

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

DISPLACEMENT, BELONGING, NEGOTIATION, AND
THIRD SPACE IN MAI GHOUSSOUB'S *SELECTED
WRITINGS*, ZENA EL KHALIL'S *BEIRUT I LOVE YOU* AND
NAIMA EL BEZAZ'S *VINEXVROUWEN*.

by
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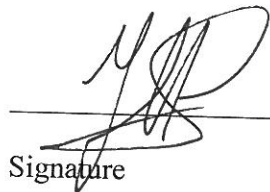
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Displacement, Belonging, Negotiation and Third Space in Mai Ghoussoub's *Selected Writings*, Zena El Khalil's *Beirut I Love You*, and Naima El Bezaz's *Vinexvrouwen*.

This thesis examines the works of three postmodern authors: *Selected Writings* by Mai Ghoussoub's, *Beirut I Love You* by Zena El Khalil and *Vinexvrouwen (The Suburban Wives)* by Naima El Bezaz. Through closely reading and analyzing their texts I show that narration is a tool with which they attempt to transcend their identities and ground themselves. I explore how writing created a Third Space symbolizing a home to all three writers, a space where diversity is appreciated and becomes the norm.

The first chapter defines and explores the different definitions of the terms, displacement, belonging, negotiation and Third Space. The second chapter discusses the displacement of Mai Ghoussoub, Zena El Khalil and Naima El Bezaz and the different causes of displacement. The third chapter elaborates on the negotiation and belonging of the three authors. This chapter examines the different negotiation styles of each author and their attempts at belonging. The fourth chapter looks at the Third Space created by Mai Ghoussoub, Zena El Khalil and Naima El Bezaz through writing. This chapter discusses the need for narrative in creating an identity and home. I will attempt to show that the Third Space, instead of being a contested space, can be a source of stability and self expression. The fifth chapter concludes the thesis and finds that Mai Ghoussoub, Zena El Khalil and Naima El Bezaz created an additional space, a Third Space, through writing in which they are not touched by offensive behavior. They anchor themselves in a virtual Third Space and find a home within their texts.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, memoirs have become extremely popular; hundreds are published each year, fulfilling a seemingly innate need for writers to tell and write their own stories and readers to consume them. Telling life stories originated in the Stone Age with cave paintings and continues today with phenomena like Facebook, Instagram and personal blogs. It is through personal narratives that one makes sense of the world and discovers oneself (Ochs and Caps). In the postmodern world, where identities and belongings are continuously questioned, it is not surprising to see this influx of memoirs and the success of social media. The absence of guidelines and fixed rules for how to live in a world that has become increasingly complex, fragmented, culturally mixed are conducive to the development of a narrative structure to understand oneself. It is up to each individual to make sense of their world and find a space in which he or she is comfortable. No longer are concepts like identity and belonging a constant.

In this thesis I examine the work of three postmodern authors, *Selected Writings* by Mai Ghossoub, *Beirut I Love You* by Zena El Khalil and *Vinexvrouwen (The Suburban Wives)* by Naima El Bezaz. These three postmodern writers try to create a space to anchor themselves and find meaning in their lives. By writing their personal stories, they attempt to define who and what they are and make sense of their multicultural world. Adopting memoir writing as narrative tool is an attempt to transcend their identities and ground themselves. I argue that through writing they create a Third Space, which becomes a space in which they feel comfortable. It is an abstract space, a home to all three writers, where the multiple parts of their own

identities find stability. The commonality between the three authors is the notion of displacement and their search for belonging. However, each one experiences a different form of displacement and has developed a different way of negotiating their identities and feelings of displacement. All three authors share the need to write in order to make sense of their world and find their place. The stories they tell help bring together their disparate experiences and identities in an attempt to make sense of the confusion associated with different realities. All individuals consist of a single narrative; this narrative is constructed unconsciously through perceptions, feelings, thoughts and actions. I argue that it is through writing the authors anchor themselves because when “narrative fails in the life of a person that life can shatter completely” (Allen 27). Without writing, these authors’ lives might have been shattered. Theodor Adorno expressed it very eloquently when he wrote in *Minima Moralia*, that “authors settle into their text like home dwellers for those who no longer have a homeland, writing becomes home” (51). In other words, home for the three authors is found within the text, they belong while narrating their lives which creates the Third Space, and in which they find serenity.

This chapter aims to outline the different definitions that scholars have provided for the concepts of displacement, belonging, negotiation, concepts that have been used to describe the condition of postmodern individuals. I also review definitions of Third Space, a concept I use to characterize or understand the narratives of the writers I am studying. I look at the origin of the terms and modern day usage as applied by different scholars today and reveal a gap in the interpretation of the Third Space. The terms displacement, belonging and negotiation have different interpretations, but scholars all agree on the concept of Third Space as a space of hybridization and

contestation, overlooking that such a created space can be a respite from struggle. I intend to show in my thesis that the Third Space can be a space without conflicts or provocations. Ghoussoub, El Bezaz and El Khalil through writing create an abstract Third Space in which all three find balance and a home.

A. Displacement

The term *displaced persons* originated during WWII to describe refugees from Eastern Europe who were forced to leave their native countries (Wyman 99). A displaced person is someone who has been forced to leave his native place, a phenomenon known as forced migration (Malkki 498). In the postmodern world, displacement refers to the millions of refugees who are forced to flee their native countries due to violence, natural disasters or economic reasons and are unable to return. In addition, displacement refers to global citizens who travel easily between different locations and often feel they belong to more than one place and are forever divided between these places and their different selves. A self is a person's perception of himself/herself formed through one's experience with one's environment and the interpretation of that experience (Shavelson and Bolus 3). A variety of self perceptions is common among displaced persons because they are unable to ground themselves with a single identity as they feel out of place and incomplete.

A displaced person often feels off balance and continuously questions his surroundings. Ha Jin, in *The Writer as Migrant*, writes, "Exiles, emigrants, expatriates, and even some immigrants are possessed with the desire to someday return to their native lands." It is this nostalgia which "deprives them of a sense of direction and prevents them from putting down roots anywhere" (qtd. in Hout 332). The physical

displacements of individuals outside their home country can be so painful that it impairs their present views and future plans in the new habitat (Hout 332). Displaced individuals may never develop a sense of being at home anywhere, and they are always aware of their displacement, which prevents them from obtaining a harmony between them and their direct society. This mental displacement is a debilitating force in the lives of many people. Lebanese diasporic narratives in English and in French share what Hout sees “as a generation-specific awareness of a dichotomous existence, a life split and defined in terms of the here and now (the host country or second home) vs. the there and then (Lebanon)” (Hout 332). According to Hout, to be divided from one’s early roots can only exacerbate the inability to plant oneself anywhere. Displaced individuals never develop a harmony between themselves and their surroundings and therefore remain divided between locations and are unable to settle permanently anywhere.

Not only physical and mental displacement hampers belonging but defining aspects of a person can also prevent their fitting in. When one does not have the ‘right’ name or skin color it can be hard to feel rooted in the host culture. Amin Maalouf, in *In the Name of Identity*, writes that to be a migrant is a permanent ambiguous state. A migrant is permanently displaced as a result of not having the right accent, right first name, right family name or the right papers. Even if a person adopts a host country as his own, the fear of rejection, humiliation and contempt will cause the migrant to feel misplaced (38). The result is that the migrant never feels that he fits in; he is a misfit by default enduring a constant state of being out of place.

Displacement can be a lived experience or an emotion handed down by family, and is a strong motivator and contributor to the discourse of identity formation. Asaad

Al Saleh in his article, “Displacement in Palestinian Autobiography,” compares Edward Said’s *Out of Place* and Fawaz Turki’s *The Disinherited*. Saleh describes Said’s book as an example of displaced autobiography, with an overlap between personal experiences and creative reconstruction of these experiences. Displacement is not always just an individual construction of past events but can be a family inheritance, a legacy that makes family part of a fate, faced collectively but narrated individually. According to Saleh, *Out of Place* suggests that Said grew up “to know that his past, his people’s past, and the loss of the only country he felt he belonged to, determined his self-perception as a displaced Palestinian” (83). It is not his direct personal experiences that led to his feeling displaced but more the emotions of his family which were handed down to him. This, according to Saleh, is in contrast to Fawaz Turki, who had a childhood that directly immersed him into displacement. Turki extensively narrates his early life in a refugee camp in Lebanon, a life that initiated in him the tension, loss, humiliation, and, above all, the fear and anger that there was no return to Palestine (82).

Displacement can also be caused by political conflicts. Mahmoud Darwish, a Palestinian poet, describes in his poetry the anguish of dispossession and exile. In his poem “Identity Card” he uses the imperative and orders the listener repeatedly to “Write down! I am an Arab.” This poem was read out loud in Nazareth in a movie house and had spread around the world in a couple of days (Kavita). Darwish’s displacement becomes tangible in his poetry and he has published over thirty volumes of poetry covering the theme of exile, dispossession and forceful displacement.

Whether because of a handed-down emotion, aspects of oneself, too many fragmented identities, or a forcible displacement, a displaced person is forever searching for stability and belonging.

B. Belonging

Belonging is an ambiguous term and means a variety of things but they all imply an endorsement and refer to a consensus. The many terms available in the dictionary emphasize the ambivalence of the concept of belonging. For instance, it can mean “to fit in” and to be a “member of a group,” but also to be “proper,” “appropriate,” and “suitable,” as well as “to have in one’s possession.” The term thus conveys a paradoxical notion that to be a “natural” part of something involves following a particular set of rules and norms that are set by actors more powerful than oneself (Nagel 108). This relates to the notion that in order to belong one has to be approved by the other.

Therefore, to belong or not to belong is not always a matter of choice. In a colonial context, in order to belong, one had to be white. According to Frantz Fanon, “What parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging or not belonging to a given race a given species” (32). Power was held by those who belonged, and unless one ‘belonged’ no importance or power would be bestowed upon an individual. Whiteness determined belonging, regardless of class or education (Loomba 25). In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Stuart Hall points out how belonging was determined by the ‘Other’ (226). It was evident that one either belonged or did not belong; it was not necessary to question one’s belonging. Nowadays, people struggle with the question of where they belong, identities have become fluid (Baumann 1) and traditions, which differentiate one place from another, have turned into matters of choice (Malpas 1). The postmodern individual, as an “international consumer of customs, conventions and ways of life” (Malpas 2), decides where he or she wants to belong. No longer does one simply belong by default--alternatives are available. In contrast to colonial times, postmodern

individuals have options about their belonging; however, these options have become burdens.

According to Simon Malpas, identity has become a malleable attribute of the individual. The individual has seemingly unlimited liberty as to how to create his identity as he picks and chooses randomly the self which suits him/her (3). In *In the Name of Identity*, Maalouf contradicts Malpas. According to Maalouf it is not necessary to have to choose one identity or belonging over another. An individual is made up of a variety of affiliations in the postmodern world. Maalouf's viewpoint is that one should be able to have multiple 'belongings' at the same time. He gives as example a Turkish man who was born and raised in Germany. Now the (originally) Turkish man speaks and writes better German than he does Turkish, yet for the German society he is not German, while for the Turkish society he is not Turkish. Maalouf points out that common sense should enable him to claim both allegiances (3). One should not be forced to choose one identity over another and one can belong to a variety of identities.

Belonging shifts backwards and forwards between multiple selves. According to Maalouf, one does not simply belong to one entity statically throughout one's lifetime. He gives himself as an example. Speaking Arabic connects him to the Arab world and being Christian creates a significant link between him and the two billion or so other Christians in the world. Add to that the fact that he is French and Lebanese and his affiliations multiply a million fold. Maalouf continues and mentions his Melchite origins, his Turkish grandmother and his Christian Egyptian grandfather (19). He emphasizes the different elements that make up and shape his identity, making him a unique blend. He argues that "every individual without exception possesses a composite identity"; for Maalouf everyone possesses a unique identity, not to be confused with any

other (20). This unique identity enables individuals to maintain a variety of affiliations simultaneously.

Affiliations and belonging can also be created through emotional ties to the surrounding world or through the creation of a home. In contrast to Maalouf, who believes that individuals have belongings handed down to them, David Ralph states in “Home and Migration: Mobilities, Belongings and Identities” that “belonging is a subjective feeling held by individuals and is socially defined and the subjective side of belonging is in many respects synonymous with aspects of home’s dimensions of place and identity” (523). For Ralph, then, belonging is related to the space and the construction of home, and it is thus not necessarily tied to a fixed location. Rather, it emerges out of the regular, localizing reiteration of social processes and sets of relationships with both humans and non-humans (Ralph 520). The ways in which migrants describe a sense of fitting in ‘at home’ shares several characteristics with their sense of place. There is an explicitly social element of belonging that conditions home and identity. This social element speaks not so much to the feeling of identification and familiarity as it does to experiences of inclusion and, very often, of exclusion. (Ralph 523). In order for a person to belong he must feel emotionally included in the space around him. A person needs to feel accepted by his surroundings.

Feelings of identity and belonging are also place-dependent. According to Ralph, the syntax of belonging is structured by relationships in a variety of locations, be they local, national, cosmopolitan or, more likely, a combination of all of those locations, as migrants move through their daily lives. It is important to understand how these relationships are combined and interact to construct homes and how these homes

are interpreted, understood and given meaning by migrants (Ralph 526). For Ralph, constructing a home, a place of abode, is an important element of belonging.

Material objects and the approval of one's surrounding are important in creating a home and of sustaining relationships that help to constitute a home. Ralph notes that "those relationships and processes that construct home are also involved in creating identities and feelings of belonging" (521). For Ralph, it is through the creation of a home that belonging follows where "the conceptualization of home as simultaneously mobile and grounded intersects with identity and belonging" (Ralph 521). However, Ralph does point out that the issue of belonging is never entirely about migrants' subjective feelings of 'fitting in' but also relates to how (powerful) others define who belongs to home according to specific spatial norms and expectations. It is necessary to be accepted by the other since a sense of belonging comes from the validation of the other. As such, belonging emerges out of entwined social processes of incorporation and exclusion that are partly self-defined, partly other-defined (Ralph 523). In order to belong, one needs to be able to create a home with personal possessions and maintain good relations with one's surroundings.

