” (ibid, 280)

Being an artist is also a career path, its context being the art market, even if the habitual and material settings differ (and even though most of the artists that successfully engage in this as a vocation come from wealthy families). The positions of all the various actors overlap in complicit modes within the field, which this chapter will demonstrate. All roles are structured by inequality, and actors are equipped with different sets of tools, within dual social hierarchies that are both local and foreign, in relation to the institutions and their funding. Many artists see themselves as autonomous individuals who have little choice other than to depend on European state funding. Both sides do not want to submit to criticism, and do not want criticism to be personalized. They largely justify their actions based on this illusion of autonomy. Neoliberal subjects disavow vulnerability on the basis of an intensive individualism, which negates dependencies for the sake of an emphasis on personal responsibility. (Scharff, 2016, 109) These ruptures are moments of dissonance between what looks like a solid internalized discourse and order. Interviewees calibrate their positions in front of me, in relation to my assumed position as an outsider who is researching the cultural field and its intricacies, yet this is ambiguous: am I part of their social group, or am I auditing their policies? Are they defensive, or upset? Am I being treated as a like-minded ally, or as someone who doesn’t know the rules of the game?

Each side negotiates its respective ideas of autonomy and its ability for leverage. In the end, both sides are brokers in a market that desires productive and consuming individuals, even if they have different positions in this market, and even if their ideas of what the market is differs. For the European state brokers, the market is both the cultural field of middle-class artists and the secular cosmopolitan art elite, as well as the representation of these in European cities. For the local actor, it is the symbolic capital of the representation of their works through the institutions, especially since the local art market and art audience is so small as to be almost non-existent. The following sections tackle the link between cultural foreign policies, soft power, and the market.

4.3 Cultural Diplomacy, Soft Power, and Credibility

Public diplomacy as a term (of which cultural diplomacy is seen as a subset) arose in the second decade of the 20th century. After the Second World War it was mainly seen as an instrument of moral restoration, particularly for Germany, and was oriented in relation to the Cold War and East-West tensions between the US and the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ Public diplomacy was also used in order to avoid the loaded term ‘propaganda’ during the post-war and post-colonial period, while simultaneously investing in sustaining neocolonial power. (Zamorano, 2016, 168, 170) Later on, post-9/11, this orientation was recalibrated along a North-South axis and, particularly for European states, in terms of Europe and the MENA region. Consequently, the focus of European institutions is linked to respective former colonies.

The formalization and funding of pre-existing institutions through the ministries of foreign affairs was one of the measures taken to ensure this control. The German government invested in 1920 in their Deutsche Akademie, the predecessor to the 1951 Goethe-Institut; the French government created the Office of Cultural Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the British Council was founded in 1934 as a voluntary association under the name British Committee for Relations with other Countries.⁵⁶ (Martens, 2005, 5) Today, French cultural diplomacy is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Communication and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which manage over 100 cultural centers, with the state generating the budget and the activities. (Zamorano, 2016, 172, 173) In contrast, the British Council, the “UK’s international organization for educational and cultural relations” (BC website), is a decentralized model of cultural diplomacy, acting under the purview of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which expanded the institution geographically and increased its governmental support. (Zamorano, 2016, 173) Although the British Council places value on its independence from the UK government’s foreign policy goals (Mark, 2009, 34), the projects that it implements, particularly regarding the so-called creative economies, are in line with the neoliberal ideas of the sending state (see chapter 5). Formally, the BC:

...facilitates contacts between people and organizations which create understanding and mutual respect and a demand for closer engagement with the UK and its people. [...] the British Council contributes in a distinctive but integral way to the United

55 For the story and history of US cultural diplomacy, cultural propaganda, public-private governance, and the involvement of the CIA in promoting anti-Communist propaganda and the ‘American way of life,’ and particularly the involvement of the arts sector, see also the upcoming publication ‘Parapolitics. Cultural Freedom and the Cold War,’ HKW, Berlin.

56 Within the context of European reconstruction, various European governments also developed local cultural policies and created Arts Councils and Ministries of Culture. (Zamorano, 2016, 171; Urfalino, 1996)

Kingdom's international relations, supporting and complementing its diplomatic, commercial and development efforts. (BC website, quoted in Martens, 2005, 5,6)

The BC is registered as a charity, but operates as a national public body for which the Foreign Office is responsible. It is provided with an annual grant from central government via the Foreign Office, with additional revenue from the private sector. The BC in Egypt opened its doors in 1938.

The influence of global events and politics and their repercussions at the local level – particularly the war in Iraq and the post-9/11 ‘war on terrorism’ – called for a new kind of diplomacy; one that would somehow link the global with the local, the host country with the respective home country. According to cultural sociologist Martina Topić and art historian Cassandra Sciortino, the range of cultural diplomacy has widened from the implementation of cultural agreements to the practice of public diplomacy, although public and cultural diplomacy are not synonymous. (Topić, Sciortino 2012. See also Mark 2009, Zamorano 2016) While diplomacy refers to interactions between governments, public diplomacy indicates a dynamic between governments and people, or even people and people. Yet, it remains unclear among academics what exactly the practice of cultural diplomacy is: cultural policies, the maintenance of cultural relations, political advocacy, or interactions with foreign publics? In general, it is seen as a long-term project that focuses on the presentation of one's own society as disseminated slowly via academic and artistic exchanges, and through exhibitions, films, or language instruction. (Topić, Sciortino, 10) Because of its long-term aims, cultural communication, or cultural diplomacy, operates largely outside of daily foreign policy decisions, and extends into institutions that are partially autonomous, such as the British Council, the Cervantes Institute, or the Goethe-Institut (ibid, 11). Actors within cultural diplomacy are instruments of the state, and their function, or duty, is to “produce ‘positive attitudes’ toward a nation.” (ibid, 12) Other academics differentiate between cultural diplomacy and cultural relations, where the former refers to the negotiation and implementation of cultural agreements with the aim of producing a positive attitude toward one's country, while the latter focuses on developing a mutual understanding between states for mutual benefit, “marked by various forms of exchange rather than selective projections of national identity or character.” (ibid)

Differentiating between cultural diplomacy and cultural relations, while subsuming both under the umbrella category of public diplomacy, is one way in which these terms and aims have been understood. Simon Mark defines cultural diplomacy as, “The deployment of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy,” involving, “directly or indirectly the government's foreign ministry,” (Mark, 2009, 8), “connecting with groups abroad that are important to the cultural diplomacy practitioner,” (ibid, 9), and “communication [by a government] with foreign audiences in order to positively influence them.” (ibid, 12) In order to do so, the foreign audience needs to be able to decode and connect whatever it is that is presented by the country that is seeking to market itself as a brand. In an article in *Foreign*

Affairs from 2001, the political scientist Peter van Ham, who heads the Global Governance research program at the Clingendael Institute in The Hague and focuses in his research on European security, global governance, public diplomacy and place branding, defines brand states as countries linked to “an increasingly global audience of consumers.” According to van Ham, “the ‘brand state’ comprises the outside world’s ideas about a particular country.” (Van Ham, 2001)

Smart states are building their brands around reputations and attitudes in the same way smart companies do [...] The traditional diplomacy of yesteryear is disappearing. To do their jobs well in the future, politicians will have to train themselves in brand asset management. Their tasks will include finding a brand niche for their state, engaging in competitive marketing, assuring customer satisfaction, and most of all, creating brand loyalty. (ibid, 2001)

One way state branding is performed in the field of contemporary art in Cairo is through the attachment of an institution’s symbolic logo to flyers, websites, and other informative material for its projects and programs. Branding is also one of the main areas in which competition between the European institutions in Cairo is visible. The size and design of the logo is of utmost importance, and is part of the corporate branding identity. For example, instead of the English word ‘institute,’ ‘Goethe-Institut’ is used in German throughout the institution’s website and on all other official Goethe material because, “[as] the central corporate identity element, the function of the logo is not confined to identification purposes.... Incorrect positioning, changes to the proportions and even manipulation of the logo have a negative effect on the sender function and are therefore not allowed.”⁵⁷ The size and prominence of the logo illustrate the importance to the institution of signaling who funds what, and where to place which logo is often a subject of long negotiation linked to the amount of support given by a particular body to a particular event or program. An image of a flyer of the D-CAF/Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival Cairo 2013, and a flyer of Photo Cairo 5, 2012 follow (p. 94). Visible on both are the logos of the supporting institutions on the bottom-left corners (among others: Institut Français, Goethe-Institut, British Council, CKU, Hivos).

