

Connecting National Ruptures: U.S., West German, and East German Cultural Diplomacy in Lebanon, 1955-1970

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This paper is part of a research project that examines U.S. and German (both FRG and GDR) cultural policies in the Middle East during the Cold War (1955-1970). Using a comparative trajectory to study three distinct yet interrelated and competing cultural programs illustrates how the U.S., the FRG, and the GDR understood and defined themselves and their changing roles in the world in relation to each other and to the region. By establishing this new venue for analysis, I seek to broaden the conventional analysis of the Cold War “through the lens of U.S.-Soviet conflict” (Penny Von Eschen) to explore global Cold War dimensions that a binary U.S.-Middle East approach cannot contain.

My research includes NARA State Department records and FRG and GDR Foreign Service files at the Political Archives of the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin. Correspondences between the respective Beirut offices and Washington/Bonn/East Berlin demonstrate how the three governments conveyed their geopolitical interests and ideas of nationhood and national identity and assessed each others’ cultural and foreign policy. Through what representational means, and with what political investments and results, did the USIA, Federal Foreign Office (FRG), and Ministry for Foreign Affairs (GDR) cultural programs in Lebanon use the embattled city of Berlin and divided Germany - the “German question” - as an ideological tool?

While the nation’s history of racial oppression and the Civil Rights movement framed U.S. cultural programming decisions, the National Socialist past and the German nation divided into two states structured those of West and East Germany. These distinct national histories and contemporary realities gained new meanings in the Lebanese political context, where seemingly “strictly domestic” ruptures, such as the East Germans’ *Flüchtlingsproblem* (refugee problem) and *Heimatrecht* (the right to the homeland), provided a flexible trajectory through which to interpret not only the plight of Palestinian refugees, but also that of the Algerians and Hungarians. The concepts of freedom, democracy, and of human rights - all of which were integral to U.S. and German foreign policy rhetoric - were constructed, transmitted, and reinterpreted in divergent and contradictory ways in Lebanon.