According to Ralph, belonging feels like a matter of the heart; however for Caroline Nagel it is very much a matter of the law. In her article "Belonging," she explains how belonging "is structured through laws, policies, and norms, and it involves negotiations between dominant and subordinate groups that can lead to a reformulation of the terms of membership. Belonging, it seems, is often an incomplete process – individuals can belong in some ways but not others" (110). Belonging is not a matter of the heart but more a matter of acceptance by others. Governments impose rules and regulation in order to regulate belonging. Laws and ordinances designed to enforce

English language usage, deny immigrants access to public services, regulate migrant workers' presence in public spaces, and hinder their access to affordable housing, which produces clear distinctions between those who belong and those who do not belong. The ban on the headscarf in France, the emergence of the "social cohesion"¹ agenda in Britain, and a new policy in the Netherlands that requires foreign-born brides and grooms of Dutch residents to pass an assimilation test before receiving a visa all point to the power of the state to control "foreigners" (Nagel 115). Nagel looks at Christian Joppke's article, "Transformation of Immigrant Integration: Civic Integration and Antidiscrimination in the Netherlands, France, and Germany" to conclude that one cannot belong while being different. Nagel writes, "The main point I have tried to convey in exploring these particular dimensions is that belonging is necessarily *political*" (121). In other words, in order to belong one must 'fit' or one will be made to fit by law.

Being a foreigner in a strange land provokes questions of one's background and those questions prevent feelings of belonging. In "(Re)scaling identities: Embodied Others and Alternative Spaces of Identification," Lasse Koefoed and Kirsten Simonsen both discuss the fact that 'strangers' often get asked "Where are you from?," with the expectation that the answer will clarify what is 'suspicious' about them. Small phrases in everyday language games routinely produce the stranger as being out of place and not at home (630). By not physically matching the people around them, migrants get asked

¹ **Social Cohesion** - The Committee accepted the Local Government Association/Home Office's definition that a cohesive community is one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued;
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from Different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighborhoods.

where they are from originally, implying that they do not belong where they are. As Nagel points out, “For those excluded from the boundaries of social membership, belonging is something to be achieved and something to fight for” (122). Belonging and identifying with one’s surrounding is a continuous struggle when one is considered different. Belonging does not happen automatically, but is something actively and continuously contested. Belonging requires active participation and governments oblige citizens to abide by specific laws in order to qualify and have the privilege to belong. By refusing to comply, an individual will be destined to remain the permanent outsider.

That being said, Zygmunt Bauman believes that refusing to comply is a choice. In *Liquid Life*, Baumann explains that life is precarious and lived under conditions of constant uncertainty. For Baumann, “Liquid modern life is a series of new beginnings”; identity and belonging have become consumer products to be consumed and discarded at will (2). One cannot belong to one single identity simply because that would mean life is stagnant. Instead, life has the “possibility of renegotiating the setting that makes individuals liquid” (Baumann 11). Belonging shifts continuously and is renegotiated constantly according to the current need of the individual. As a result, individuals and belonging are in a constant state of motion.

C. Negotiation

The definition of ‘negotiating’ is to deal or bargain with another or others in the preparation of a business or political deal. The term conjures up images of grey men and women in suits seated around a table managing, conducting and transacting deals and agreements in the world. In the middle of the 20th century the idea of negotiating identities came up in the sociological literature. The phrase ‘identity negotiation’ was

introduced by William Swann, who elaborated on the tension between two competing processes in social interaction (1038).

Negotiating different identities successfully in a multicultural world depends on one's native culture. Saba Ozyurt, looks at how discursive practices and sociopolitical mechanisms underlie the identity negotiation of Muslim immigrant women in the United States and the Netherlands. She explains that the self in Western cultures is autonomous and free, oriented toward independent achievement, where life is evaluated in relation to an individual's needs and goals. The self in Eastern cultures, on the other hand, is connected and fluid, oriented towards harmony with the environment, and evaluates life with reference to collective needs and expectations. Social roles and relations have different organizations in Eastern and Western cultures. In the former, the self is ascribed which means that there are (more or less) clearly defined self-representations and social roles that individuals follow (Ozyurt 242). On the other hand, the self in Western cultures is acquired as the self is 'made,' rather than inherited. Thus, in Western societies, the process of identity construction and negotiation becomes a self reflexive project that the individual continuously works and reflects upon (Ozyurt 241). Self negotiation is therefore an ongoing process and is made easier with a Western background as the Western self is more fluid than an Eastern self.

There are several forms of identity negotiations and individuals opt to use some or all. Very often individuals become connected to others through belonging to a specific group rather than by individual choice (Roccas and Brewer 90). Sonia Roccas and Marilynn Brewer, in their article "Social Identity Complex," discuss four different forms of identity negotiations. The first identity negotiation is intersection which takes place at the intersections of multiple cultural groups (90). The second identity

negotiation is dominance, where an individual adopts one primary group identification to which all other potential group identities are subordinated. In compartmentalization, the third identity negotiation, individual identity is context specific or situation specific. In this mode of identity structure, multiple incompatible identities are maintained, but the individual does not activate these social identities simultaneously (91). The final negotiation tactic, merger, is a strategy where an individual's social identity is the sum of combined group identifications. The more social selves the individual has, the more inclusive the definition of in-group becomes. This does not mean that one cannot switch negotiation style. Rather, Roccas and Brewer believe that negotiation is an on-going process that develops over time. Negotiation depends on a variety of factors and an individual cannot simply choose one strategy over another (92). Negotiation is a complex process depending on one's current situation.

In contrast, Ozyurt argues that the negotiation style depends more on the individual's characteristic rather than on one's location, culture or circumstances. According to Ozyurt, in order to negotiate multiple identities, it is necessary to have a clear self image. She writes, "Successful negotiation of bicultural identities depends, not so much on whether the individual perceives these identities and cultures to be compatible with each other, but rather on the availability of a coherent self-narrative of belonging to both cultural worlds" (242). This means that for an individual to successfully negotiate different selves, he or she needs to have a clear understanding of themselves within both cultures. Only with a sense of belonging to both cultures can a successful negotiation take place. This concurs with John Oetzel and Stella Ting-Toomey, who both wrote that the negotiation process is affected by a person's identity

coherence. It is clear that only someone with a clear identity confirmation can handle and negotiate another identity.

Switching between different cultures is an option for someone who holds multiple cultural identities. Cultural frame switching, as this is called, is a negotiation tool that refers to the phenomenon of switching between cultural frames in relation to a specific environment. Veronica Benet-Martinez believes that little is actually known about how biculturals manage and negotiate their dual cultural identities. She states that individuals who evaluate their two cultures as compatible and complementary are more likely to successfully negotiate their bicultural identities and manage their multiple life-worlds than those who describe them as oppositional or contradictory (494). It is easier for a Westerner to adjust to another Western culture than it is for an Easterner to adjust to a Western culture and vice versa. Antin, a Russian Jew who immigrated to the United States at the turn of the century explains that,

Everything impressed itself on my memory, and with double associations; for I was constantly referring my new world to the old for comparison, and the old to the new for elucidation. . . . All the processes of uprooting, transportation, replanting, acclimatization, and development took place in my soul. . . . It is painful to be conscious of two worlds. (qtd. in Benet-Martinez 494)

Cultural frame switching is painful; to be divided between two or even three worlds is confusing and debilitating. Negotiating a variety of belongings leads to instability as an individual is always in touch with another part of oneself and never quite in balance. Although cultural frame switching is one way to handle negotiating different cultures, an individual is destined to be forever shuffling back and forth.

Bridging two cultures is a possibility for an individual who feels quite comfortable with herself and her host culture. Ozyurt suggests a negotiation strategy that a Muslim woman might develop in an unfriendly Western environment. She refers to a 'mediating strategy' where the woman mediates between the two very different cultures to construct a meaningful narrative about how she belongs to the two incompatible groups by bridging two groups. In contrast, Theresa Laframboise and Hardin Coleman's strategy suggests individuals do not bridge cultures but alternate between the different cultures. Laframboise and Coleman focus their attention on the premise which "posits that an individual is able to gain competence within two cultures without losing his or her cultural identity or having to choose one culture over the other" (395). Similar to Maalouf, Laframboise and Coleman believe that a person can hold several affiliations without giving up one. One is able to hold on to one cultural identity while simultaneously accepting and functioning in the second culture.

Negotiating two different cultures, without choosing one over the other, leads to an amalgamation of both cultures. Ozyurt explains that instead of adopting a mediating negotiation style, an individual can 'synthesize' two identities. This happens, according to Ozyurt, in compatible cultures. Likewise, Jean Phinney and Mona Devich-Navarro believe that 'fusion' happens where multiple identities are negotiated and merged so as to produce a third hybrid identity.

Negotiation, synthesizing and fusing are easier when the host culture is not negatively influenced by an inferior image of the migrant. As Ozyurt comments, in the Netherlands, the relationship between the Muslim community and the larger society is shaped by a public discourse that emphasizes the 'backward' nature of Islam and the oppressed position of women in it. Such a negative construction of Islam limits the

psychological, cultural, and political space available to Muslim women in the Netherlands and makes it hard to negotiate cultural and religious differences (246). Negotiating and developing a positive narrative about oneself in an unfriendly environment is much harder than when the host country is more compatible with one's own culture. Moreover, blending two cultures and creating a third culture, a hybrid culture is much easier when the two cultures resemble each other. Displacement, belonging and identity are complex aspects of one's self. An essential space needs to be created in order to find a balance and harmony between them.

D. Third Space

Like identity, Third Space is a term that emanates from the social sciences and has received various interpretations. Although there are many interpretations of the Third Space, from a contested space to a creative space, they all have one commonality: Whether it is a social, postcolonial, feminist or linguistic platform they all portray the Third Space as the place where change takes place. Third Space can be a real existing space as with Ramon Oldenburg and Dennis Brisset, or an abstract space as with Homi Bhabha, however the Third Space is always dynamic and provoking.

Oldenburg and Brisset in their article "The Third Place" note that modern men, and increasingly women, agitate between two poles of existence, they "flit from the 'womb' to the 'rat race' and back again" (267). Neither place provides satisfying experiences and relationships. According to Oldenburg and Brisset, the 'third place(s)' or social arenas (places outside the workplace or home) are opportunities which offer people a larger measure of their sense of wholeness and distinctiveness (266). In Oldenburg and Brisset's Third Place people relax and step out of their performative

selves and become an unlabelled individual. The Third Place is where individuals let their 'real' selves show (Walsh 125). No longer are they 'mother' or 'manager' but just an individual. Third places where informal meetings take place facilitate creative interaction. Soja, a political geographer and urban planner, developed a theory of Third Space to apply to his own field. He notes that "Thirdspace is a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances and meanings" (qtd in Dixon 2). For Oldenburg and Soja, the Third Space is a creative space where anything can happen.

The Third Space gives individuals an opportunity to be who they are without a label; however, this process is not always an uncontested one. For Homi Bhabha the Third Space is where the colonizer and the colonized meet and interact (36). It is the gap between the first and second space, the first space belonging to the colonizer and the second space to the colonized. The Third Space is needed to synthesize and identify the different spaces occupied within the first and second space. Without the third dimension that enables a distance from the first and second space, a merger of the two spaces cannot take place. Bhabha's Third Space is an abstract notion that is constantly expanding to include 'an-Other'. Fusion takes place in the Third Space; a distance is needed in order to blend and mingle something new in the Third Space. This blending and mingling is not an easy process.

Bhabha is very clear about the Third Space being one that involves struggle. The Third Space is not some safe and secure position that ensures formulaic political correctness. The Third Space represents a radically hybrid space—unstable, changing, tenuous, neither here nor there. The Third Space is not just something in-between two distinct cultures: for Bhabha, there is no pure, homogeneous cultural space—even

within an ostensibly unitary and coherent culture. By exploring this Third Space, people may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves (35). Bhabha makes this claim primarily to challenge the imperialist desire for a space of cultural purity, an imaginary white, civilized space. Bhabha's Third Space challenges white supremacy.

The concept of 'space' has become a very popular term to signify something that is opened up within or outside of more grounded, material and specified 'places.' Dudgeon and Fielder quote Michel de Certeau, who premised that "this is an instance of creating space in places controlled by the powerful." (405). By creating an additional space, the Third Space, the marginalized build a space using the rules extant in a culture in a way that is influenced but not controlled by those rules. Bhabha describes this space as a hybrid space. The Third Space, in essence, for Bhabha is the fissure in between ostensibly seamless and stable places. It is a space that can be opened up, but the impulse to pin down, close, or paste over is strong.

Like Bhabha, feminist writers see the Third Space as a contested space. American feminist and social activist bell hooks made much of the marginal space occupied by black women, one which she calls a "special vantage point," and which she urges black feminists to use to "criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony" (15). According to Leona English, a Third Space can be "central to itself and can be a strategic vantage point for women" (102). For English, 'Third' refers to the constructing and reconstructing of identity, to the fluidity of space, to the space where identity is not fixed. Third Space is where identity is re-negotiated to reach a hybrid identity. It denotes the place where negotiation takes place, where identity is constructed and re-constructed, where life in

all its ambiguity is played out. This term serves as a rebuttal or corrective to regulating views, and highlights a way of seeing things differently. This Third Space is a place between uncertainty and stasis where marginalized people resist being coded and marked by others (English 100). Like the post-colonial concept of Third Space, Third Space for the feminists is also a place of resistance, a place that attempts to challenge and change accepted standards in society.