On the one hand, the logo branding maintains transparency in terms of making it clear who was funded by whom. On the other, it marks and underlines the dependency of the organizers, initiates a sense of ownership or patronage on the part of the funders (who then often come to take a look at “their” project on opening days to judge its success), and undoes the notion of the gift, which, in reverse, frames the funded project with certain conditions of reciprocity (see Chapter 5).

57 See http://www.goethe.de/itr/002/pro/cd/manual/Pdf_en/manual05_en_neu.pdf (last accessed November 11, 2015).



The characteristics of new forms of cultural diplomacy become clearer when examining the soft power within which such diplomacy operates. The soft power of a state is measured in relation to its reputation, which is built up over time; this may reference, for example, its perceived economic stability, or the prestige of its higher education system. In this sense, soft power is not only influence or persuasion (which would relate to propaganda) but also “the ability to entice and attract. [...] In behavioral terms, soft power is attractive power. In terms of resources, soft power resources are the assets – tangible and intangible – that produce such attraction.” (Nye, 2008, 31) Cultural diplomacy is soft power that “rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others” through the power of attraction that facilitates the accumulation of other forms of power in order to “affect the behavior of others.” (Nye, 2004, 2; Zamorano, 2016, 175) This is enabled by three resources: an attractive culture, positively recognized political values, and foreign policies that are presented as being legitimate and having moral authority. (Nye, 2004)

These forms of power are linked to the relationship between cultural diplomacy and nation branding – the repeatedly performed reputation of the state (its performed soft power) through the “systematic intervention of governments in the arts, sciences, and other cultural expressions as the basis of an official categorization of national identity.” (Zamorano, 2016, 169) This involves a number of agents, such as supra-national organizations, national governments, business people, artists, emigrants, and governmental institutions (ibid). Cultural diplomacy can be used to “raise a state’s profile, contribute to nation branding, advance core interests” and “connect with elite, mass and diaspora audiences.” (Mark, 2009, 32) In the end, cultural diplomacy, international relations, foreign policy, nation branding, image production and management are all interlinked, and are particularly dependent on the successful branding of the state, and therefore the state’s projected power.

Katharina von Ruckteschell-Katte, now director of the GI’s regional office for South America, writes in her contribution to the collection of essays ‘Symposium on Building Art

Institutions in Africa' (a cooperation between the Raw Material Company cultural center in Dakar, the Goethe-Institut and the German Federal Cultural Foundation):

The festivals also make it possible to reach our target groups and build up a more solid network on the continent. The Goethe-Institut does not do this out of pure altruism or because it wants to do good. This concept originated from a clear interest in partaking in what I would like to refer to here as the imaginary global futures of the cultural world. (Von Ruckteschell-Katte, in Kouoh, 2013, 96)

This quote displays two different kinds of dynamics that have been discussed above. On the one hand, the quote uses the economic lingo of contemporary cultural diplomacy, with terms such as target group and network building. On the other hand, the author clearly describes the motivation of the culture institute as “partaking in the (...) global futures of the cultural work,” which relates to the competition with other branding nations:

An essential reason for Action Africa was certainly the attempt to position Germany on a continent that was about to be usurped by the Chinese – Africa, a continent whose resources, which are continually being discovered anew, appear to be inexhaustible. Added to this, in many countries, the political situation still required the implementation of sustainable, peace-securing measures. Culture seemed to be a tried-and-tested means of achieving the goals that had been set with ‘soft power.’ (ibid, 96)

The mode of soft power conceals power relations and makes them appear legitimate, especially when linked to peace-securing measures – which also hint at the socio-economic relationships the states have with each other. “... [C]ulture as a symbolic resource, although it always implies legitimization and power, is an inseparable component of the economic and sociopolitical relations (internal and external) where it is displayed.” (Zamorano, 2016, 178) Soft power and cultural diplomacy are linked to knowledge creation and the imposition of meaning.

4.4 Discourses of EU Self-Promotion

Some of the criticism of European cultural institutions overseas can be traced in discursive material about them, which often reflects the power structures they are embedded within through the use of particular terms, (self-)references and object-constructions. Such narratives

are also used to justify certain social positions and power structures. GI representative von Ruckteschell-Katte and Hortensia Völckers, artistic director of the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation), founded in 2002 by the German federal government and financed by the German Commissioner for Culture and Media, wrote in one of the forewords in the aforementioned publication on art institutions in Africa as follows:

What does Germany know about Africa, its institutions, its art scenes, its intellectual debates? Much too little. We are still looking upon Africa as if through binoculars turned the wrong way round. Our image of an artistically underdeveloped continent in need of help has (yet) not changed. [...] It [the work behind the publication] shows us that Africa's own paths are of great interest and that we in Germany are missing out on something if we are not familiar with the contemporary art and debates of this continent. We need this knowledge to forge both an unprejudiced view and an intelligent and up-to-date cultural exchange between Africa and Europe. That we accompany and support this process is of great importance to us, and this book makes a significant contribution towards fulfilling that wish. (Völckers, von Ruckteschell-Katte, in Kouoh, 2013, 7,8)

The formulation of “we need this knowledge,” in combination with “[it] is of great importance to us,” (emphasis by author) suggests the creation and support of knowledge on the one hand, and a possible one-sided interest and sense of entitlement on the other. The paragraph quoted does not reveal whether the expressed “great importance” is equally experienced and wished for by those to whom this speech is directed.

Another illustration of discursive self-perception and representations of the ‘other’ is a report commissioned by the Danish Center for Culture and Development (CKU) in 2016, ‘The Right to Art and Culture 2013-2016. Danish experiences with the power of art, culture, and creative industries in development cooperation.’ This was the final report of the CKU, which officially closed its doors in Cairo in 2016. It was a “self-governing institution under the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs” and “implemented cultural programs in 13 countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.” (CKU, 2016) In this report, the author writes, “[W]e supported shy schoolgirls who became self-confident performers in Uganda and young men who let their frustrations out through rap music.” (CKU, 2016, 13) Regardless of the program itself and its potential success, what is significant here is the description with regards to its self-perception – the ‘us’: “I am proud to name,” “...our efforts,” “...We paid attention, [...] trusted, [...] cooperated, [...] saw and [...] supported,” are signifiers of the construction of the active agent in this relationship – empowering brown women and finding outlets for angry brown men. Besides the discursive differentiation between ‘we’ and ‘them,’ these descriptions also mirror common stereotypes intersecting with gender, race, and class: not shy men but shy girls, not angry women and men but girls and (angry poc) men; (poc) girls

need empowerment (by the Danish institute), and (poc) young men need to calm down; the (poc) young men are the rappers, not (poc) girls or young women.

As the examples above show, admitting a lack of knowledge and expressing a desire to acquire knowledge, paired with a sense of self-criticism, or allowing for critical comments, is only possible if credible cultural diplomacy is performed and is in line with a reputation consolidated through soft power. (Nye, 2008; Mark, 2009) Credibility and perceptions of credibility are of utmost importance in the realm of cultural diplomacy and soft power – particularly when alternative sources of information are available that could possibly interfere with, or call into question, the managed representations.

In June 2013, the EU representatives working on the program ‘Preparatory Action: Culture in EU External Relations’ organized a two-day “consultation mission” in Cairo, to which they invited public officials, independent cultural professionals, former public officials, and European cultural organizations. The author Damien Helly writes in his ‘Egypt Country Report,’ as one of the findings of his commissioned “consultation mission,” the following:

In the currently uncertain political environment, and as a result of deeply entrenched mistrust towards government structures, the non-profit, non-confessional cultural sector, based in Cairo and Alexandria, mostly supported by national European and/or EU and other Western funders, has become a driving force in international cultural relations. (Helly, 2014, 5)

On the professional networking site LinkedIn, the author is described as “currently advising leading European cultural organizations and cultural institutes (EU Cultural Diplomacy Platform, Goethe Institute, Institut Français, British Council, Bozar) on the delivery of their international cultural relations strategies.” (LinkedIn website) He is also a speaker for EU institutions and EU member states, and has policy expertise in EU external action, development policy, security, defense and peacebuilding. Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy, Helly continues later on:

... appears to be the leading non-governmental organization in the field of cultural policy research [...] Its regional Arab coverage, with the existence of national cultural policy groups, makes it a privileged stakeholder, with *a regional and internationalized mind-set* and *modern* working methods. (ibid, 6, emphasis by author)

Leaving to one side the role that Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy does play for the art scene in Arab societies, it is interesting that the attributed “internationalized mind-set” and “modern” descriptor are used as something positive in relation to Europe. Additionally, a “regional and internationalized mind-set” is attributed to intermediary organizations and their ability to translate between the global and the local. The report continues:

European countries were very active in the cultural field in 2011-2012, increasing their budget and trying to contribute to democratic transformations. The British Council and the Goethe-Institut developed regional projects aimed at supporting the independent cultural sector and young people [...], most innovations will probably continue to emerge from the independent scene supported by foreign partners. (Helly, 8,9)

At the same time however, there was space in the report for a critique of funding structures based on a two-day workshop that had included public-sector officials (one person/participant), independent cultural professionals (six), former public officials (two), and representatives of European cultural organizations (four). This consultative workshop took place in June 2013, amidst controversy with regard to the Egyptian Ministry of Culture (see Chapter 2) and a heated political situation as protests against President Mursi gathered momentum. A point of criticism mentioned in the report is that “Europe is seen as too self-indulgent in its belief that Europeans know a lot about other cultures.” (ibid, 11) This statement appears to be contrary to the general tone of the self-descriptions of the institutions’ work, but also specifically contrasts with the above-mentioned comment from a GI official in which a lack of knowledge is lamented: “What does Germany know about Africa, its institutions, its art scenes, its intellectual debates? Much too little.” (Völckers, Von Ruckteschell-Katte in Kouoh, 2013, 7,8)

Another point in the report reads: “cultural relations between Egypt and Europe [are] still tainted by the obstacles of ‘distorted stereotypes,’” (Helly), adding as an example perceptions of “Muslim terrorists,” and now “young revolutionaries.” However, “we also have stereotypes about Europe as colonial powers with a hidden agenda to use us,” one of the participants adds to the critique. (ibid, 11)⁵⁸

The bulk of the above-mentioned EU program ‘Preparatory Action: Culture in EU External Relations’ took the form of collaboration with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA), which established a program aiming to stimulate new impulses within the cultural sector under the umbrella heading: ‘North & South - Support for Cultural Diversity and Creativity in Egypt.’ For this program the EU, in September 2015, launched a Facebook page promoting European cultural activities, carried out by 34 European embassies and cultural centers. “Culture is one of the key sectors in which the EU has built a successful rapport with Egypt over the years,” the announcement asserts. (Announcement European Union and Member States launch Facebook Page to promote European Cultural Activities in Egypt, 2015) “The EU is constantly supporting cultural institutions interested in promoting social inclusion...

58 The report also mentions that Egyptian stakeholders are not necessarily uncritical of European support, because “it is also viewed as a way of pursuing a political agenda, consisting of encouraging ‘underground’ organizations.” (p. 12) The underlying topic of this comment is further discussed in Chapter 6.

encouraging the diversity of cultural and artistic expressions in Egypt,” and, through these offers “promoting a cultural hub for the youth.” (ibid) The BA also invited the foreign cultural institutions to a debate in Alexandria, and welcomed them at the Swedish Institute in the city. Among those present were representatives of the US-based Amideast, the Anna Lindh Foundation, the British Council, the Goethe-Institut, the Chinese embassy, the Italian, French and Hungarian cultural institutions, the Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute (DEDI), Pro Helvetia, and the Hellenic Foundation for Culture – in short, all of the main actors on Egypt’s foreign cultural scene. The debate was meant to “explore the relationship between foreign cultural institutes and Egyptian society, and the vital role that the former have played in the enhancement of culture in Egypt.” (statement BA, June 2015)

One year before the EU’s ‘Preparatory Action: Culture in EU External Relations’ published its report, the Goethe-Institut Kenya, in cooperation with Native Intelligence, published an edited volume titled, ‘Creating Spaces. Non-formal Art/s Education and Vocational Training for Artists in Africa Between Cultural Policies and Cultural Funding’ (edited by Nicola Lauré al-Samarai, 2014). The publication analyzes the visions, interests and approaches of four private initiatives in South Africa, Senegal, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ethiopia respectively, in the context of a Western-dominated funding landscape. The study was commissioned by the GI South Africa, itself a major player in arts and education. The authors did not shy away from describing post-colonial entanglements of foreign funding and problematic representations, highlighting continuously overpowering Western paradigms, and illustrating the problems that accompany a neoliberal framework of ‘creative industries’ within the scope of ‘culture and development.’ Their analysis called for a change in funding policies, away from shortsighted, narrow project logics to more sustainable, longer-term planning.

Yet despite one workshop after another discussing analysis, evaluation or consultation, structural changes have yet to materialize. Instead, institutions turned to evaluating the effectiveness of their work. One example is ‘The Cultural Value Project’ initiative, commissioned by the BC and the GI, which ran from January 2016 to June 2018. Together, the GI and the BC commissioned sociologists from the UK’s Open University and academics from Germany’s Hertie School of Governance for a research project that “aims to draw a comprehensive picture of different approaches and forms of cultural activities abroad, identifying shaping factors and conditions which allow for a lasting and sustainable impact in the host societies.”⁵⁹ The Hertie School of Governance is a private university in Berlin accredited by the state and the German Science Council and describing itself as “an ambassador of good governance.”⁶⁰ The Open University and Hertie School of Governance researchers chose two countries for their evaluation – Egypt and Ukraine – with the aim particularly

59 See <http://www.newpolcom.rhul.ac.uk/npcu-blog/2017/1/27/new-cultural-relations-project-with-the-british-council-and-goethe-institut> (last accessed November 5, 2018).

60 See <https://www.hertie-school.org/en/who-we-are/> (last accessed November 11, 2018).

of building “a better understanding of the impact and value of cultural relations in terms of their ability to make a difference ... to supporting stability and prosperity in societies going through substantial change.”⁶¹

In the introductory description of their first publication, the literature review, evaluations in general are reflected in a critical way: “Attempts to assess the value of cultural relations from the perspective of the countries that practice them [...] can be instrumentalist and reductive,” can “miss the richness of the ways cultural relations work in practice” and “are also of limited use at evaluating which forms of cultural relations work best in which contexts.” (ibid, 3) In the next paragraph, the introduction describes how in this case, and with a “more sophisticated approach to the assessment of cultural value,” the two institutions

want to examine the ways in which cultural relations work, and understand the conditions, places, and contexts where cultural relations can provide most value and impact [...] We also want to understand the relative strength – of different types of value – that comes with different types of cultural relations interventions, and which sorts of interventions are most powerful for responding to which sorts of challenges within societies in transition. (ibid, 3)

In the report, the commissioned institutions warn against the instrumentalization of culture in relation to soft power:

The instrumentalization of culture is unashamedly advocated in soft power theory. Soft power means getting what you want by the force of attraction rather than coercion. Soft power allows for the exercise of influence by encouraging others to cooperate with you (Nye, 2004). Culture is an essential part of soft power. [...] However, the power in soft power is very problematic. For many practitioners and theorists, soft power implies state power over citizens, rather than the empowerment of citizens, which, arguably, is the ultimate goal of CR [Cultural Relations]. (ibid, 12)

Embedded in the report is a critical perspective and self-reflexive notion, and a distancing from state power, problematizing ‘power’ and shifting the focus to the ‘empowerment of citizen’ as the goal of ‘cultural relations.’ Ahmed, who in her research scrutinizes the documentation of a race equality policy and action plan implemented in 2000 as the result of the Race Relations Amendment Act in the UK, offers a critique of this self-reflexive tendency, arguing that “such declarations are non-performative: they do not do what they say,” and

61 See foreword of “Cultural Value. Cultural Relations in Societies in Transition: A Literature Review”, https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/lit_review_short_working_paper_final_final.pdf, published by the British Council 2018, p.3 (last accessed January 15, 2019).

even offer a “fantasy of transcendence in which ‘what’ is transcended is the very ‘thing’ admitted to...” (Ahmed, 2004) In this way Ahmed shows how critical language itself becomes one of the techniques of governance – and soft power. Similarly to what happened in connection with the discussion series on European funding of the art and culture scene in Cairo that I was asked to curate for the GI in 2013 and 2014 (see Chapter 2), institutional critique is then seen as good performance, but it won’t challenge actual relations of power, and the critique itself is being consumed by those who are criticized (ibid, 11).