On a completely different note, Bhatt concludes that code-switching, as linguistic hybridity, is a Third Space where speakers (readers/writers) (re-)position themselves with regard to new community practices of speaking and writing. It is in this space that speakers/ writers, as well as hearers/readers, are presumed to have the capacity to synthesize, to transform: code-switching serves as a visible marker of this transformation, the creative adaptation to communicate a kind of multiplicity that is highly contextual, a new habitus representing for its speakers a new, slightly altered representation of social order (188).

Describing the Third Space using Bhabha's terms, it is "neither one nor the other" (127). It becomes clear that there is not a single Third Space. There are many and varied, they are spaces rather than places. Within the Third Space one is challenged, whether in the social, postcolonial, feminist or linguistic field. Emphasis is on the challenges encountered within the Third Space. Scholars emphasize Third Space as an unstable never ending process where identity is constantly questioned and in motion.

E. Conclusion

I choose the subjects of displacement, belonging, negotiation and Third Space because of my own family situation. As a Dutch citizen, married to a Lebanese, who

moved from Nigeria to the UK and who lives now Lebanon, I have struggled with the question of where my children and I belong. To highlight this predicament I will share a short story about my daughter Maya, who while in KG I received the assignment to draw and color the flag of her country. She chose to make the English flag. Not the Lebanese or the Dutch. When I questioned her about her choice she defiantly looked at me and told me, "I speak English, therefore I am English." The simplicity and logic of a five year old is endearing but I realized there and then that for my daughters the question of where they belong is not a clear cut one.

It is ever since this brush with my daughter's declaration of Englishness that my interest in what makes a person feel he or she belongs to a place was born. The reason I choose Mai Ghoussoub's *Selected Writings*, Zena El Khalil's *Beirut I Love You* and Naima El Bezaz's *Vinexvrouwen (The Suburban Wives)* is because I identify with these authors. I understand Ghoussoub's division between East and West; she straddled two places the way I do. I feel particularly sympathetic to El Bezaz's painful displacement: internally Dutch and externally Moroccan, her two selves are in a continuous negotiation. El Khalil, being postmodern and fluidic, resembles my children the most, rootless and belonging everywhere the world has become their village.

My daughters do not seem concerned with the question of where they belong. They each have gathered a circle of friends who all share a similar itinerate background and like birds of a feather who flock together they are settled and at home within this nomadic group. I see them as the new generation, global citizens and third culture kids. However, it is not so clear cut for many others who do struggle with the question of where they belong and feel continuously displacement. These are the people who continuously renegotiating themselves and attempt to grasp and understand their place

in society. This thesis discusses the displacement, negotiation and the role of narrative in the lives of Mai Ghossoub, Zena El Khalil and Naima El Bezaz and I explore the concept of Third Space as a safe haven reached through the process of writing.

CHAPTER II

DISPLACEMENT

A. Introduction

One day, during my graduate course on Occidentalism at the American University of Beirut, I realized that our discussion had suddenly shifted from the use of metaphors, to a discussion of ‘us’ and ‘other’ where ‘us’ is Lebanese and ‘other’ is Western. There was a consensus in my class that ‘they’ think ‘we’ are still backward. ‘They’ being Westerners and ‘we’ Lebanese. My class mates in that moment shared an identity that I was not part of. Although I feel part of the ‘us’, I am aware that I am also part of the ‘other’. This feeling of being part of more than one place and identity, and its resulting displacement is a recurring event in my personal life. Despite vastly different reasons for displacement, the commonality among displaced individuals is the fact of being displaced. It is being aware of being different from everyone and not quite fitting in your own surroundings.

In this chapter, I will explore three postmodern authors and their displacement: Mai Ghossoub in *Selected Writings*, Zena El Khalil in *Beirut I Love You* and Naima El Bezaz in *Vinexvrouwen (The Suburban Wives)*. I will look at displacement as a state of being physically in one place but mentally in another, without belonging to either one. Although the authors are displaced for different reasons (Ghossoub fled her home country because of the Lebanese civil war, El Khalil belongs to an expatriate community and El Bezaz is a second generation immigrant), they share the need to explore their surroundings through writing. As Ochs and Caps discuss, “Narrative

interfaces self and society, constituting a crucial recourse for socializing emotions, attitude and identities, developing interpersonal relationships, and constituting membership in a community” (19). Narration is an essential tool that transcends the authors’ floating identities and grounds them.

1. Mai Ghoussoub

Mai Ghoussoub, born in Lebanon in 1952 of Lebanese parents, was a sculptor, playwright, choreographer, publisher and writer. She grew up in Beirut, where she attended the French Lycee and studied math at AUB and French literature at the Lebanese University. She is the oldest of the three authors and the only one who has passed away. Growing up in Beirut, Ghoussoub was surrounded by multiple influences. French, American and Lebanese educational institutions shaped her thinking throughout her youth. Her connection with both the East and West was established from early childhood. At an early age, she learned to negotiate society’s expectations and her own desires. She was a rebellious teenager, and during the Lebanese Civil War, Ghoussoub played an active humanitarian role until she lost her eye in 1977 and left to London for treatment. In London, she co-founded El Saqi Books in 1979 with her childhood friend, Andre Gaspard, and became known as an Arab beacon, publishing works too daring for Arab publishers, including topics of gay and lesbian love.

Ghoussoub was a feminist influenced by Simone de Beauvoir, and her art provokes and challenges her audience; her play “Divas” features a transsexual as a central character. One of the postmodern aspects in her work is to provoke her audience into a reaction, in London as well as in Beirut. In addition to her writing, Ghoussoub found self expression through sculpting. Her fragmented life is visualized through her

sculptures, which are made up of various materials that produce a controversial whole, just like Ghoussoub herself.

Although English is Ghoussoub's third language, her memoir *Selected Writings*, a collection of essays and stories, is written in English. There, she attempts to put the contradictions of modern life into perspective. Through her observations she relays a message to her readers, encouraging them to question the accuracy of memory and reflect on the possible lies of nostalgia. She uses imagery and personification to visualize languages meeting on a roundabout and she questions missed opportunities because of gender.

2. Zena El Khalil

Zena El Khalil born in London in 1982 to Lebanese parents and grew up in Nigeria. She went to boarding school in the UK, completed her undergraduate studies at AUB and her masters in Art in New York. El Khalil received her education from three different continents, and, as with Ghoussoub, her thinking was shaped by a variety of cultures. She is an artist, a writer and a cultural activist who plays an active role as an Arab voice for peace.

Her visual three dimensional art reflects her postmodern self, where pieces are created from a variety of materials and are paradoxical and exuberant, reflecting the contradictions and tensions of today where nothing is fixed or permanent. For instance, she uses pins to hold the fabric and material in place. With the slightest disturbance, any force that removes the pins from their positions causes a change. This creates a metaphor for postmodern society, where change is inevitable.

Since 2003, El Khalil has participated in the Beirut International Marathon as “The Pink Bride,”² The initial idea behind the Pink Bride was the concept of marriage was to question the motive behind marriage in Lebanese society she started a social experiment called “Wahad Areese Please!”³ After the summer war of 2006, the running bride’s concept changed from trying to create awareness about marriage into an omen of good luck, transforming it into the “Pink Bride of Peace.”

El Khalil is founder and co-director of Xanadu, a nonprofit platform created in New York after 9/11 to help give voice to Arab artists. El Khalil tried to bridge the gap that suddenly appeared between Arabs and the Western world. As an Arab voice of Peace, she spoke at a recent TEDx talk in Amsterdam, where she discussed her solutions to the political problems by giving a talk titled, “Love Will Save Us.” In 2006, during the July war, El Khalil wrote a personal account of the summer war from her apartment in Beirut. Her BlogSpot received attention from CNN and BBC and excerpts were published in weekly news magazines. The entries in this BlogSpot were later collected and transformed into her published memoir, *Beirut I Love You*.

Her postmodern memoir is a first person narrative, textually and temporarily fragmented. She introduces herself through a Transworld identity, Asmahan, and ties her own identity to this character to guarantee her own tangible existence. Through the process of writing her memoir, she tries to make sense of death, violence and the world around her. El Khalil presents reality as she sees it and by the act of narration, explores her displacement.

² A performance where El Khalil wears bright pink heels and a bright pink wedding dress while running part of the Beirut marathon.

³ One groom please!

3. Naima El Bezaz

Naima El Bezaz was born in 1974 in Morocco of Moroccan parents and her family immigrated as guest workers to the Netherlands in 1978. El Bezaz grew up in the Netherlands in Alphen aan de Rijn, a typical small Dutch town, and went to school and high school there. She then proceeded to law school in Amsterdam and, after meeting a renowned author at a lecture, she was inspired to become a full time writer. She gave up her studies, and in 1996, she was awarded the “Jenny Smelik IBBY prijs” for her first novel, an award given to authors whose focus is on minority children in the Netherlands.

El Bezaz is a controversial and daring persona in Dutch/Moroccan society. She caused a national furor after reading explicit excerpts from her second novel during a televised interview⁴. El Bezaz admits that she aims to provoke people: she shows the autochthones the perspectives of an “allochtoon”⁵ in their own language. Through her literature she holds a mirror to Dutch society and reverses the stereotyping that she herself is subjected to. Though her work is praised by many for its fearlessness, it is often seen as offensive.

Her controversial ways and audacity in confronting people with their own hypocrisies resulted in threats which forced her to keep a low profile. El Bezaz suffers from depression and has addressed this in public media, where she openly talks about her struggle with depression and how her writing is a salvation to her mental state. By writing and using sarcasm to portray both Dutch and Moroccan communities, she distances herself from both, confirming her displacement.

⁴ http://pauwenwitteman.vara.nl/Gast-detail.1575.0.html?&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=19078&cHash=df08c2fe47160a779a13e74105bebb1c

⁵ A Dutch word literally meaning “coming from another country”.

B. Displacement

Displacement and its consequent feeling of being an outsider led these three authors to pick up a pen and narrate their stories in order to make sense of their lives. Ghoussoub was shuffling between the UK and the Middle East, unable to find her bearings in either one. El Khalil meanders in her expansive geographical space, never settling, while El Bezaz struggles with the way Dutch society treats immigrants. Each author negotiates disparate strands of displacement and its resulting fragmentation.

The term 'displaced' infers the meaning that something or someone once belonged to a location or a place and is just temporarily out of place. But what happens if someone does not belong to any one *place*? A displaced person often does not have one single home or a place to return to but many. The displaced person is physically in one place but mentally connected to another (Hage⁶ during lecture at AUB). Ghassan Hage, writes in his article, "Insiders and Outsiders" that an insider is mentally and bodily attuned to a specific socio-cultural space. Hage explains that a person feels at home in the place where he has historically evolved in relation to that space. A displaced person cannot experience socio-cultural or political belonging, because his mental and bodily dispositions have evolved elsewhere and thus he feels culturally out of place. He holds too many memories and emotions of other places. In addition to holding memories and emotions of other places, Hage argues, certain places actually encourage migration and therefore become a cause for instability. In other words, they foster a future state of displacement. An example of a place that harbors displacement are Lebanese villages which Hage depicts as "portals of migration." Migration for the young people in these villages is not an event but a continuous presence in everyday

⁶ Hage, Ghassan. "The Lebanese diasporic life-world: between universality and specificity." AUB. West Hall. Beirut. March 11, 2013. Keynote address.

life. For the young villagers especially, who are already transported in their mind to other regions, because their villages are unable to support them in a modern world, migration becomes inevitable. Once they migrate, a sense of loss captures them and memory of home haunts them, preventing them from feeling at home in their new surroundings. As a result they become displaced and are constantly in search of a place to belong.

According to Hage, there is not one reality with a multiplicity of views but rather a multiplicity of realities. A displaced person reinvents himself continuously and multiple realities become a way of life. In his lecture, Hage used the term “Illusio” to refer to this state where a person imagines himself away from his current location. The more spaces the individual is connected to, the more memories haunt him. Hage refers to these memories as emotional memories and explains that they are triggered by interacting parallel realities. Parallel realities happen when a sound or smell transports you to another time and place. The displaced person is haunted by the shadow of these other spaces in his daily life and these emotional memories highlight his displacement. To illustrate the different perspectives displaced people hold, Hage used an example of a bubble; each displaced person creates multiple bubbles to make sense of their changing world. Life is a subjective state where perspectives change, depending on which bubble one observes from. For a displaced person occupying a variety of bubbles, perspectives change continuously, adding to feelings of displacement.

1. Displacement of Mai Ghoussoub

Once Ghoussoub moved from Beirut to London she was haunted by Hage’s shadows of other spaces. Emotional memories triggered by every day sounds and smells

in London take her back mentally to Beirut. Ghoussoub writes in her memoir that every time she describes a city, or visits one, she is in fact describing Beirut and revisiting it (13). For Ghoussoub, Beirut holds only wonderful memories, although on another level she admits that “lies that are the essence of nostalgia” (12). The emotional memories of Beirut capture her and she connects to Beirut through her writing. However, once in Beirut, Ghoussoub is aware of its shortcomings. She realizes that it is in London where she has “the chance to live in a multiracial environment, where the Asian is the computer engineer who connects me to the net, as well as the newsagent next door” (16). She appreciates London and the open-minded attitude of the people there, and she realizes that Beirut today gives her “one image of an Asian: an oppressed, over-exploited immigrant housemaid” (16). While she is in Beirut, positive feelings of London fill her mind; forgotten is the need to connect to Beirut. Instead Ghoussoub hopes that Beirut will relearn to be a cosmopolitan space.

Ghoussoub’s story “My Skin and I” (105) further illuminates this tug of war between places. It is a humorous rendition of a disparity between her current identity and the culture into which she is born. Ghoussoub endows her skin with a voice and her personified skin holds a monologue lamenting the promised life under the sun, “not the unbearable kind but a mild and friendly Mediterranean sun.” The skin deplures it is not free anymore as it is covered with “wool and long sleeves and gloves and socks” (105). This story embodies Ghoussoub’s lies of nostalgia. We all know how relentless the Mediterranean sun can shine-- it is not mild or friendly; it is only because Ghoussoub is far removed from Beirut and the hot Mediterranean sun that she yearns to walk under it. She moved to England to escape and be free but realizes that under five layers of clothing she is not. She is literally limited in her movements by her clothes and

symbolically by her memories of Beirut. She is captured by memories of home and they prevent her from feeling at home in her new surroundings (Hage). This story illustrates and clinches Ghoussoub's displacement as it reveals how she is forever divided between her two worlds.