In her research findings, Ahmed mentions the appearance of ‘well-meaning people’ in the documents she is evaluating: “... people who would identify with the nation in its expression of shame” and who would, through the feeling of national shame, align with each other as “well-meaning individuals.” (ibid, 23) National shame, writes Ahmed, can be a tool of self-reconciliation and grounds for claiming a national identity – Germany is a good example of how a carefully orchestrated nation branding has to consider the country’s past thoughtfully (see Chapter 1). The conversion of shame into pride was even more visible in the celebration of the ‘*Willkommenskultur*’ (welcoming culture) in 2015, a celebrated symbol of Germany’s new identity as the friendly and benevolent host country for Syrian refugees.⁶²

The critical self-reflexivity displayed in the above-mentioned evaluation serves a function: with their warnings about possible instrumentalizations or problematic links between state and power, the institutions demonstrate that they are not part of this link, nor of a structural instrumentalization through soft power. The performance of allowing a certain amount of criticism keeps the status quo as it is. Ahmed describes this phenomenon as “claims to performativity rather than as performatives.” (ibid, 54) The self-reflexivity remains nothing but, literally, lip service, instead of involving a listening and un-learning of privilege (ibid, 36). The implication of subjects within the hegemonic structure remains hidden by these performativities, whilst the political economy with regard to the distribution of resources, matters of representations, of voice and silence remains.

In the above-mentioned evaluation, soft power is linked to the ‘empowerment of citizens’ and hence a developmental approach is formulated as the ultimate goal of cultural relations. This idea of development links cultural politics with cultural diplomacy. The website of the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) states that the 2012/13 yearbook ‘Culture & Conflict. Challenges for Europe’s Foreign Policy,’ available online, “elaborates on the external cultural policies Europe needs to embrace in order to foster the

62 This moment was also critiqued by leftist movements as short-lived charity rather than a meaningful political movement. The celebration of the ‘welcoming culture’ abated after the Cologne incident on New Year’s Eve 2015/2016, when several people “witnessed the collective public sexual harassment and assault of dozens of women” during the New Years celebrations in the city. The assaults were instrumentalized by right-wing politicians and movements “to encourage discriminatory and exclusionary policies towards Muslim, migrant, and refugee communities in Germany and elsewhere in Europe”, see Abdelmonem, Bavelaar, Wynne-Hughes, 2016.

development of art, education and intercultural dialogue.”⁶³ EUNIC members are the Goethe-Institut and the British Council as well as the French Foreign Ministry and many others. EUNIC not only “strongly advocates for culture to become an integral part of EU development policy” but has also developed a long-term project concerning its activities in the MENA region, specifically targeting young people and women. The main goal of EUNIC in this region is to “put culture and civil society at the forefront of the democratic transformation.” In the foreword to the yearbook, which carries the poignant title, ‘Lifting the Veil,’ the author argues that after Samuel Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’ and 9/11, the “geopolitical significance of culture” and its role in conflict regions became obvious. “[I]n parallel to this,” he adds, “the limited success achieved by military interventions in Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq pose the question of whether other, softer, approaches would be more effective.”

This ‘humanitarian touch’ is also visible in various calls for cultural projects and funding lines; for instance the website associated with a project call from May 2011, launched by the European Commission and titled, ‘Revolution meets the Arts!’ states:

The global objective of this Call for Proposals is to contribute to the diversity of cultural creation and promote a culture of human rights [...] Proposals should contribute to a culture of Human Rights and especially freedom of expression. In particular, proposals should take into consideration the recent political developments that unfolded in Egypt and build upon them. (Website 2011)

Here, the increasing overlap and entanglement of cultural politics and the politics of development becomes more transparent. Back in Berlin in 2012, the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBF), which also labels itself the ‘Green Political Foundation,’ with 29 offices worldwide, organized an international conference on ‘Radius of Art. Creative Politicization of the Public Sphere - Cultural potentials for social transformation’ (February 8-9, 2012). The ‘Radius of Art’ project (funded by the European Union and the Anna Lindh Foundation in partnership with the HBF Berlin, Beirut and Ramallah, and the Goethe-Institut Beirut) aimed to “bring together scientists, activists, and policy-makers who share a trans-disciplinary approach and who believe that the integration of art practices of their respective works would create new visions, perspectives, and insights.” (Unmüßig, Opening speech of conference, 1)

“We need policies in support of – and in full recognition of – the cultural potential of art, in particular in social transformation processes,” declared the HBF, in the opening statement at the conference:

... this means support for artistic proposals responding to contexts of poverty and social exclusion, as well as building collective platforms for the mobilization of

63 Part of the following discussion on EUNIC was published in a working paper in 2014 (Eickhof, 2014).

different social players towards public causes such as social integration, effective citizenship, human rights, multicultural dialogue, and social equity. (Unmüßig, 2)

The opening speech linked the conference to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, approved by the UNESCO General Assembly in 2005. The convention emphasizes “diversity in dialogue,” and the inclusion of “culture as a strategic element in national and international development policies, as well as in international development cooperation,” informing “policies and project support of the Goethe-Institut; the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (IfA); the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the Allianz Cultural Foundation.” (Unmüßig, 2) The conference was organized in collaboration with the Anna Lindh Foundation in Alexandria (Egypt), the University of Hildesheim’s Department for Cultural Policy, and the Robert Bosch Foundation, among others, with the mission of promoting “cultural policy and funding designs that support art for social transformation processes towards cultural sustainability,” and “to explore the potentials of art for the public sphere and the new dimensions of knowledge production”. (ibid, 4) The 106 participants included artists, curators, and employees of the partnering institutions, and “expert consultants working on dialogue between cultures and the development policies of the European Union in relation to the Arab countries,” employees of the German development cooperation Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) focusing on the “development and implementation of creative approaches and methodologies,” the secretary of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of Bangladesh, culture managers associated with various institutions, like the Robert Bosch Foundation, the program manager of the European Cultural Foundation (ECF), former employees of Germany’s Federal Foreign Office, and more. The employees representing these institutions are state cultural brokers, acting within and executing the cultural bureaucracies of this specific field of state purview.

Cultural policy academic Mariano Zamorano differentiates between two types of cultural diplomacy: one focuses on artistic, intellectual, and cultural-pedagogic areas and diaspora politics, aiming for long-term effects, emphasizing the cultural value of heritage, arts, and identities, and “assuming the relative absence of governmental control over the creative process linked to artistic diffusion.” (Zamorano, 2016, 178-179) The other subjects culture to “political and economic instrumentalization by various processes of government management of external cultural representation,” and focuses on “cultural content that shows a positive view of the political territory in question.” (ibid, 179) Creative industries or cultural branding would fall into this last category, which is concerned with external social representation and construction of a state’s image. In either case, cultural diplomacy synthesizes a specific way of ‘being’ in the world, and this ‘being’ is translated and mediated through the individuals who carry out the cultural diplomacy. “I must be aware that there is an economic inequality. I myself see this from a rather post-colonial perspective, but not all of my colleagues do

so,” one of my interlocutors comments in response to my question about the general role of white, Western cultural institutions in the global South.

Our partners, artists, participants, of course they ask us these questions, which projects are you supporting, and why. We have to face this process. We cannot change the position itself, but we can make it transparent and discuss it. We cannot put them up for discussion, it’s simply not possible because of the economic, political and social framework, but we can discuss them. (EE, interview 2015)

Here, the European employee of one of the European cultural institutions admits to how important transparency of funding processes and choices of funding are with regard to communicating with the contemporary art world. However, at the same time, the interlocutor emphasizes the impossibility of structural changes: we can discuss them (the projects that are supported, and why they are supported), but we cannot put the structural process up for discussion.

Some academics and cultural brokers see cultural diplomacy as a form of negotiation, *despite* political situations, and others highlight the agency of non-governmental actors on which government organizations depend. The latter position, expressed by the director and founder of the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin, Mark Donfried, and the historian Jessica Gienow-Hecht, allows for a differentiation between what is happening on paper (in reports and policy statements) and what is happening between people, on the ground, and an acknowledgment that one is not a copy of the other (see Chapter 4, 4.3). “Artists, teachers, curators, students etc. who have agendas and interests of their own may blur state-drawn policy lines, regardless of the governmental program under whose jurisdiction they may operate.” (Topić, Sciortino, 2012, 12)⁶⁴

4.5 Friends of the Art World I: European Cultural Brokers

“I just like to enable people to meet. The job feels good when we achieved to truly connect people,” one of the European employees of a European cultural institution tells me in response to my question of what motivates her to do her job. “The institute’s point here is building trust

64 Just recently the GI received an informal warning from Egyptian state officials in relation to their latest project, Jeem, a website “aimed towards the Arabic-speaking youth looking for information related to gender, sex and sexuality and their intersection with various aspects of life and society,” supposedly because of its use of the word “sexuality.” (Jeem website, jeem.me/en/about-us, last accessed September 15, 2018)

between peoples of the world, and to create opportunities,” another cultural institute employee says. “You can only change society when you see other things than you are told to see. And I think we are all trying to do that.” However, as this chapter shows, the “just” of the first quote and the general “we” are significant, in that they open up several questions in line with the previous section: Who enables who to meet whom, and why, and how? What is the interest of an employer of a European cultural institution in “truly connect[ing] people”? What is the role of the employee? In the article ‘The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods,’ Bourdieu describes the art business as the belief of “a trade in things that have no price,” a practice that only functions “by pretending not to be doing what they are doing.” (Bourdieu, 1993, 74) If the institutions operate as conduits for cultural diplomacy, then their (mostly white) employees perform as diplomats – with a representative domicile in one of the wealthier quarters of the host city for those in higher positions, international health insurance, high salaries, and other benefits. At first, my interlocutor who represented exactly this kind of state broker with a high salary, an above-standard apartment, and all other benefits, did not feel comfortable when I asked him if the GI operates in the realm of cultural diplomacy. After a brief moment of silence, he responded:

That’s a really difficult question. Well, in regards of the structure, yes, I mean we learned from our history, I hope so, and therefore, after the Second World War, we initiated these very specific structures in Germany. Well, what does it actually mean, intermediary organization? Those are structures that are..., on the one hand, allow these organizations the highest degree of autonomy. The GI is a private association, and on the other side the Federal Republic wants to implement certain objectives. And the constructions are as such that the Federal Republic as Foreign Ministry has a general agreement with the intermediary organizations in which specific goals are formulated, and in our case we are supposed to implement foreign cultural policies. But it is consciously kept open that we are not a part of the cultural department of the Foreign Ministry, because it was planned from the outside that we have this degree of autonomy. On the other side, obviously, we are financed by this public money. But also this proportion has decimated even further because we generate our own income through the language courses, and we spend it in our own projects. Special funds are completely financed, though. (EE, interview 2015)

Thinking about his answer, I kept wondering why my interlocutor was so reluctant to refer to his work as that of a cultural diplomat, or to the institute he works for as a body that operates within the realm of cultural diplomacy. I also looked at the general agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany, represented by the Foreign Ministry, and the Goethe-Institut, signed in January 2004. The 2004 agreement states in §2 (1) that: “The AA [*Auswärtiges Amt*, or Foreign Ministry] and GI work closely together in order to execute tasks that have been

agreed on. They ensure that the employees see loyal cooperation as a duty.” [*Sie machen ihren Bediensteten und Mitarbeitern eine loyale Zusammenarbeit zur Pflicht,*” translation by author]. It further states in §9 (1):

If, after substantiated reasoning by the Foreign Ministry, an employee of the Goethe-Institut who has been seconded from the ministry damages the German reputation, or if his behavior burdens the political relationship between the Federal Republic of Germany and the host country or other third countries, then the Foreign Ministry can demand his immediate suspension. (Agreement 2001, translation by author)

Even if these statements are ‘just on paper’ and don’t explicitly govern the rationale of the institution, they still demonstrate the close relationship between the work of the Foreign Ministry and the GI in terms of cultural representation of the German state. However, my interlocutor persisted in defense of the institute’s autonomy:

I consider this [the autonomy] a privilege, because we can always say, if we are made responsible for any decision of the Federal Republic, or what the embassy does or does not do, we can always say that we are the wrong addressee, we don’t belong to the embassy, we have nothing to do with the embassy. That gives us greater autonomy than some colleagues and their national cultural institutions have, that’s just different. So, for example, the British Council or the French Institute. We also don’t receive instructions from the embassy. (EE, interview 2015)

In contrast to this experience, §4 (7) of the general agreement states:

Regular meetings are held between the head of the embassy or an appointed staff member and the head of the institute, and all questions of mutual interest and cooperation that are important to him or her are to be discussed. The programming must be submitted in time for a review in order for the representative of the embassy to comment and modify it, if necessary. If the head of the embassy raises objections to an event within the framework of the political tasks entrusted to him, the institute’s management takes this objection into account. (Translation by author)

Further into our conversation, my interlocutor explained how he saw the role of the GI as more of a translator than a tool of the Foreign Ministry:

I can imagine that differing positions exist with regard to the Goethe being an association and an intermediary organization for the Foreign Ministry. [...] Of course we don’t see it like that, but we’re in this general context of cultural diplomacy, we cannot

escape that. But also because of not having the diplomatic status we're very close to what's happening [*sind wir hier sehr nah dran*]. We're getting a lot done [*kriegen sehr viel mit*]. This is also some kind of a translation service. The Foreign Ministry has a certain set of goals and strategies, and if we want the funds, then we have to go along with these goals... Well, the usual Goethe-work, the allocated extra funds, they are tied to very concrete goals. But these goals they are often an approach of... cause and effect, a bit simplistic. The cultural conditions are much more complex, and that's what we're trying to negotiate. Of course this is a very complex context, we have to stay in a permanent conversation here, and also in this conversation our own position has to be presented transparently, discussing, to be aware. And then you enter a process that can be very meaningful. (EE, interview 2015)

Cultural producers have been referred to as those who are “connecting non-art audiences and social contexts with art spaces and communities, and thus [are] engaged in an ongoing process of interpretation and mediation.” (Holert, 2015, 94) In the case of European cultural institutions in Egypt, the cultural producers are also state brokers.⁶⁵ In 2010, Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie wrote a long and complex critique of the work of Okwui Enwezor, a renowned Nigerian curator and art critic, who lives in New York and Munich, titled ‘The Curator as Culture Broker.’ I am not so much interested in his critique of Enwezor as in his definition of cultural brokerage as being about two things: it is a role in which “value is created for cultural commodities [...] determining which objects gain value and which do not;” and it is linked to the economization of the field, the “reorganization of cultural production as a process of brokerage and management.” The cultural broker mediates the “value of artworks” and,

... in an information age where content aggregation is the primary mode of data management, curatorial practice as brokerage redefines a process where known objects accumulate greater value merely by being known, while other objects of equal value, rendered unknown by selective curatorial dismissal, find it difficult to gain traction. (Ogbechie, 2010)

Furthermore, the contemporary curator as a cultural broker “operates mainly as an information broker who makes [African] cultural resources available for appropriation.” (Ogbechie, 2010) This may or may not be true for all curators who work as cultural brokers, but if the cultural broker is employed by a state-representing institution, he or she acts as a cultural state broker. As much as, for instance, the GI is an intermediary organization for the

65 The concept of brokerage and the role of state broker as intermediate agent between state and social actor has been introduced to me through the work of Ingrid Holst and her dissertation on ‘negotiated state interrupted,’ an analysis of the Mexican state from a feminist perspective.

Foreign Ministry, the state broker is in an advisory and intermediary position, and his or her networks, information and personal contacts are their main resources and assets.

From a background in development studies, Davis Lewis and Davis Mosse take a closer look at the dual role of social actors when they are representing specific identities and strategies, and when they re-enact and perform a specific role mediating between institutionalized processes and social actors:

The overall system can be stabilized only when actors are able to reconstruct the network of interactions through the creation of coherent representations, which they do through a process of ‘translation’ that permits the negotiation of common meanings and definitions and the mutual enrollment and cooptation into individual and collective objectivities and activities. (Lewis, Mosse, 2006, 14)

The classic notion of the broker, as someone who mediates between a weak state and local contexts, is carried out through the role of translation, as described above by the employees of one of the European cultural institutions. The state broker in the field of cultural diplomacy is exposed to tensions and contradicting dynamics that often consist of a number of variables: official state policies; the wording of project support coming from respective foreign ministries, which usually have limited knowledge of the actual local situation; reporting constraints; language barriers; restrictions due to limited knowledge of the local cultural field and the possibilities offered to local actors, and so on. Yet, often, the state broker feels like he or she is ‘closer to what is happening’ and, due to his or her position, better able to perform this act of mediating and translating between the local scene, state institutions and foreign ministries. This creates a dilemma in which the state broker confirms and reproduces the ‘language of statehood’ through their position and participation as mediators and translators in these processes (see Hansen, Stepputat, 2001). Who is translating for whom, who is seen as a key actor and key player on the scene? What role does gender play in the assessment and ‘mapping’ of the field (see Chapters 5 and 6 in particular)?