Another example of Ghoussoub's displacement is the story "M in Exile." It is not impossible that the 'M' in the story stands for Ghoussoub herself. In the story M is forced to leave her country (just like Ghoussoub herself) and feels positive about the move. M looks forward to learning a new language, acquiring new habits and gaining more freedom than she would have in her own country. She adapts to new ways but her parents do not settle well and when M's country goes back to normal, they all return to their homeland. Because her parents had continuously talked about "the wonderful things back home," M believed that "going back would bring happiness" (20).

However, upon return to her country, home was not exactly home anymore. M had had another home for many years now; she lived her adolescence away from her country, from its language, its streets and habits (20). As a result, M felt displaced, she had split into two. The first M loved it back home and the second M felt as a foreigner. The two M's are haunted by Hage's shadows of other spaces, rendering M forever in search of the missing space.

Ghoussoub gives voice to her own displacement through her narratives and uses them as a tool to handle her own dichotomy. Richard Allen writes in, "When Narrative Fails," a person's identity is the narrative he embodies and is more than a structured sequence of words, it is told in part 'unconsciously' and collects images, emotions, and words (28). Through the process of narrating, Ghoussoub negotiates her

own identity and through her writing she maintains that identity as she grounds herself in the text.

Ghoussoub's ability to hold multiple perspectives, similar to the different bubbles Hage mentioned in his lecture, are portrayed in her story "Beirut: A Visible City on the Road." Ghoussoub recounts the story of two youths in a train compartment who are listening to a sitcom. This sound disturbs a stereotyped Englishman. Ghoussoub describes him as conservative with a ruddy complexion. He rudely orders the young men to reduce the noise and to switch off the device. Ghoussoub realizes she is the only one who understands both "the desire of the pink man to defend his individual space and the need of the two young men to share theirs" (12). She is able to understand the enjoyment of the youths listening to their sitcom while simultaneously understanding the Englishman's need for silence. Ghoussoub is able to switch Hagean "bubbles" and change perspective. Through her multicultural experiences she gained the ability to perceive the world from a variety of perspectives (bubbles). One of the advantages of starting anew in different places is this acquired ability to switch bubbles. Without this ability one becomes not only displaced but also isolated. Ghoussoub no longer belonged to Beirut but neither did she belong to London or any other specific place.

2. Displacement of Zena El Khalil

Born in Nigeria, El Khalil never belonged to her surroundings. She grew up as an expatriate and marginal to the people around her, because she was a white girl in a black African nation. El Khalil traveled frequently to America and Europe when she was young. As a result she became a modern day nomad who is forever on the move,

settling down only for a while before moving on again, making connections to people in other places. El Khalil is somewhat similar to Khalaf's creative writing students at the American University of Beirut who are portrayed as "positioned on the crossroads between cultures" (115). El Khalil, like Khalaf's creative writing students, reinvents herself at each new location and copes with separateness but never has any real or lasting feelings of belonging.

The term displaced does not fully describe a modern day nomad like El Khalil. A new term has to be invented to describe people like El Khalil. She does not yearn for any specific place and is not exilic or diasporic. A better term to describe her would be fluidic, taking on any shape at anytime. As Bauman in "Liquid Life" points out, "liquid life, just like liquid modern society, cannot keep its shape or stay on course for long" (1); it is unstable and continuously in motion. El Khalil grew up in the unstable space that encourages migration, the certainty of leaving Nigeria one day was present in El Khalil's daily life throughout her childhood. She knew that as an expatriate she would have to leave and live somewhere else. She was captured early by a migratory image of herself and in her mind transported herself elsewhere. El Khalil received her education on three continents and had to re-invent and adapt herself every time she arrived somewhere new. Her time at an American primary school in Africa was completely different from her High School years in the UK, where she was forced to adapt to a British system of education. The completion of her BA in Beirut and her MA in the US confirmed El Khalil as a forever wanderer.

It is striking that El Khalil introduces herself to the reader by using one of the oldest lives she can recollect. She is Druze, and Druze believe in reincarnation, where all souls are reborn as humans and this could explain El Khalil's use of this aspect of

her identity as an element to confirm her roots. El Khalil opens her memoir writing about herself in the persona of Hussein, as one of her identities from 1901. She describes her own death as Hussein during the sinking of the Titanic and recalls how as Hussein, “I lay at the bottom of the sea for almost five-and-a-half years. I wandered in the darkness all by myself, searching for the glitz and glam they called New York. I could not find it. I walked for years to no avail” (18). Hussein can be interpreted as an analogy of El Khalil herself who is also searching for something and feels herself wandering in the dark. She continues the analogy and writes that in her next life she resurfaced in “the form of a baby girl with endearing blue-green eyes. I had spent so much time underwater that I brought something back with me” (19). The different facets of her realities and the space she creates to deal with them can only be expressed through her narratives. El Khalil is not just Nigerian, British, American or Lebanese, she is all of these at the same time. So many memories of other spaces are triggered continuously, preventing her from feeling that she belongs anywhere, emphasizing her non-belonging and her displacement. Mentally she is always somewhere else, and compares her current location with other locations. Her need to reconcile them in one coherent space is a daunting task for her. She is literally torn between cultures and spaces. She is only able to discuss these spaces indirectly through former identities. It is as Asmahan, another of her former selves, that El Khalil says “I often felt torn between the two worlds of the East and West”: El Khalil uses her former lives as a technique to emphasize her own peregrination (23).

After High school El Khalil decides to study in Beirut and writes “I had visited Beirut several times in my childhood and always hated it. I hated the heat. I hated the traffic. I hated the incessant car honking. I hated the *kaak* vendors on the street

straddling their sweaty bicycles”(48). Repetition here leaves no doubt, El Khalil hated Beirut. She questioned everything Beirut offered, heat, traffic, noise, pollution and dirt everywhere. However, she felt it was something she just had to do: “It was something deep and internal” (49). As a Lebanese and Druze, if El Khalil wanted to settle in Lebanon she would have to connect to her country. In her memoir El Khalil personifies Beirut as if the city is an entity capable of putting spells on people. As a matter of fact, Beirut succeeded and trapped El Khalil under her spell, captivating her to stay in Beirut until today. Beirut enchanted her and that is why she stayed. El Khalil seems not able to accept her residence in Beirut without some kind of explanation, “[Beirut] told me to come and I obeyed” (49). Her wandering could only be tamed by a personified city and cause her to settle long enough to write her memoir.

For El Khalil, fiction serves to construct versions of reality where she is able to concretize all her various wandering selves on paper. In the opening scene of her memoir she reveals the loss of her necklace that symbolizes her birth. El Khalil even wonders, “if that necklace actually existed. Sometimes I wonder if I am even real” (9). It is even more significant when the reader learns that the necklace is in the shape of an anchor, a symbol for stability and permanence. Losing such a symbol of her birth settles El Khalil’s displacement. She literally lost her anchor and has been drifting ever since. Writing a memoir rather than discussing these topics is easier, in life some experiences belong to the realm of the unsaid, the unsayable (Allen 28). Narrating reveals the unconscious and writing allows El Khalil distance to analyze her reality.

Reality for El Khalil is hard to grasp. She describes a game where she stares into the mirror: “If I stare long enough, the eyes become those of another being. On the other side of the mirror, I step out of myself ... It is terrifying to come face to face with

yourself – to see what you really are. That you could be real” (9). Having to re-invent herself so many times might have caused El Khalil to wonder who she really is.

3. Displacement of Naima El Bezaz

Whisked at the age of four to the Netherlands as part of the wave of guest workers that migrated in the 60's and 70's from Morocco and Turkey, El Bezaz had to grow up in a society different from her parents.' This meant she was oblivious to the socially constructed norms and habits of her parents but very much aware of the Dutch norms. Children unconsciously absorb the values of a society and make these values their own. (Bourdieu 78). Consequently, El Bezaz absorbed the norms and values of the Dutch society. Unfortunately for her, she discovers that as an immigrant's daughter she is not acknowledged as Dutch or even as an equal. As an immigrant she is stigmatized as an inferior because “the relationship between the Muslim community and the larger society is shaped by a public discourse that emphasizes the backward nature of Islam and the oppressed position of women in it” (Ozyurt 265). She grew up as a displaced person because as an immigrant's daughter she did not belong to her society and had no alternative place to belong to.

Living in the wrong neighborhood and eating the wrong food, the Dutch stereotype her as an inferior. Without knowing her, society rejects her and labels her as 'allochtoon.' Allochtoon is a Dutch word literally meaning “coming from another country. It is irrelevant to them that she speaks perfect Dutch. Defining aspects of her person prevents her from fitting in (Maalouf 38). Simultaneously, the Moroccan community rejects her on the grounds that she is too Dutch. For El Bezaz there is no place that accepts her--she is rejected from both societies. Writing is an escape route for

her, it is her platform. What she cannot express verbally she writes down, allowing her voice to be heard.

El Bezaz uses her writing to challenge society and capture her audience. The opening phrase of her memoir, “Ik ben een Marokaan in een vinexwijk” (7), directly sets the mood. It is a statement and a confrontational and challenging thought to have a Moroccan in a white suburb. It is a rarity and goes against the socially constructed norms and values of the Dutch. Translated in English her phrase says, “I am a Moroccan in a white suburb.” Moroccans and other immigrants are presumed to live in big cities and run down neighborhoods, not in affluent suburbs. Migrants speak their own language, eat their own food and do not participate in Dutch society. Suburbs are an example of concealment of power and although these diffused power relations do not cause or create class divisions, they legitimize social differences (Bourdieu 77). The divisions of neighborhoods and immigrant neighborhoods appear natural to Dutch society. What is constructed becomes the norm. El Bezaz challenges Dutch society by being their neighbor and her opening phrase, in Dutch, can be seen as a statement to Dutch society to subvert the norm.

Sadly, it simultaneously reveals El Bezaz’s displacement: her neighborhood is not her neighborhood-- she is the odd one out. In fact, the opening phrase discloses a misfit, she is the square piece in a round puzzle. It is a potent phrase, because it reveals in few words El Bezaz’s audacity confronting her displacement. It is presumed by the Dutch society that as an immigrant’s daughter her chances of success are next to none. Ironically in the eyes of the Moroccan community, she is successful because she lives in a neighborhood full of white ‘autochtonen.’ Yet, those look upon her as the odd one out, and their main concern is that El Bezaz’s arrival will cause real estate prices to plummet

(7). One of the assumptions in Dutch society is that immigrants and everything related cannot add value to anything but instead bring down prices. So, when El Bezaz was invited for the first time by her publishers, at a time when not many Moroccans published novels, she sensed their disappointment when she showed up with white skin and perfect Dutch. They wanted her to fit the profile of an immigrant's daughter and sell her as such. However, El Bezaz is successful and speaks perfect Dutch, her children attend a Christian school and she lives in a suburb. Thus El Bezaz not only defies these misconceptions but writes about it in the Dutch language and proves it false. In other words, despite her potential to break down stereotypical thought she remains an outsider.

Language is essentially wobbly; what is said or written down does not always correspond to what is interpreted. There is always a surplus of meaning that the signifier is unable to control (Bertens 126). Sometimes there is a surplus meaning that the author intends to convey, which in El Bezaz's case is true. El Bezaz searches for a place within the Dutch community. She provokes, challenges and subverts expectations shocking her audience into a reaction. A postmodern artist's aim is to "shock, disturb and outrage the general public by producing art that would literally transform how the world was experienced" (Malpas 20). El Bezaz succeeds very well in provoking the community with her affronting interview on Dutch TV. The interview even led to death threats from the Moroccan community. El Bezaz explores the postmodern questions of reality and the world: What is a world? What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted and how do they differ? (Malpas 24). As a Moroccan in a Vinexwijk she does not fit and her memoir attempts to question this fixed Dutch or Moroccan identity as she is searching for a place where these colliding cultures could meet.

An illustration of her displacement is her summer wedding in Morocco. She uses humor as a tool to describe her wedding there. During the celebrations she and her husband sit on golden thrones and the whole scene is described in delightful sentences (23). Dutch readers cannot help but be amused and ‘entertained’ however, Moroccan readers would not appreciate to have their tradition mocked. The whole event is parodied; El Bezaz uses short and crisp phrases that reveal her alienation from Morocco. El Bezaz is disgruntled at her own wedding (23) and in return aggravates the Moroccan community by a farcical rendition of her wedding, highlighting her displacement.

However, El Bezaz is divided between her rejection and affinity of Moroccan traditions. When her friend refers to a traditional Moroccan dish, known as *harira*, as “een lekker soepie”⁷, El Bezaz becomes extremely offended. She passionately explains that in *harira* “Je ziel, je hart, je liefde”⁸ (25) is located where a history of centuries is found. Evidently her partiality to Moroccan tradition is as deep as her renunciation is fierce. El Bezaz is caught in a catch 22 where she is unable to be either Dutch or Moroccan and whatever project she embarks on as an individual is bound to establish her as too Dutch or too Moroccan. She is stereotyped into an entity by both communities and her writing is an attempt to find a place where she belongs. Through her writing she attempts to elucidate to both communities their backwardness which is not appreciated by either community. Disconnected from her family and her surrounding, El Bezaz is lost and searches for a place to belong. She is viewed as an outcast and finds herself in a place “just beyond the frontier between ‘us’ and the ‘outsiders’ [a] perilous territory of not-belonging” (Said, “Reflections on Exile” 177).

⁷ Trans: “a simple soup” ‘soepie’ is a slang word voor soup

⁸ Trans: “your soul, your heart, your love”

El Bezaz aware of her non-belonging and her predicament of always being caught in the middle found writing to be a way of expressing frustration.