Brokerage is now an essential part of smart cultural diplomacy; the better the soft power of a state, the more effective and powerful are its cultural brokers, who negotiate between the cultural elite, middle classes, and the state. Brokers play a central role in the imagining of state power, because they represent strong states, and have individual political and economic influence. The power of this position goes both ways: toward the self, and toward the receivers of funding, those who depend on it. “Brokers deal in people and information not only for profit in the narrow sense of immediate reward, but also more broadly in the maintenance of coherent representation of social realities and in the shaping of their own social identities.” (Lewis, Mosse, 2006, 16)

In 2014, local news outlet *Mada Masr* published an article about a lecture I gave in Cairo on the topic of foreign funding and the notion of the gift. (Bird, 2014) The piece was a rather

critical account of European spaces that fund cultural productions in Cairo, and described how, after the talk, some of the employees appeared to see themselves as exceptions to the rule. The employees, all well known and respected in the contemporary art scene, raised their concerns about this description in an open media outlet to both the author and the editor of the piece. The editor asked me a couple of months later if I was interested in sitting down with the European cultural brokers in order to write an article that would mirror “their side of the story.” Initially I was happy to do so, since it fit perfectly into the frame of my research, but the article turned out to be quite an ordeal, and resulted in me having to go back and forth between the editor and the interviewees. The interview situation also displays another way in which power structures are evident, namely when participants control the occasion, time, place or setting for the interview, and the presence or absence of other participants. When I asked the employees of European cultural institutions for an interview in order to write about their perspective on foreign funding in Cairo, for publication in *Mada Masr*, one of them positioned herself as the spokesperson for the group. She told me they would only meet with me as a group, rather than one by one. Although it is not common practice in journalism, we had agreed with the interviewees beforehand that they would be able to check their quotes, and, if necessary, we would take out whatever they did not want published. I received an email from one of them, telling me that she had “rephrased her quotes,” and that it was probably a bad idea to link the article to the NGO funding debate. Another interviewee came to my workplace one morning, and told me during a chat on the balcony that she did not understand all the fuss about foreign funding, and that we should “just take the foreign out of the funding.” This comment, however – “take the foreign out of the funding” – negates everything I have sought to argue, that funding is heavily branded and has multiple state-signifiers behind it.

All three of my interviewees for the article were generally uncomfortable with their organizations being referred to as ‘funding institutions’ – a common description of these institutions by the contemporary arts community. “The grants started post-revolution,” one of the cultural brokers explained when we met collectively to discuss the article.

One reason why this happened was also that it was difficult to spend the money we had on the kind of programs we were doing in the past, like bringing foreign partners in – people couldn’t come! Because it was so difficult, we had enough time to actually go out and talk to people, introducing ourselves: ‘what kind of support do you need from an institution like ours?’ (EE, interview 2015)

Adding to this, another of the cultural brokers replied:

Personally, working for a cultural institution when funding is quite limited makes it difficult to distinguish between the institution and the person that then represents the institution: they melt together. Walking into a room, you are the [xx] institute,

you are possible funding, you are someone who approves or disapproves a budget. (EE, interview 2015)

“You can’t step out of your role. Wherever we appear, of course we are recognized as somehow representatives of our institutions, even if we are there on a completely private basis!” The others agreed, adding that they only go together to events, because then people are too intimidated to talk to them. However, overall, they said they had lost interest in visiting events: “One of the problems that comes with this job is that I cannot go anywhere. I don’t go to events, because always somebody will come and will talk to me about money or projects.” This makes it difficult, it was implied, to actually carry out the “research” necessary to secure projects relating to a respective community. “To understand how to do a project I have to know what’s going on. I have to see what’s happening on the cultural scene, who the players are, what topics they’re interested in...,” one of them said with concern.

The differing personal arrangements for cultural brokers are usually related to the education, class, and symbolic capital of the individual in question. As a result of structural classism and racism in respective European countries, those in senior management positions and those acting as directors or attachés of diplomatic institutions are usually individuals who already possess a certain amount of capital (educational, social, and symbolic). This often means they are well used to the pressure of the constant attention they receive, and are comfortable, to an extent, in their roles. The need to perform this role publicly, however, increased after the revolution in 2011, resulting in some discrepancies between what was/is expected of cultural brokers and the degree of diplomacy they are able to perform.

There is a difference in understanding what the [xx] ministry wants, and what the [xx] institute wants. In our case, we are contracted by the ministry to do the official foreign cultural policy, but as an independent body. And in the last years we got a lot of revenues from language teaching, and we have extra funding from other institutions, so in the last years, the percentage of what the ministry was paying got less, so we became a bit more independent. For instance with the [program], we have certain ideas what to do with the money, and the ministry has certain ideas, like, I give you 100,000 euros and then you do democracy in Egypt, and then we have human rights and conflict resolution, and then we will have less terrorism. Sometimes the ideas are astonishingly simple-minded. (EE, interview 2015)

When I asked my interlocutors about criticisms that had been expressed around foreign funding and specific funding institutions like the GI, the responses I received differed:

I feel there is a certain gap between the people we are working with, our audience, our participants, our partners, and those who are not in touch with us. With our

partners, we are talking with each other, we are working with each other. We tell them what we want and what we like, and they tell us what they want and what they like. Sometimes it doesn't fit – it's ok. And usually if I hear about strange perceptions regarding our institute, it's usually coming from people who have nothing to do with the institute and who have their own images about what national cultural institutions are. (EE, interview 2015)

One of the interlocutors emphasized the transparency of the institutions with regard to the culture policies that structure the institutions' programs:

Well, that culture is being instrumentalized, we cannot really escape that. We can only confront this as a culture institute with constantly presenting our aims and goals, and discussing our positions. But this does not mean that we can get out of certain contexts, but we do it in public, we talk about it. But culture in such a instrumentalized form like some imagine it to be, it will never work like that. And it is important that we, as representatives of a national cultural institute, are always aware of this. (EE, interview 2015)

The aforementioned phrase “No one forces you to take the funding! Take it or leave it, no one puts a pistol to your head!” coming from a European employee of a European cultural institution hints at a certain construction of reality between the speaker and addressee. It suggests free choice and dismisses the economic conditions that might force someone to engage with structures they might otherwise have avoided, and it refuses to acknowledge the underlying structural conditions that offer few alternatives for Egyptian social actors, due to scant funding from the Egyptian state and the competitive nature of non-European funding of Arab artists and their work by Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafi (Beirut), AFAC (Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Beirut), or Mophradat (Brussels). Secondly, it dismisses any criticism expressed by those towards whom the funding or support is geared, and rejects both their voices and the possibility of hearing them – which is the privilege of those holding a position of power.

As I have indicated in this chapter, the ways in which cultural brokers officially see and describe themselves and their work is closely linked to the position of the mediator, the translator, the well-intentioned helper:

We're the people here on the spot, so we suggest this and that. We believe in arts for art's sake, and we try to argue that we believe in this power of art and culture without having the label of, 'ok, we are doing a human rights theater,' or stuff like that. But sometimes we have to – we have to fit the certain program. [...] Of course we have to use certain keywords, but we try, and we believe that culture, and arts

as arts, can change things sometimes. But it will not be next month. It's in the long run. (EE, interview 2015)

What is not reflected or responded to in any of the verbally expressed or written accounts given by my interlocutors is the dependency on foreign funding within the arts scene, and the role that these state brokers play in actively choosing their cooperation partners. Since these state brokers are also bureaucrats, they have to sift through hundreds of emails daily, file paperwork and write reports. The local artists who make it successfully through the calls for funding proposals, and who often receive attention, are usually those who know how to play the game: those who can write an English proposal (since most of the calls are in English, with a few exceptions in Arabic), those who know the buzzwords, who know how to write a budget, and who create less work, in the end, for these bureaucrats, who are often chronically overworked.

“The thing with the usual suspects is that they are the usual suspects because they deliver,” says one of the interlocutors. “The usual suspects, this is a big part of the perception. The main reason is, we need to have partners who are reliable, who we can be sure can implement the project [...] We can't train them to do this or that; that is not our job,” adds another. (EE, interview 2014) A further explanation of this pattern was given by another interlocutor at a later point:

All the foreign cultural institutions are supportive. It's the Egyptian government that is not supportive. So we step into that hole, that's what we do. And from our point of view, in the end it's taxpayers' money and I can't just give it to someone with no realistic sense and experience. I am happy to support them with tiny bits, see if they are still there after a year, but of course you're going to end up with the usual suspects. (EE, interview 2015)

It is not just anybody, but some people more than others, those who can inherit the 'character' of the organization by returning its image with a reflection that reflects back that image, that is what we could call a 'good likeness.' (Ahmed, 2007, 158)

The pattern of the 'usual suspects' can be explained by linking them to the ability to accumulate capital in terms of habitus, education, class and social networks in the first place (which is something I will explore further in Chapter 5). Furthermore, it is often the cultural state brokers who make aesthetic and artistic decisions – despite their educational background. The discursive judgment of what is 'good' or 'bad' conducted by the state brokers with regard to contemporary art positions them within a clear structure of power, and imparts power to them as the ones who perform this decision-making process. After the performance of a local actress, an employee of a European cultural institution walked up to her. Most of the audience had already left, and only a few people and friends were scattered around.