Hyperbole is a tool El Bezaz uses to vent her frustrations. Her observations are caught ruthlessly with her pen and she ridicules everyone and everything in a condescending manner. She describes the houses in the suburb as constructions of cardboard which are built hastily and without any imagination. To emphasize the flimsiness of the houses, she exaggerates and writes that when a neighbor drills ten houses down the road, it feels as if the dentist is working on her wisdom tooth (7). She continues to make fun of the Dutch and their suburban space and questions the reason everyone moves there. People in the Netherlands, in general, dislike the suburbs but everyone chooses to move there because of the green spaces available. Many hip Dutch make the move to the suburbs and then gripe about it which seems to be the fashionable thing to do. El Bezaz uses this duplicity and exclaims “hoe ben ik dan in godsnaam in deze vinexwijk terechtgekomen?”⁹(14). She mimics the Dutch and their duplicity to show them how ridiculous they sound. Although El Bezaz tries to belong to this suburban group, or else why did she move there, she rejects it at the same time. She hides her feelings of dissatisfaction behind offensive jokes and exaggeration.

Displacement for El Bezaz seems permanent; nevertheless she attempts to reinvent herself continuously. She briefly joins the Christelijke Democratische Appel, CDA, a Christian political party, and she writes, “I actually like Christians,”¹⁰ mocking the Dutch who claim to like Muslims (13). It is atypical for a Moroccan Muslim female to join a Christian conservative party. I imagine she joined in order to narrate and ridicule the experience. Her observations are nothing more than textuality. Reality is

⁹ Trans: “How in God’s name did I end up in this suburb”

¹⁰ Trans: “ik houd eigenlijk wel van christenen”.

subjective, it is not something waiting to be observed and then recorded accordingly. Reality is an effect of language (Lucy 15). By narrating her stint with the Christian Conservative Party, she redefines it and makes it lose its other worldliness. Now El Bezaz can choose to reject a group, she writes that she does not belong to people without emotions, action or theatricality (13). Here in this passage El Bezaz defines herself by what she is not and so continues her search for belonging.

By moving into a suburb full of 'autochtonen,' El Bezaz's displacement became tangible to her. Her resentment of being stereotyped and rejected created a desire to provoke and shake the Dutch into action. As a postmodern writer she attempts to disturb and challenge her audience by alluding to what a culture represses or excludes from their daily presentation (Malpas 29). Dutch duplicity is not acknowledged and rarely addressed, officially there are equal chances for all but in reality migrants are considered inferior. El Bezaz feels her difference as she searches for her own space, within an existing space, realizing that it excludes and rejects her. She clutches her difference as a weapon and uses willfulness, exaggeration and overstatements as methods to compel the world to listen (Said, "Reflection on Exile" 182).

To sum up, her only stable reality is textual; within the blank space of black and white she rules and feels at home. She is able to invent and reinvent herself repeatedly. From suburban housewife to a trial with the Christian political party, she puts on identities like a pair of shoes and discards them at will. She is inherently unstable, and as a result everything is a temporary arrangement as she searches for a place.

C. Conclusion

Displacement is a condition whereby physical presence in one place clashes with memories and shadows of other places. There is a struggle to develop a sense of belonging to one place while remembering another place. Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz, despite their diverse backgrounds all suffer from displacement. Ghoussoub lived between England and Lebanon and although she is comfortable in both places, she does not belong to either one. She can be compared to Said's "*forever wanderer*" who masters and expresses herself in her new language but is unable to shake off a sense of alienation with the new home. El Khalil is a modern day nomad who grew up as an expatriate yet never feels at home in any of the places she lived in. El Bezaz is Dutch but looks Moroccan and spurned by both societies she is divided between the two.

Each author confronts the shadows of memories from other places. In order to belong, it helps to have memory and self, develop in one fixed location. One cannot feel at home anywhere if memories continuously transport one to other places. Ghoussoub's personified skin complaining about being covered up is an illustration of Hage's example of haunting shadows of other places. Ghoussoub feels displaced in London and misses the sun in Beirut. Her skin laments the cold and lack of sunshine forgetting how the Mediterranean sun can be scorching hot in July and August. Hage's example of unstable places fits El Khalil. Aware from a young age that she would not stay in Nigeria, El Khalil had moved mentally to the next place. Hage refers to this next place as *Illusio*, the space where a migratory subject invents and creates herself. Opening her memoir with the loss of a necklace symbolizing her birth is a metaphor for her displacement. The necklace is in the shape of an anchor and El Khalil herself continuous today to drift from one place to the next without ever mooring. Although El

Bezaz lives in one place, she does not belong to her surrounding and is perpetually lost between two cultures. As the eternal outsider looking in, El Bezaz has a clear view of all the hypocrisies present in both Dutch and Moroccan communities and she does not hesitate to confront both with what she sees.

Through writing their personal stories each author attempts to negotiate who she is and where she belongs. Writing is a way for them to make sense of their world and give themselves a place within society. Although each author suffers from displacement, each developed her own negotiation style. In an attempt to reach their multicultural audience, they build bridges to connect readers to each other while educating and provoking them in order to negotiate a change in the perspective of their reader towards the 'other.' Writing for Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz is a way of reaching out and negotiating an understanding within their multicultural surroundings.

CHAPTER III

IDENTITY AND NEGOTIATION

A. Introduction

“Identity cannot be compartmentalized,” Amin Maalouf argues; no-one is just one identity. One is never only Lebanese, Dutch or Moroccan but rather a mixture of identities (2). Since people are made up of several identities in a specific mixture called society, it is impossible to divide them into halves or thirds. For Maalouf, the identity question, “What do you really feel inside?” has no clear answer. Maalouf refutes the assumption that people have only one so called ‘affiliation,’ and suggests that it is possible to have several belongings at the same time, as long as one is free to claim a belonging without prejudice (26). According to Maalouf’s argument when El Bezaz claims she is Dutch, it would be important for the Moroccan community in the Netherlands not to look upon her as a traitor, and when both, Ghoussoub and El Khalil adopt Western elements it would be essential that the Lebanese society does not reject them for their Westernness. An individual can have several affiliations simultaneously provided they can have them without prejudice. However, having several identities requires negotiation skills in order to be accepted by society. It is not an easy task to juggle different affiliations.

Although El Bezaz is labeled by Dutch society as a migrant, she does not fit the prototype. She is an educated Dutch citizen, and she does not hold any memory of a homeland hence has no desire to return there. She is unlike the displaced person of Aiden Arrowsmith, who clings to a primordial notion of an ethnic identity in search for

certainty – a secure sense of origin and roots (177). Despite her sense of belonging to the Netherlands she still needs to negotiate cultural and religious difference because of negative discourse of Islam (Ozyurt 255). Ghoussoub and El Khalil share similar problems. All three authors are like Maalouf’s specific mixture, which is unique to every individual, and requires a certain negotiation of worlds and identities forcing them to juggle the different values and norms of these worlds (20). What is accepted in one culture might be frowned upon in another. It might be necessary to hide parts of oneself (Maalouf 26). Said admits that while writing some explicit political books he felt that he “had been fashioning a self who revealed for a Western audience things that had so far been either hidden or not discussed” (Said, *Between Worlds* 101). For example one culture may accept certain values, while the other culture frowns upon these same values. Roles that actually define identities take a different form from one culture to another, making it especially difficult to juggle cultural expectations. In this chapter, I show how Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz juggle and negotiate their multiple identities and how their different negotiation styles are attempts to connect the ‘other’ to their respective worlds.

1. Negotiation of Naima El Bezaz

Part of El Bezaz’s negotiation of her multiplicities involves handling other people’s perceptions of her. Migrants in the Netherlands have to fight against discrimination, exclusion and marginalization (Ozyurt 246). El Bezaz’s strategy is humor and ridicule. One example of this is an anecdote about a time when she is invited to give a lecture to a group of “inburgeraars” – newly arrived immigrants who follow cultural classes in order to become familiar with Dutch language and culture

(72). El Bezaz is received by a teacher who blunders and reveals her own ignorance when she tells El Bezaz, “Because you are also not from here, you see the thing the way they do, which is what we do not see”¹¹, implying that for her, El Bezaz is also foreign (73). Such a statement reveals the stereotyping that takes place in Dutch society. El Bezaz in her daily life is continuously confronted by people who see her as Moroccan, a migrant and label her as such because they are not able to look past her exterior. Part of her negotiation pertains to breaking down this stereotyping by the Dutch by holding up a mirror to her readers in order to reveal to them their generalizing attitude. The teacher and her ‘othering’ phrase can be seen as a metaphor for all short-sighted citizens who classify their fellow citizens based on skin, hair or eye color. Why would El Bezaz see things the way newly arrived foreigners do? Because she looks foreign? It is exasperating for El Bezaz to continuously face these kinds of prejudiced encounters.

El Bezaz continues her humorous rendition of the misguided teacher. Through the use of humor El Bezaz negotiates this confrontation with a Dutch citizen (the teacher) and her Moroccan self. She includes this episode of her life in her memoir in order to expose the fixed idea society has about Moroccans. While El Bezaz attributes the teacher’s behavior to the use of drugs, the teacher furthers the conflict by using the diminutive form of the word book (boekje), parodying the condescending approach to immigrant adults by addressing them in children’s language. Diminutives are usually used when speaking to toddlers. The comment of the teacher that ‘boekjes’ can be bought in the book shop but in their case can be borrowed from the library, further signifies the teacher’s attitude. She believes that immigrants are not well off and cannot afford to buy books and must instead borrow them from the public library. The message

¹¹ Trans: Want jij bent ook niet van hier, dus zie jij dingen zoals zij, wat wij weer niet zien.

El Bezaz has for her readers is that this teacher should not give an ‘inburgerings’ course as the teacher herself does not possess the qualities promoted in the course.

The teacher in El Bezaz’s anecdote can be seen a metaphor for a society that stereotypes immigrants into social roles and economic statuses. Not all immigrants are poor or unable to succeed in Dutch society; however, it is society that shapes and instills beliefs, rituals and attitudes (Maalouf 25). For El Bezaz negotiating these two different worlds, (the Dutch and the immigrant’s) is only possible by exposing and caricaturing the Dutch. Through humor she exposes the hypocrisy of a society that welcomes immigrants but then treats them condescendingly. Bourdieu’s work on cultural production helps explain the beliefs driving Dutch society that El Bezaz parodies. Bourdieu, in *The Field of Cultural Production*, depicts the value of art as constructed by society. The art trader is not just the agent who gives value to a work of art by exposing or defaming, but the person who proclaims the value of art (77). As a result, prominent people buy works of the promoted artist with the conviction that it has true value and is worth buying. Like the value of art is produced by a production of a belief so is the view that all immigrants are inferior produced by a production of belief. As Ozyurt noted, the “relationship between the Muslim community and the larger society is shaped by a public discourse that emphasizes the backward nature of Islam,” hence what is constructed becomes the truth (246). Negotiating this prejudiced view of her person and the discrimination that follows it is a recurring event in El Bezaz’s life and her narratives give voice to her negotiation.

The Netherlands, as a free liberal society, does not admit of having any taboos. All subjects are supposedly open for discussion; however, it seems that some subjects are not so welcome. The immigrants, while meandering through the village, repeatedly

emphasize the liberal aspect and how grateful they are to be in Holland, a free country. El Bezaz humorously has the immigrants discuss various topics. In her attempt to portray the struggle of immigrants expressing their identities through finding similarities in everyday activities, such as hanging laundry, El Bezaz depicts the ridiculousness of the situation. El Bezaz continues her farcical portrayal of these foreigners in a Dutch village, by having one of the Somalis point at the hanging laundry and ask, “Large pant. What is that exactly?”¹² (79). An older Dutch lady, dressed in traditional clothing, responds scornfully with “Sir, here in the Netherlands we don’t talk about that”¹³ (79). She is not willing to even remotely discuss her laundry or underwear. Dutch are prudish and El Bezaz exploits this stereotype here. The phrase that in Holland ‘this’ is not discussed abruptly ends the chapter. The reader is left hanging with the phrase in the air. There is no choice but to reflect on the truth of the phrase, not everything is discussed in Holland. El Bezaz throws phrases and statements at her reader in order to provoke a reaction, a thought.

El Bezaz’s family arrived in the Netherlands hoping for a better life. However, an immigrant is at a disadvantage in several ways because of rejection and humiliation; he is constantly looking for signs of contempt, sarcasm or pity (Maalouf 38). Maalouf writes that the first instinct is to pass unnoticed and almost be taken for a ‘native.’ However, El Bezaz does not have the right skin tone or the right name and it is no use trying to pass as a Dutch native. She is caught between two identities, Moroccan on the outside and Dutch on the inside. El Bezaz negotiates these “dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and the struggles to alter these dynamics” through her narratives (Nagel 120). El Bezaz regards the Netherlands as her country and considers herself part of it and

¹² Trans: “Grote broek. Wat is dat eigenlijk?”

¹³ Trans: “Meneer, hier in Nederland praten wij daar niet over”

feels she has the right to criticize it. However, Maalouf argues that if you treat someone with contempt, your observation, whether justified or not, will be seen as an act of “aggression and will make the ‘other’ obstinate and unapproachable rather than instigate change for the better” (Maalouf 42). This observation seems substantiated by the public outrage¹⁴ El Bezaz created after reading a passage from *Vinexvrouwen* out loud on television. In a demeaning manner El Bezaz mentions how all white Dutch sit in the sun until their skin peels off like cheap paint (84). She lumps ‘all white Dutch’ in one collection in a revenge strategy since many Dutch label all Moroccans as guest workers. In the selected passage, El Bezaz’s neighbor, an older lady, suntans with bare breasts and a hairy crotch, all which are clearly visible from El Bezaz’s window. El Bezaz uses hyperbole and explicit language to provoke the Dutch readers. El Bezaz’s message here is that Dutch naturalness goes too far and is actually repulsive. Now, not all Dutch suntan in this manner and many never sit in the sun. Consequently, many Dutch rejected being labeled, whereas Dutch society is guilty of labeling immigrants all the time. El Bezaz’s negotiation strategy is one of confrontation: she shakes the collective security as established truths are questioned and expectations are challenged (Malpas 18). An ‘allochtoon’ who criticizes Dutch society and who had the audacity to do so out loud on television led to many angry reactions. The infuriated reactions of the Dutch corroborate Maalouf’s statement of making the ‘other’ obstinate and unapproachable. By mocking the Dutch and Moroccans alike, El Bezaz establishes herself as a postmodern individual who negotiates herself through the use of antagonizing caricatures with the intent to provoke. Despite her writing, revealing the

¹⁴ http://pauwenwitteman.vara.nl/Gast-detail.1575.0.html?&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=19078&cHash=df08c2fe47160a779a13e74105bebb1c

pain and feelings of being a misfit, El Bezas negotiates multiple identities in an unjust society.

2. Negotiation of Mai Ghossoub

Compared to El Bezas's negotiation style, Ghossoub's style is conciliatory; she attempts to build bridges between her different worlds. Ghossoub was forced to flee her homeland: "I had fled Lebanon where a terrible civil war had made it impossible for people like me, who didn't belong to any clan, to fit in or survive" (37). For Ghossoub arriving in London and communicating in a new language meant a whole new perspective was added to her world. She resembles an exile who "is oriented to a distant place and feels he does not belong where he lives" (Barbour 293). From a vibrant city where Mediterranean weather permitted an outdoor life, she arrived in an Anglo-Saxon city that lived inside, in dim light, with no shore and no café life (13). Ghossoub did not identify with this British indoor life, and despite still being surrounded by Arab sounds and tastes, she did not feel she belonged. Something was missing for her, and she realized that Arab cultural life in the form of books was absent. An exile tries to insert elements of home in his new culture: an "exile often conjures up something new in the very act of looking back" (Peters 20). It was by looking back to Beirut and wishing to assimilate cultural life from Beirut into London that she decided to start her publishing house, El Saqi Books in 1983. She enriched English culture by exposing the British to the marginal Arab writers in English translations. Ghossoub began a lifelong negotiation of East and West with the establishment of the El Saqi Books.

Ghoussoub discovered early on that the truth depends on one's location, perspective and history. She writes, "It was in my *Lycee Français de Beirut* that the Crusaders were either saints or cruel colonizers, depending on whether the textbooks were in French or Arabic" (15). In order to negotiate her identity within English society it was necessary to add an Arab voice. Her publishing house, El Saqi Books, gave a voice to 'others.' In keeping with Ghoussoub's belief that books are the best tool to create harmony, she "wanted to be a Carrefour, a roundabout, where languages met, where one could no longer tell where the East starts and where the West ends" (39). She aims to achieve a continuous negotiation between the British people and the various new immigrants arriving in the UK. Through the publication of different marginal voices, Ghoussoub attempts to create an intellectual emphasis on 'diversity' and not on 'divergency.'

Ghoussoub believes that it is through literature, the imagination and dreams of story tellers, that the world can know the 'other' in reality. Literature speaks the language of individuals to individuals. Ghoussoub uses herself as example when she writes, "I'm left with the characters of my novel, I'm interacting with them for the whole length of the book. I cannot, even if I wanted to, generalize, look at them with my society's prejudices, or turn them into clichés. Novels humanize their readers" (38). Ghoussoub knows that when perspectives are turned around the 'other' becomes the self.

Ghoussoub's story, "Lebanon: Slices of Life," illustrates this element. Ghoussoub gives the reader here the perspective of Rida, a Lebanese taxi driver, who discusses politics with his foreign passenger. Ghoussoub humanizes this Lebanese taxi driver by portraying him as a regular kind of guy. During the drive he expresses

opposing political opinions continuously and as such resembles most taxi drivers anywhere in the world. In one conversation, he proudly states “We taught Israel a lesson; every person was ready to sacrifice their life to, *fida Sayyid Nasrallah*,” and not much later the same Rida derisively comments “Hezbollah should have known better, what heroism is there in creating a million refugees” (41). By offering her readers an inside view of the ‘other’ and his perspective on the politics of his country, she shows her readers that Lebanese are just like them. Lebanese gripe about politics and agree and disagree and voice their opinion just like anyone else anywhere in the world. To sum up, Ghoussoub negotiates differences through connecting readers with perspectives from elsewhere (Ozyurt 244). She gives the unknown ‘other’ a voice in her stories and humanizes them.

Ghoussoub mediates between her Western and Eastern worlds. The story, “Lebanon: Slices of Life,” also introduces the reader to two different neighborhoods in Beirut. One neighborhood experiences a disturbance caused by the Husseiniya,¹⁵ with loudspeakers and prayers. Every six hours the call to prayer is heard and the chanting is invasive and disturbs leading the wife in the story to remark, “At least they could have selected a sheikh with a better voice” (43). If someone is going to call out loud through loudspeakers, he better have a good voice. Ghoussoub adds this bit of humor to humanize her Eastern character, intending for identification to take place between the West and East. A Western reader might smile and realize that not all Lebanese are extremely religious, and agree with the wife.

Ghoussoub juxtaposes the sound of the call to prayer with the sound of a recently opened nightclub. A character grumbles that a nightclub recently opened “and

¹⁵ Shi’i Mosque

the pop music and the synthesizers assault my eardrums till four a.m. every morning” (44). How unpleasant for anyone to have a nightclub on their doorstep. Ghoussoub portrays a slice of life from a Lebanese perspective, showing her Western readers that East and West are not all that different. Progress and tradition can be the source of disturbance for ordinary citizens all over the world. By blending Rida’s tale with a humorous anecdote of noise pollution, Ghoussoub tells a universal tale--it is a tale without bearings that could have happened anywhere. Perhaps the subject would have been different, and instead of Hezbollah, we’d have Bush, or Blair, but the taxi driver would have shared his opinion uninvited, like most taxi drivers.

Ghoussoub’s approach to exile resembles Said’s exile, who uses metaphors to describe his vision and who assumes a detached perspective from which to examine his culture (Barbour 293). Ghoussoub’s ordinary characters from England and Lebanon stand for the bigger differences found between East and West. Ghoussoub is an outsider and a modern intellectual who looks in and uses her position in an attempt to build bridges and mediate between cultures. Writing allows her to bridge differences just as her exilic position helps her to gain a clearer view. She gains tremendous insight from her position, and as Said writes, “There are stories portraying exile as a condition that produces heroic, romantic, glorious even triumphant episodes in a person’s life” (*The Reflections on Exile* 49). Ghoussoub needs her exilic position in order to gain this insight. Her duality helps her in recognizing the ‘other’ as herself or vice versa.

Ghoussoub’s story “Soft Round Suzy,” reveals how identities can be fluid and the ‘other’ can become the self. Ghoussoub tells the tale of an uninspiring English girl, without any self-confidence. She encounters Suzy at her Oriental dance class and refers to her as “white, creamy, sweet Suzy” (84), who hides away in a corner and resembles

more an unhappy teenager than a young woman. Suzy hurries away from the skeleton-thin ballerinas and avoids all mirrors; Ghoussoub paints a picture of a shy English girl, pink, large and awkwardly withdrawn. Yet, Suzy, after only two Oriental dance sessions, changes into another person. Oriental dance comes effortlessly to Suzy; she is comfortable dancing figures of eight and her belly naturally follows the turn of her hips. Suzy starts using kohl powder to enhance her gaze, adds Oriental earrings and dyes her “colorless, faded blond hair dark” (85). Ghoussoub’s carefully chosen words, “white,” “creamy,” “sweet,” “colorless,” “faded” paint a dull and insipid character. However, under the influence of Oriental music, Suzy is transformed. She is no longer an awkward, fat and pink girl but a glamorous, sensual girl who smells of amber and musk. Suzy “had reinvented her identity” (86). Identity is not a fixed given, it is open to change because it is fluid (Malpas 1). One can choose the identity which fits him best. Ghoussoub shows her readers that you can re-invent yourself and the ‘other’ can become the self and vice versa.

With the story of Suzy, Ghoussoub aims to show her readers that identity has a fluid quality and that an “identity is not a given once and for all, it is built up and changes throughout a person’s lifetime” (Maalouf 23). Although Ghoussoub was the only Easterner in her Oriental dance class, it was the shy English girl who picked up on the moves and the vibes of being Eastern. Ghoussoub through her stories and observations constructs a connection between her Western world and her Eastern world. It is Suzy’s choice to be Eastern just like it is Ghoussoub’s choice to remain in England and adopt its monuments and customs as hers and become Western. She writes, “I went to another city, and it became mine, I became proud of some of its monuments and customs: London is home as well” (16). Through her mediating negotiation style

Ghoussoub shows the West and the East that identities are not fixed and one can adopt another identity, just like Ghoussoub did with England.

Ghoussoub attempts to reconcile her two worlds with the story of Suzy. Her story shows how it is possible to switch from one world to another. One simply has to look the part and one becomes the 'real': there is no 'real' Easterner or Westerner. Ghoussoub is supposed to be the real Easterner in the dance class, yet she cannot dance like the Western Suzy. Suzy succeeds in dancing Oriental and ends up looking more Oriental than Ghoussoub. The question is then, "Who is Oriental?," the one who looks it or the one who 'is it'? Identity is no more than a fictive creation that can be consumed at will (Bauman 10). Ghoussoub wants her reader to understand that if "clumsy, graceless Suzy" can be transformed into a sensual Suzy, the reverse must also be true, one can pick up any identity by negotiating different identities. Suzy's story affirms that identities are nothing more than mutable structures permanently open to redefinition (Malaouf 26). Suzy could be a metaphor for Ghoussoub's own adopted Englishness, Ghoussoub fitting into the Western world as naturally as Suzy did in the Eastern. Ghoussoub explicates to her readers the process that goes into creating a 'real' identity. She mediates between two different cultures in an attempt to show that identity is not innate.

Ghoussoub learned from a young age to be a mediator and her skill helped in building bridges between her two worlds once an adult. In her story "Me and My Gender: Missed Opportunities," she points at society's construction of gender as a confinement. She explains how from a very young age she learned how to negotiate her femaleness in a patriarchal society. In Lebanon, although westernized to some extent, (French was spoken), Arab mentality ruled. Ghoussoub writes, "It is OK to be born a

girl,” but in a Middle Eastern society not having a boy to perpetuate the family name was considered a misfortune (52). Her mother by repeating continuously “it was ok” confirms that: affirmation is really a negation. Ghousseub writes, “I am female, accepted as such but unconsciously or very silently wished different” (53). She uses the French translation of the term tomboy, *Garçon manqué*, a boy missed, an opportunity missed, to highlight the reality of her parents. Ghousseub juggles her femaleness with the characteristics of a boy. She liked playing football where “all was free and fun” until, in the shape of Sitt Zalfa, society steps in and stops Ghousseub from playing (54). Academically, Ghousseub juggles her femaleness with her mother’s desires for a boy. She excelled at math, pleasing her mother, who was not interested in typical ‘girl subjects’ like literature. Ghousseub understood that “this was a safer way of replacing the boy that was never to be born ... for sciences do not jeopardize virtue or reputation” (55). Being a woman is a form of confinement, it defines what one can and cannot do (Butler 23). For Ghousseub, negotiating these societal gender restrictions is a preparation for her later negotiations with her divided English and Lebanese selves. Her writing becomes a way to negotiate her own different identities while simultaneously involving a larger audience in the hope of reconciling their differences.

3. Negotiation of Zena El-Khalil.

El Khalil, the most postmodern of the three authors, negotiates not only her multiple identities but also divisions in Lebanese society. Unlike El Bezaz and Ghousseub, El Khalil is not simply switching cultures as in East and West, but switches sides in an internally divided East/West division in Lebanese society. She switches within Lebanon between those with an Eastern outlook and those with a Western

outlook. The Western orientated Lebanese do not hold on to traditions, they live a hedonistic life style and brush over the memory of the civil war. The more traditional Lebanese are not willing or able to join the fast train of modernity because for them the civil war is an unresolved source of pain (Haugbolle 199). The division El Khalil attempts to negotiate is between those who wish to commemorate the civil war and those who wish to forget it. Forgetting the past is a dreaded condition to be resisted at all costs (S. Khalaf 103). El Khalil is aware of the importance of the past and its necessity to make sense of the present through the past (Haugbolle 199). Indeed, El Khalil opens her memoir with a lost anchor and a past self of long ago. El Khalil's past, in the shape of a former self, searched the ocean floors for years to find his destination, this former self is a metaphor for El Khalil, who searches for her destination until today. Because El Khalil did not connect to her past she understands the importance of acknowledging one's past. Her writing is a search for herself and serves as a reference point for Lebanese society. Lebanese society is divided between people with a need to remember the civil war and people with a need to forget it (S. Khalaf 3). El Khalil sits on a border between the two camps and aims to negotiate an understanding between them.

According to Bauman, postmodern life is without meaning and nothing has any permanence. Life is like a series of new beginnings and series of successive endings. Therefore, in a postmodern society, survival depends on the speed with which products are consigned to waste and in such a society nothing is safe from the rule of disposability (3). Life in postmodern society cannot stand still and everything has to be able to be dismantled whether it is identities or war memories (Baumann 3). In Lebanon there is an "indifference and a weariness which borders on collective amnesia" towards

the civil war (S. Khalaf 14). A collective memory of the civil war in Lebanon is non-existent and many Lebanese prefer to dismiss their war memories and enter their future without it. For El Khalil it is unacceptable that the past should be delegated to the trash can and forgotten. El Khalil's negotiation with herself is involving and educating her readers by showing them the importance of an acknowledged past.