The EE congratulated the artist on her performance and told her that the European institute she represented would be interested in hosting her show as well.

It was a bit eerie, the way how she stood there, with that smile. She came walking up to me, and everyone else had already left, only my close friends were there, we wanted to celebrate. She came up as if she was a friend, it made me feel very uncomfortable and I felt this fake smile on me. She said she liked the work and that they want to invite me to other local things and European places to show it there as well, so I felt like kind of relieved because she liked it, and I want to travel and all that and it's so easy if they pick you. (LA, conversation 2016)

The act of showing benevolence and support demonstrates an educated and elevated position (apart from the content that is chosen as good, or suitable – a topic that will be discussed in Chapter 6). Through their representation and the enactment of their roles, cultural state brokers symbolize future possibilities and hope for others who may approach them. Yet, at the same time, their degree of control and power is limited. In this way, cultural state brokers reproduce state systems through vast grey areas of friendship, resistance, refusal, agreement, collaboration, solidarity, empathy, personal justifications, labor structures and more.

4.6 Friends of the Art World II: Perceptions in and of the Scene

EU-funded programs initiated after the 2011 revolution were often put together hastily, with little time for research into what was already happening on the ground in the cultural field. This was also for circumstantial reasons, as funds often needed to be distributed quickly, due to formal requirements. However, these dynamics were also recognized and reflected on by those on the receiving end of the funding. One interlocutor reflects on his involvement in the BC's 'Cultural Leadership and Innovation scheme' in 2013:

They had these trainers coming from outside, to teach us. It felt quite condescending. First they chose who can attend, they chose what they called 'cultural leaders,' and then they come and teach us to become a cultural leader, with their ideas of what that is. I wanted to leave the very minute, but I wanted the grant. (LA, conversation 2013)

The program brought together “artists, policy-makers and creative entrepreneurs from across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA),” with 17 participants selected from Egypt. (BC website) “I was curious about what they [the trainers] would say, so I attended. But it was all in the old, usual scheme of ‘us’ and ‘them’ – nothing useful,” comments another participant. The program, “committed to engaging emerging talent and established cultural leaders in a part of the world teeming with artistic enterprise,” (BC) came with a small individual grant to kickstart fledgling projects, and was developed in partnership with the US-based Ford Foundation. It focused on identifying and supporting “emerging global cultural talent,” and helping to increase such individuals’ international exposure through the grants. Chatting about the incoming flux of funding in the immediate post-revolution period, one of my interlocutors spoke emphatically and expansively:

Post-colonialism! That’s what all the interest in, like, the revolution is, for me, that’s what it is. It’s another form. Like, when I look – because it has always been there when people were making art about being Egyptian or about Cairo, or about the city, it has always been there. And it’s always the same, one form or another of the same thing, these Egyptians, it has always been there. [...] there’s a curator in the middle who is either [...] wants to help with something for their career, and this is really hot, and they want to get on that train. Or they actually believe that this is really cool, and just being kind of ignorant at the same time. And that’s another thing. And then there’s the funders. And their policy has always been to appear like they’re doing something that helps the culture grow in Egypt – or like whatever country they are putting their money in – and that this is helpful, and this is the product, see what we’ve made. They also have to explain why and how they spent this money. They can’t just say we’re doing it because of art. No, they have to explain it. So they want to explain what they’re doing... (LA, interview 2013)

Similar to the BC’s Cultural Leadership program is the ‘Kulturmanagementtraining NaNo’ 2015, a program that is part of the GI’s cultural academy (Kulturakademie, or KA), which organizes cultural management training courses for participants from the MENA region, who then spend about six weeks in different areas of cultural management in Germany. The KA is one of the largest projects of the GI’s ‘Dialogue and Change’ (*Dialog und Wandel*) initiative, which aims to support social change through various cultural projects in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco and Jordan.

“First and foremost, it is nothing but networking,” observes a participant from the KA with whom I had a conversation about the program shortly after her return. “I remember one trainer in particular, she was a German woman in her fifties, we barely understood her English, and it didn’t make sense for us at all. How should we apply all this information in Egypt where the context is so different?” (LA, conversation 2015)

Language plays a major role within the funding scene. What is the *lingua franca* of a project, in which language do you have to submit a proposal, whom do you talk with in Arabic and whom in English? When do groups switch to English or Arabic and who is able to do so? What does it mean to have discussions or a conversation in one or the other language, and does it matter if the European interlocutors do not speak or understand Egyptian Arabic? Language is part of the game – command of English (or German or French, for example) allows actors to find a rather comfortable position in the field because this knowledge enables them to communicate with European representatives who often do not speak Arabic fluently. Language may also be used as a means of agency and resistance:

We often spoke in Arabic with each other in front of the organizers, honestly. We were wondering how they thought these instructors could be useful for us and our specific context. It felt relieving to just let go in Arabic, we knew they wouldn't be able to understand us, and we could speak freely! (LA, conversation 2015)

The experienced imbalance with regard to expectations on either side was also reflected on by another interlocutor after her meeting with a European employee who had been contracted to conduct a 'mapping' exercise of the cultural scene in Cairo: "Every time I talk to someone white [white European] who is new here and working in the artistic field and we have a conversation and I mention the names of French theoreticians or current art discussions, they look at me like, 'Oh my God, the monkey can play the guitar!' " (LA, interview 2013) Another local artist wrote on Facebook in 2016 in reaction to a published article which, in a similar vein to the many mapping exercises that key actors and cultural players have carried out over the past few years, mentions a 'thriving scene.' She writes:

... this 'new' 'emerging' scene/wave is seriously suffocating and reaching a static point because of the day-to-day challenges it faces. There is no young cute artists paving their way around with a ray of sunshine following them despite the difficulties they are facing. Most artists are depressed and our life is shit. Not to mention that there is nothing new or emerging about it this year at least, again, not because of the artists, but because of the conditions we are living in. We, as an alternative art scene, have failed in creating a sustainable alternative model. (Facebook post, December 4, 2016)

Another artist responded via Facebook that "... this whole thing of 'new' and 'emerging' is like 'developing nations.' When do we stop being framed as always emerging and be seen moment to moment, rather than against a timeline that the author decides?" Such a comment highlights the power of cultural brokers – authors, filmmakers, curators, and cultural state brokers – to analyze the scene from the outside as being in need of representation and

discovery. On asking about the funding patterns in terms of trends and political interests, a local artist responds:

Of course we could always blame the institutions, right? It's really easy to blame them. But we have all benefited from them some way or another. And we have to all just admit that we have, and realize that this is happening, and just find a way to either break out of it, or use it in a more useful way, a more efficient way, to get out of that. Use it. (LA, interview 2013)

She recognizes that it is also difficult to resist these funding baits:

I sent something in, it was a very bad draft, and it was chosen for a residency. It was very bad though, qualitatively. It was about virginity and women and liberties, and the revolution, and I knew that would be interesting. It was this moment that I realized it was there, on that list, because it was interesting for them. With the work I was doing then, but still, I myself am so uncertain about the clichés that I narrate. I was thinking, this is us, getting too emotional about this, this is very unpolitical from us. (LA, interview 2013)

At the same time, most of my interviewees shared a general querying of the motivation for cultural funding:

But the [German] government itself – and the GI is an arm of it – why does the government itself, why does it pretend that it cares? Why does it put so much money into this? And why does it also pretend that it cares when it comes to politics and when they are dealing with someone like Mursi, when they tell him, 'Oh no, you violate human rights, we are not giving you money.' Really? Where were you 30 years ago? [...] Now you tell him that you don't think that he's interested in human rights? It's just easier now because its easy to play with Mursi because he's such a pushover. But, like, I don't see how you are helping us. You say, 'Mursi we're not giving you money.' And you don't give him money. But this is really just formalities. (LA, interview 2013)

Another one comments:

Of course it [foreign funding] gets more important because it is also becoming more political. It is not as dry, it's a field that engages people [...] But for me foreign funding is a small payback of what this region, you know, does for boosting the economy for Europe and America. (LA, interview 2013)

Having said this, the projects and programs of European cultural institutions are also appreciated by most of the interlocutors I spoke with. “They definitely do really cool stuff,” says my interlocutor about the GI program in 2013:

They funded projects that I definitely like, and they have supported things I like, but I think their main, the most visible work has been always that – at least in the past few years – has always been towards that, funding that kind of revolutionary work. For me the GI is two things, they give German classes to Egyptian men who are engineers who want to live and work in Germany, or doctors sometimes, and they are all really religious. And then they do, and this is very visible, I mean I see their logo on things that have to do with the revolution – it’s always these things. Or sometimes I see their logo on something, it’s too good for them to not fund. Even if it’s not about the revolution, like DCAF [Downtown Contemporary Art Festival in Cairo]. In some way it has its problems as well, but they can’t miss out on putting their logo on that. And you get funding from Goethe if you do something good enough, or you are doing something that looks like it’s something socially aware. (LA, interview 2013)

In 2015, the Nile Sunset Annex (NSA), an artist-run, self-funded apartment gallery in Cairo (actively operating 2013-2016) mounted a show called ‘Friends in the Art World,’ by painter Amy Arif, showing a “selection of society portraits, a series of painterly likenesses recognizable to the audience.”⁶⁶ (Evan, 2015) The NSA concentrated on solo shows and artworks that the organizers felt were underrepresented in Cairo, particularly in a scene dominated by an interest in sociopolitically themed works (see Chapter 6). Arif’s portraits were of artists, curators and other key players – local, as well as foreign – on the contemporary art scene, with none of them knowing that their images would be part of the exhibition. Through its title, the exhibition commented playfully on the artistic and cultural community in Egypt, hinting at the cliquy nature of the scene, the ambiguous relationships, the nepotism, gatekeepers, and dependencies – but overall a community of individuals on friendly terms with one another (to the point that the portrait of a main European key player was bought for him as a present).

On the one hand, the exhibition portraying these key players challenged their ‘management of perception’ in a subtle way, because the individuals portrayed were not able to agree or disagree to being part of the show. They were not told why they were placed in this exhibition, or how they related to each other personally and professionally. Of course, all of this may have been contrary to their perceptions of themselves. On the other hand, the crowd who

66 See Nile Sunset Annex on the show with Amy Arif: <http://nilesunsetannex.org/past/aarif.html> (last accessed August 5, 2018).

attended this exhibition related to the portraits in terms of structures of popularity: who is most favored, who is not, who is famous, and who is dismissed? Where are these reputations coming from, and how do rumors influence them and the scene?

It is not only the image of the European gatekeeper that is contested, but also that of the local key players and cliques within the scene in relation to foreign funding. The ‘ranking’ of local individuals within this specific contemporary art scene is linked to the European cultural institutions.

In January 2016, the state-run Gezira Art Center and the US-run Binational Fulbright Commission in Egypt organized a panel discussion on ‘The Art Economy in Egypt: Challenges, Needs and Opportunities.’ The panelists were artists Hamdy Reda, Khaled Hafez, Moataz Nasr and Mariam Aziza Stephen, and the discussion was moderated by artists Bassem Youssri and Haytham Nawar. The moderators’ questions were often thought-provoking, and touched on funding, fundraising and Egypt’s art scene, which was represented in the discussion by Reda, Hafez and Nasr. At the time, all three ran art initiatives: Artellewa, a space located in the densely populated area of Ard El Lewa (Reda); the Khaled Hafez Foundation, a personal initiative to enlarge artists’ general skill sets (Hafez); and Darb1718, a space founded in 2008 in Old Cairo (Nasr). The opening questions addressed the origins of these institutions, highlighting how each follows a different financing strategy. Whereas Reda started his art space in his own building, with the support of friends, and is now secured through funds from the Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute, the British Council, Pro Helvetia, Hivos (a grant-making Dutch development aid NGO that finances itself largely from public funds) and AFAC, Nasr and Hafez self-finance their spaces. When asked about their respective funding structures, one of the panelists replied:

Initially there was a need to give to those institutions because the official establishments were corrupt. The cultural non-profit sector that was funded heavily, abusively, created a strata of parasites, because this money is never enough. [...] I think for the past 15 years we have been corrupted by certain foreign funders. (Transcription panel discussion)

The panelist continued his comment, mentioning fake goals, offshore bank accounts and opaque budgets, and criticizing the heavy funding provided by just a few institutions on a project-by-project basis. This, he argued, created a non-sustainable model that might lead to collapse when the funding fell through. The panelist then became critical of local institutions that receive funding: “And then they take a chunk of funding for doing nothing – you know what I’m talking about, we’ve all seen that,” he said to the audience. When the recent closing of the popular art space Townhouse by state authorities was mentioned in a question from the audience, the Egyptian panelists, who were all familiar with the space, and have exhibited in it themselves, responded skeptically:

We are all dealing with similar problems, but to the extent that the space is closed? This is not normal! [...] There must be something unusual to send seven different authorities on the same day to check. There must be something wrong” [...] “It changed status several times. It was a sustainable, successful model, but if there is a sustainable model for a certain number of years – definitely being monitored and audited and yet not cracked down on, or invaded, or anything for this amount of years – and suddenly something happened, then someone needs to answer that, we need to know what happened there. (Transcription, panel discussion)

The suggestions remained nebulous – “I think the people who should answer that are the people there,” or, “You’d have to ask him.” One comment even linked the example directly to foreign funding: Townhouse was great in the past, “but what happened afterwards is the story of certain foreign funding to certain institutes. We need to know what happened.”

This Q&A is an example of the rivalry, gossip and criticism that exists between local artists and local institutions. One of my interlocutors mentioned that in Cairo, she feels a reluctance to have a critical dialogue about work, or to challenge it. It’s a “feel-good” atmosphere, she said. This might have two sides: the art circle is so small that open criticism is almost impossible because it cannot be read on a non-personal basis; and, secondly, a lot of the structures rely on personal social networks – between the individuals within the scene and the European funders, and also among the local individuals themselves. In Cairo, you are limited to a handful of spaces and practitioners. It is very likely in this context that people will talk about your work, while in a bigger scene you may remain more anonymous, which could allow for the space to make mistakes, greater variety, and having the space to try things out. The contemporary art scene in Cairo is so small that no one can *afford* to offend – unless you are in a privileged position, geographically or financially, in which you do not depend on either the local spaces and community, or European funding. In this sense, criticism becomes a privilege. Individuals in the art world often have several professions in order to survive: the writer is a critic and the partner of a dancer; the curator is also an artist who is in a personal feud with the director of a funding institution; and the European state broker is a friend of the Egyptian artist and a supporter of one of the only remaining critical local media outlets. The contemporary art scene is also small and cliquey because it caters to an elite in terms of its audience but is also comprised of an elite who can afford to be in this social group, with salaries they don’t necessarily depend on to support themselves. The dependency of the contemporary art sector on governmental support (meaning here via the European cultural institutions) fosters intense competition. It often leaves individuals for whom the accumulation of cultural, symbolic or economic capital is difficult in a vulnerable state.

4.7 Conclusion

The funding of cultural production through foreign (European or US) cultural institutions that use such buzzwords as ‘democracy,’ ‘human rights,’ ‘gender,’ and/or ‘youth’ makes foreign cultural policy look like development policy. Taking a closer look at policies of representation, “soft power,” development policies and the dynamics embedded in the act of giving and receiving allows for a critical look at the asymmetrical power structures they are embedded within.

This chapter indicates that the ways in which those who work for foreign institutions manage perceptions of themselves do work on some levels, and on others they do not. It seems to neither fully convince the funders in their role as cultural brokers, nor the receivers of funding (who might encounter a lack of choice when it comes to financial support for their artistic practices). This is evident in the ways in which institutional state brokers insist on not being referred to as ‘funding institutions,’ when in the end the funding does translate into contractual money that comes with a required mode of operation and implementation. State brokers are drawn into these particular positions or identities because of the discursive – people are both produced by and subjected to ideology, and the ideologies they represent. (Wetherell et al., 2001, 209) These state brokers are interpolated as funders, and hence become funders, even if they try to shake off this image because it is not in line with their self-perception as cultural diplomats. The way they describe themselves and what they are doing tells us something about the broader ideological context, and about their subject position within it.

What then essentially emerges from the interviews I conducted, and what leads to the next chapter dealing with the so-called ‘creative economies’ is how the concept of funding as an unconditioned gift lays the ground for asymmetry within developmental structures and cultural programming. This prompts the question that is at the center of Chapter 5: who can afford to be a volunteer or intern, to work for free for several weeks or months? It is an essential part of any economy, but especially the so-called cultural industry, which rests on the backs of volunteers and/or project assistants. Most of these jobs are low-paid, economically unstable and highly competitive, but they are also based on the illusion of flexibility, regulated by self-exploitation and the necessity of constant accumulation of symbolic capital, due to a tougher and tougher job market – which, with regard to the contemporary art scene in Cairo, is mainly regulated by European cultural institutions.