In modern Lebanon there are lots of ways to forget the past, and the Lebanese are familiar with all of them. Thinking out loud, El Khalil lists the numerous choices available in which citizens can forget, "Lexotamil, Xanax, Dewars White Horse, nightclubs and super nightclubs" (55). She is a dreamer, who aims to achieve world peace by spreading love (she spoke at TEDxAmsterdamWomen in 2013, "Choose Love over Hate"). By reflecting in her text on Lebanon's rebuilding project after the civil war, she highlights that the war is erased from memories and that the burden of having passed through a civil war is never addressed. She notes that, "Just like their buildings, the people were becoming sexy and alluring on the outside but hollow and empty on the inside" (55). Her observations resonate with Saree Makdisi who writes in "Beirut, a City without a History" that the focal point of the entire war became the new city center without even a passing reference to the dead and thousands who were kidnapped during the civil war (204). El Khalil, alienated from Lebanon, has the fresh look of the outsider looking in and clearly sees the Westernized version of Beirut. The new Downtown of Beirut is an "amalgam of decontextualized history-as-culture-cum-kitsch overridden with international luxury consumer goods" (Haugbolle 198). For many Lebanese, Downtown symbolizes a touristic center where the past never existed while for others the same place carries the atrocities of the civil war and no Western luxury goods, shops or restaurants can brush away the pain it experienced..

El Khalil uses her memoir to discuss the significance of this amnesia with her reader and points out the impossibility of a society that denies its past. El Khalil writes, “while a large portion of our population was trying to forget, there were those who, try as they may, could not forget. These were the families who no longer had homes. Who watched brothers and sisters die in front of their eyes” (56). El Khalil juxtaposes two kinds of people in Lebanese society, the ones that are weary and wished to move on and the ones that wanted to commemorate the war (S. Khalaf 14). El Khalil with her multicultural perspectives has a clear view of this Lebanese East/West division. According to El Khalil, the Westernized Lebanese are replacing their memories with silicon and do not realize the danger of not acknowledging one’s history. For if “many private memories never find a voice” injustices might appear to be forgotten but will forever linger (Haugbolle 199). To put it bluntly, without addressing their past and agreeing on a consensus, there is no stability for the future of Lebanon.

Through her personification of the streets and explanations of how these streets hide themselves behind fashion boutiques and fast food dinners, she underlines the active role, the dichotomy of Beirut, forgetting and remembering. The repetition of the term ‘I see’ compels the reader to begin to see the schizophrenic Beirut that El Khalil depicts. The readers begin to open their eyes and see for themselves what she is so bluntly trying to tell them – “you cannot hide behind a magazine sipping coffee on a busy sidewalk. You cannot blind yourself with false ideals. You have to walk the streets” (102). She negotiates with her reader and informs him, “although you do not see the damage, you cannot conclude there is no damage.” Her negotiation serves to open society’s eyes and bring together the different strands of Lebanese society.

El Khalil with her outsider's view warns her readers against denying their past. A society that does not acknowledge its past is on a slippery slope as mistakes of the past are likely to be repeated (Haugbolle 196). El Khalil negotiates with her readers in an attempt to make them recognize and question the direction society is taking. If there is no meaning, no belonging, people will search for one, and in Lebanon that identity could be a religious one which might bring back another civil war (Haugbolle 196). Furthermore, without acknowledging a past, a society is flattened into a perpetual present and turns into a consumer society (Bauman 4). If a hierarchy develops in the form of a pyramid then at the top there will be no meaning, no belonging, only a hedonistic and egotistical lifestyle. At the bottom of the pyramid, people will cling to their only identity available while holding the bits and pieces together (Bauman 5). El Khalil interweaves her personal experiences with collective ones. By contemplating personal and collective experiences throughout her memoir, she becomes like a reference point. She sits on the border between her different worlds and writes to educate (Niday 61). She is a reference point for readers in Lebanon as well as for Western readers.

In her attempts to educate readers from the West, she shows them "how similar we all [are]" (26). She illustrates this by showing how people all over the world fear, grieve and mourn in exactly the same way. El Khalil uses her personal experience during the 9/11 attack, when she had a firsthand experience of the Twin Towers collapsing. She observed that during the mayhem in the aftermath, people for a moment lost their anonymity. New York is known as the city that never sleeps, where everyone minds their own business, but as New York collapsed under debris, Kurt became the son of Amy and Joe, and Christine, daughter of Joyce and Brian. Typical American

names to emphasize that the victims were mainly American. Everyone reached out and assisted everybody else, while strangers suddenly seemed like our closest relatives (26). However, the solidarity did not last for long. Overnight El Khalil was stereotyped into an Arab and was transformed into the dangerous ‘other.’ No longer was she a fellow New Yorker but an Arab. Her hair gave her away. She rejected the questioning of all Arabs and replied with stories of her own. In her memoir El Khalil calls out and exclaims, “New York, why could you not remember the best thing about you? Why could you not remember that you belonged to everyone?” (33). El Khalil is betrayed by New York, as she too was a victim and not the perpetrator. Before 9/11 New York belonged to everyone but after the attack anyone that looked Arab was regarded suspiciously. Americans expected El Khalil, and all other Arabs, to have an explanation for 9/11. El Khalil asks them, “What if we didn’t know? What if it had nothing to do with us?” (38). She asks a direct question in the hope that this question will resonate in society and cause people to realize that it had nothing to do with El Khalil or any other ordinary Arab walking the streets of New York. Through her eagle’s eye perspective, she sees the random violence on both sides and explores different avenues to reach out. She observes that, “How, when faced with a crisis, we often lose everything we’ve spent our lives working to become” (26). The objective of this lesson to her Western readers is the realization that everyone grieves the same way and nobody has answers. Her negotiation style is a strategic plan which lays out all the facts in front of her readers. Like a negotiator, who attempts to bring about change, she informs all parties of the different elements.

Beirut, I Love You, uses new forms of narrative in order to engage the reader. She doodles little drawings over the pages, she switches from poetry to e-mail entries

and uses temporal distortion in order to hold the reader's attention. Engaging any reader, let alone a Lebanese reader, with questions about the past, present or future is a daunting task. According to Makdisi, it is possible to "narrate about the past, the future, or the present, but such a narrative demands new forms, structures, and devices" (207). El Khalil's pastiche guarantees reader participation and in combination with metafiction and temporal distortion, it is the new form of narrative Makdisi refers to. El Khalil's style is not simply a strategy to write about the inner turmoil of Beirut but is also a manifestation of the inner turmoil of El Khalil herself, giving the past and the civil war of Beirut a place is part of herself discovery. El Khalil writes, "twelve years have passed since I first moved here and I still find myself trying to make peace with Beirut" (106). Her writing is an attempt to reassess Beirut from a new perspective and gain new insights.

In one of her chapters El Khalil uses personification of a mannequin in Hamra as an indirect way of addressing and provoking her readers. The mannequin holds a monologue where in short crisp sentences she lets El Khalil know that, "This is it. This is life" (108). She tells El Khalil, Beirut is not real because she [mannequin] saw the activists grow old and create false realities. The mannequin has been standing for decades in the window and has seen it all and according to the mannequin, it is all a game, plastic has its benefits and veiled women wear Jimmy Choo under their black blankets. Reality is a creation where "there are bigger players that control everything" (107). The mannequin tells El Khalil not to bother changing anything but to simply live her illusion and she warns her that there is no need for a global dialogue about life, wine, war or anything else. The mannequin is a metaphor for the tired Lebanese people who are at the bottom of the pyramid and who have tried to promote change and finally

accepted that nothing ever changes. El Khalil fights back and responds, “You are just an observer. It is my reality, but only your illusion” (108). El Khalil looks for a dialogue with her readers. Through her confrontation with the mannequin El Khalil portrays the superficial reality, in which “spandex is artificial and cold,” encouraging her reader to wake up, face their past and give it a place in history. By doing so she warns her audience that a forgotten history is a forgotten identity.

B. Conclusion

Juggling different customs and habits in daily life is more complex than it appears to be because it involves feelings of loyalty and treachery; having one foot in each world means a permanent imbalance for the individual. This imbalance can never be corrected as long as someone hides one part of himself because of prejudice or fear of stereotyping. A conscious awareness of a sense of alienation will always be present despite seemingly having been integrated. It becomes essential to negotiate within oneself the different contradictions that make up one’s complete multifaceted identity.

Writing becomes a tool to construct one’s self and to put order in jumbled fragments of the past. It is not surprising that Edward Said at the end of his life needed to write an autobiography in order to impose order on a life that happened almost haphazardly. Said created his home within his text. To understand his life, it is necessary to analyze his writings. However, it is not enough to simply make sense internally; in order to negotiate one’s own multiplicities, it is essential to understand other people’s perceptions. Knowing how to handle the others’ stereotyping is key to successfully negotiating differences. While Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz have different styles of negotiating their identities and despite the contradictions of their daily

lives, the common element they share is the need to write down their observations. Part of negotiating involves creating a textual reality, which in turn, transmogrifies them into present day realities.

For El Bezaz this means writing texts that are humorous and provoking at the same time. She has the insider's and outsider's view of an immigrant which allows her to portray both parties in a stereotypical manner. Her sharp humor is felt from the misguided civic integration teacher to the wedding scene in Morocco. By attacking both camps El Bezaz reveals her alienation, writing is her way of expressing her frustration. Simultaneously it helped start a dialogue in Dutch society. TV interviews and newspaper articles gave a lot of attention to El Bezaz's and her writing helped spark a debate on immigrant stereotyping.

Compared to El Bezaz, Ghoussoub has a conciliatory negotiating style. As a young child she learned how to handle and negotiate differences in Lebanese society. This allowed Ghoussoub, once established in England, to absorb the English lifestyle in a way that was impossible for El Bezaz with the Dutch lifestyle. El Khalil did not face these issues as she is a true wanderer. She belongs everywhere but is not at home anywhere. One element that differentiates Ghoussoub from El Khalil and El Bezaz is that she was not whisked around the globe or stereotyped. She had a clearer concept of who she was than El Khalil or El Bezaz. As a result, her negotiating style is not confrontational like El Bezaz or didactic like El Khalil. Rather, she aims to connect both of her worlds by bridging the gap that exists between East and West. Her inclusive style handles differences through a connection with the English public by opening her publishing house. El Saqi Books serves as a platform for Arab voices in England, it is an opportunity for the English speaking world to see the perspective of the 'other', her

initial exilic state allows her to create something new (Strugura 113). For Ghoussoub, coming from a patriarchal society arriving in London was a cultural rebirth. London did hold new opportunities for her, with much more freedom than she would have had as a woman in Lebanon. El El Saqi Books helped her negotiate the collective differences found between East and West. Her stories in *Selected Writings* reveal that complaints and life's annoyances are the same whether in Beirut or London. The story of Suzy's re-invented identity proves that identity is nothing more than a fluid quality of a human's social expression.

El Khalil during her travels, developed a sharper eye than both Ghoussoub and El Bezaz. El Khalil soars high above everyone and gains an eagle's eye perspective. She sees sharply and educates her readers. Her negotiating style is that of a teacher who takes his students on a trip of self-discovery. She is able to see life from everyone's perspective and aims to guide her reader to enlightenment. She negotiates the internal divisions of the people in the East as well as the East and West divisions. El Khalil believes that in order to discover one's self, one's past has to be acknowledged. She aims to show that embellishing something ugly does not make it go away. A fantastic city center will be nothing more than a hollow mask if its purpose is covering up something not acknowledged.

The most postmodern of the three, El Khalil is an expert at new beginnings but recognizes that one cannot dispose of the past, because disposing of the past will hinder the construction of a present day identity. As opposed to the two other authors, El Khalil's own fragmented past taught her the importance of acknowledging one's past. She gains her bird's eye view from literally being far removed from each past location without exilic sentiments coloring her memories; her distance gives her insight. Her

interactive style triggers her readers into reflecting on that which is hidden. She adds an absurdist twist by personifying the mannequin and allowing her to voice an unprecedented reality that shocks readers into questioning their own realities.

For all three authors, there is no kind of philosophy that fits their predicament and brings a solution. They are in a constant state of flux, where the mixture of identities creates havoc, disturbing their harmony of a single identity and forcing them to perpetually negotiate identities. Negotiating their fragmented identities involves a continuous reinvention of the self, a continuous reinvention that is reflected in their writing, which offers the only solution to negotiate their differing identities.

CHAPTER IV

THIRD SPACE

A. Importance of Narrative

Narrative is universal and emerges early in the communicative development of children where they make sense of the world through telling stories. Telling stories is a fundamental building block of their cognitive and emotional development (Ochs and Capps 19). According to Ochs and Capps, narrative and self are inseparable “in that narrative is simultaneously born out of experience and gives shape to experience” (19). Narrative allows the narrator to impose order on disconnected events and reach continuity between a past, present and future self. Narrative consolidates self and society constituting a crucial resource for understanding one’s self and in doing so aids in developing interpersonal relationships with one’s surrounding (Ochs and Capp 19). The unity of narrative and self is “grounded in the phenomenological assumption that entities are given meaning through being experienced” (Ochs and Capp 21). Narrative is a tool that allows the narrator to bring experiences to a conscious awareness where the narrator represents the world through his eyes. The narratives of Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz are textual versions of their reality, created in order to make sense of it all.

While browsing through the dictionary I noticed that the antonym for memoir is ‘ignorance’ and for narrative is ‘rambling’, I came to the conclusion that life without narrative must therefore be an ‘ignorant ramble.’ Neisser confirms this by writing, “Life narratives are the basis of personal identity and self understanding and they provide answers to the question ‘who am I?’ (1). without narrative we cannot put a perspective

on who we are and where we belong. Narrating is therefore essential for the authors in order to make sense of the world. Narrative and the self cannot be separated; a narrative originates in experience but simultaneously gives shape to that experience. The authors can only understand who they are through narratives used to apprehend experiences and negotiate relationship with others (Ochs and Capps 21). Without narrative life will be a confusing jumble.

Writing becomes a negotiation tool because it adds a form of control through the retelling of an experience. By looking at Roseanne Khalaf's creative writing students the importance of narrative becomes clear. Khalaf notes that for her students, writing grants some sort of control and removes the strangeness of a situation (116). Displaced and marginalized people often choose to be detached and become observers: "They seek meaning from their gaze" (R. Khalaf 116). Their imagination becomes an all important element in their drive to narrate, where they create a reality that affords them a space. The process of writing and interpreting their experience affords them a space that nobody can invade or control, where reality is put into perspective by the authors and this process sets them free.

Khalaf explains how these creative writing students believed that being an unattached observer was preferable to participating. They wished to observe from a safe distance as they did not always like what they saw. When Khalaf opened a creative writing class at AUB, the response was overwhelming (112). She writes, "I was startled by how many of my students had a profound need to express themselves in their texts" (112). Although these students came from a variety of disciplines, they all shared a sense of displacement, being "seasoned travelers, border crossers, outsiders existing on the margin of whatever society they happen to find themselves in" (112). As Khalaf

notes, “Writing offers students a kind of freedom from the external constraints of a threatening society” and opens up spaces where students can leave behind unwanted memories (115). These students found solace in writing down their observations and experiences, the process of writing which allowed them to put a perspective on reality as they saw it and create a Third Space for themselves.

B. Third Space

For most postmodern theorists, the Third Space seems a dynamic, provoking, and contested space where it is described as a hybrid place, where the oppressor and the oppressed meet and interact. It is not a safe and secure space but an unstable one that involves struggle (Bhabha 35). For Bhabha, the Third Space is a gap between the first and second space and the urge of the oppressor to paste it over or close it is very strong. This postcolonial concept of Third Space as a contested space is compatible with the feminists’ point of view. For them the Third Space is also a place of contestation and struggle, it is a special vantage point from which to launch their resistance against white and male hegemony. It denotes the place where identity is renegotiated and life in all its ambiguity is played out (English 15). Along the same lines, Bhatt sees the Third Space as a linguistic space where individuals reposition themselves through code-switching (Bhatt 182).

All the above views emphasize the unstable aspect of the Third Space, a turbulent space where changes take place all the time and identity shifts continuously. Although Soja and Walsh describe the Third Space as a space where individuals let their real ‘selves’ show, it is nevertheless a space that attempts to capture that which is constantly shifting and changing (Soja 2) (Walsh 125). They describe Third Space as

the place located between the formal work sphere and the home sphere, an actual physical location. Nevertheless, this would still make it a hybrid space, a space where two identities come together to form a third identity. Therefore, all Third Spaces seem to be spaces of change, of transition and contest. Although as Walsh and Soja argue, the Third Space provides the self with an opportunity to express its unhidden self, it is a process of change which is a never ending cycle, where the search for the self is infinite and no rest can be found. The ‘real’ self is actively constructing itself, leading us to the general conclusion that the Third Space is an unstable one.

In this chapter I argue that the Third Space can be a place of stability and tranquility, reached through the creative process of writing stories, memoirs or personal narratives. Struggle and contestation are no longer necessary as the Third Space becomes like a beacon of stability. Through narrating and self expression a space is found that does not compare to the first or second space but is rather a space away from both, one that allows individuals to claim all parts of who they are simultaneously. Questions of belonging or non-belonging fade into the background as they enter the Third Space and are free to express and write down their innermost thoughts. Unlike Bhabha, English and Bhatt, who see the Third Space as unstable, for Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz writing affords them a Third Space that belongs to them, a space that is lacking in their daily lives, it is here where they find stability. Writing for Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz meant transportation into another dimension, the everyday world and all its challenges are left behind.

Animals, to protect themselves from the world, grow shells, build dams and spin webs. Human beings do not engage in such activities to protect themselves. Instead they are engaged in a creative process where they spin stories: “the brain spins in order

to define, protect and control part of reality” (Volmer 190). The spinning is a peaceful and solitary exercise and in its process the authors find the Third Space. For Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz, writing is like the spinning of stories which releases them from the mundane experiences of everyday life, opening up space for them similar to the way it did for Khalaf’s creative writing students at AUB. Through writing Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz gain control over their experiences. For Ghoussoub, who was forever divided between her two worlds and could never decide which one was hers, writing afforded her a space in which both worlds came together. For El Khalil, drifting without base and struggling on the borders of her own society, writing connected her back to herself. Finally, for El Bezaz, marginalized and alienated from Dutch and Moroccan cultures alike, writing created another dimension for her. All three authors channel their frustration of their fractured selves into an open space where they freely express themselves through narrative. As a result of being caught in between different cultures, they need to turn to narrative as a safe place to deal with such conflicts and find common grounds with their surroundings.

A memoir or personal narrative represents the way in which an author constructs and configures life; the author creates himself through narrative (Crossley 67). In order for their lives and those of others to make sense to them, Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz create a narrative plan to define themselves. Hence, to find meaning in life they must create, “dynamic narratives that render sensible and coherent the seeming chaos of human existence” (McAdams 166). Therefore, the unstable space of Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz’s daily lives are channeled into a narrative and the process of writing provides clarity and stability.

In this chapter, I show the importance of narrative and how the intellectual exercise of writing creates an additional realm, a Third Space. Just as in colonial times when people were forced to relocate and by this movement began to express conflictory values and ideas, the authors too had no choice but to express themselves in order not to be caught in the middle. Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz have a postmodern struggle which they express through narrative and such expression leads them to harmony rather than chaos. I will explore the concept of Third Space not as a turbulent/chaotic/conflictory space, but as a tranquil one, a space not connected to the conundrum of everyday life, but where creativity and awareness strike a balance and the authors become whomever they desire without fear of rejection or labeling.

1. Third Space of Mai Ghoussoub

An example of how Ghoussoub creates herself through narrative is Ghoussoub's rendition of photographer, anna sherbany (small letter used). In her story Ghoussoub deals with her own internal conflicts by relating to anna's form of expression. The following paragraph describes sherbany at work but is a metaphor for Ghoussoub as writer,

anna clicks again and again on her camera as if she is reiterating and repositioning her questions, She stages her set, places and replaces the model, moves her flashlight as if she's trying to reformulate the questions that never stop haunting her: her place and ours within the confines of a picture where gender, colour and private public space seem to have been positioned for a unique take. (Ghoussoub 137)

In writing about sherbany's clicking and repositioning and constant change to find the perfect shot Ghoussoub deliberately describes an artist at work in a Third Space. By Ghoussoub's constant shift of perspectives in her writing she mimics sherbany's search of herself in a multicultural context. Although Ghoussoub describes sherbany in action, it sounds like the writing process that Ghoussoub practices. Like sherbany, it is Ghoussoub who stages her plot, characters and setting and Ghoussoub who tries to reformulate the questions that never stop haunting her (137). Further in the story, Ghoussoub describes sherbany as a "director", but while contemplating who the director is, the reader will realize it is Ghoussoub herself who does all the directing (137). As much care as sherbany takes while preparing her photo shoot, as much care Ghoussoub takes with her texts. Ghoussoub can only notice the care sherbany takes because Ghoussoub unconsciously recognizes herself. By narrating about sherbany she constructs herself. She thinks out loud in her texts and usually the only time where one will think out loud and not be afraid of ridicule or scorn is the place one is most comfortable in. This shows that Ghoussoub, as she is writing, feels totally at ease and where she is not afraid to let her authentic self show.

Thinking out loud, asking questions and then answering them can only be done in a space where one belongs and where one is without fear of judgment. If one wishes to discover who is a person, then one asks 'what is their story, their real, inmost story?' For each of us there is a biography – a story within. Each of us is a narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us - through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions, our discourse, our spoken narrations (Sacks 110). Ghoussoub constructs her genuine self in her narrative to such an extent that her readers become acquainted with what her experience has been. While by that

same comparison, people in her circle of life may never unveil her mask unless they read her narratives.

Bromley describes how texts which are written from a “disjunctive, fragmented, displaced agency,” construct a third space beyond existing political and cultural binaries (1). He calls this space a space of revaluation. Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz, all three express their thoughts away from these binary divisions and aim to take their readers beyond these divisions through their observations and questions in the texts.

2. Third Space of Zena El Khalil

El Khalil recounts a period during the summer war of 2006 when she finds herself alone in her apartment in the ‘wrong part’ of town. As a Druze amongst the Maronites, she is considered to be in the wrong part of town. However, she feels safe and warm in her bed, as according to El Khalil, “home is where the heart is” (127). She contemplates the decision to live in Ashrafieh, as opposed to other parts of town where other Druze are established. She involves her readers into doing some reflection of their own when she states that she ‘decided to live in Ashrafieh specifically to prove a point’ because Lebanese people should live once again as one and not be divided by religion (127). She reveals a certain confidence within her text. In Lebanon such statements carry weight and are often considered political. Like Ghoussoub and El Bezaz, a large part of El Khalil’s writing is thinking out loud; their thoughts spilling out onto the paper and wandering in different directions. It reveals the real person, to use the words of Sacks, if you wish to know the real person we ask about their inmost story.

The narration of El Khalil reveals El Khalil's innermost thoughts and takes the reader in all directions. An example of an inner most story is the bicycle episode where Nadim, (the brother of El Khalil), rescues El Khalil and bikes her home. It is particularly touching. El Khalil thoughts flow in all directions, from reflecting on herself in an Italian movie scene to contemplating the similarity of her organs and those of her brother, el Khalil includes her readers in her thought process. The reader is exposed to a glimpse of Beirut resembling an Italian movie where El Khalil's hair "was blowing in the wind... the few people who dared to be out pointed at us and laughed... it was good for a while" and is then whisked to an internal reflection of organs (132). The reader shares in the brother/sister love and the serenity of El Khalil safe behind her brother on the bike. El Khalil would not be able to passionately write about her experience with her brother biking through the war stricken streets of Beirut if she was not in her own space at the time of writing.

This episode during Beirut's summer war of 2006, reflects El Khalil's ability to find peace despite the bombing that was taking place. Writing as a way of opening up an inner self, or as Bromley puts it "moving in and out of borders constructed around co-ordinates of difference and power", needs a place of stability free from tension (1). El Khalil, like Ghoussoub and El Bezaz, writes from a space that is all her own. It is the space where anything can happen, such as experiencing an Italian movie scene while biking home through war torn Beirut.

El Khalil throws out questions and statements that are unanswerable or even incomprehensible, almost absurdist. To reiterate my earlier statement, one can only ever show one's real thoughts, one's real self, when one is entirely comfortable in one's space. Maalouf writes that aspects of one's identity are suppressed in a hostile

environment but are expressed in a space of reciprocity and the Third Space found in between the existing spaces of Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz, is such a space of reciprocity. It is in the Third Space where El Khalil even goes to the extent of describing tolerance and finding commonalities by reflecting on her organs and the similarities they have with her brother's. She unconsciously steers her readers into finding similarities with 'others.' By finding the similarities the readers examine their own organs and compare themselves to other individuals and by doing so El Khalil succeeds in enlightening her readers to bridge differences rather than build walls.

El Khalil resembles sherbany the photographer Ghoussoub describes. Like sherbany and Ghoussoub, El Khalil also stages her set, places her characters and reformulates questions posed. Consider how later on in the same chapter, El Khalil after debating whether or not to stay in Beirut during the 2006 bombing, uses short staccato type sentences, "This is our life. Our reality. We are Lebanese caught in a time trap" (134). Her writing here is in short bursts, planned and controlled, and a sense of urgency is felt through these words. El Khalil within her space is the director Ghoussoub described.

3. Third Space of Naima El Bezaz

El Bezaz, like Ghoussoub and El Khalil is another director in charge of her set. She also chooses her words, her setting and characters to reformulate questions. El Bezaz has openly discussed her struggle with depression and her various treatments for a cure for her bipolar disorder. As she lies relaxed on her bed writing, she lets her readers know that she is smiling as she writes. She admits that writing for her is like a treasure that she cherishes because it is the only way to keep her depression at bay (12).

Her depression is related to her displacement and non-belonging and writing is her palliative. She continues the chapter by discussing a variety of subjects, while thinking out loud and then writing such discourse. El Bezaz resembles Ghoussoub and El Khalil in that she lets her thoughts have free rein. The reader gets to know a El Bezaz who does not perform an identity, she reveals her inner most story in her text. Her guard is down because she is safe in her Third Space. She admits that writing is a means of staying sane, “I wrote because I wanted to escape, because I wanted to know what living was like, because I wanted to be free” (14)¹⁶. Writing for El Bezaz is a lifeline, by writing she enters her own Third Space away from the questions of inclusion or exclusion and keeps her depression under control. Without that Third Space El Bezaz could be caught in a vicious cycle of turmoil but instead she releases her inner most fears and frustrations liberating herself from her own disorder. El Bezaz is angry and the Third Space buffers the anger enough for her readers to be able to empathize with her and understand the real source of her pain. The Third Space is a safe haven for her to let her guard down and reveal her true self.

C. Conclusion

According to Bromley, narrating is a fictional exploration of the complexities of displacement, identity and belonging (4). Although Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz write from a different perspective, each text is concerned with negotiating differences. Each author is located in what Bromley calls a cultural borderzone, where aspects of the dominant culture are layered with aspects of the ‘other’ culture (4). Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz do not necessarily advocate one large melting pot with everyone

¹⁶ Translation: “Ik schreef omdat ik wilde ontsappen, omdat ik wilde weten wat leven is, omdat ik vrij wilde zijn”

absorbing aspects of the other but rather they negotiate to develop a state of mutual understanding and a tolerance for contradictions and ambiguities. Rather than imposing or adjusting the space of society each one operates in, they find their own space through writing. They develop strategies to negotiate their identity in a hostile world by connecting to their readers and attempting to open the mind of readers. Their selves and the spaces they circulate in are fluid and heterogeneous. They have a need to create a Third Space, a stable space they can occupy and which they can control – one of intellectual expression. It is here they control the scene, use words and phrases to reformulate questions.

The three personal narratives I am analyzing concern themselves with displacement and belonging. The neither here nor there status of the authors is debilitating. The authors move in and out of their different spaces and their in-between position is a constant burden. Memory and marginalization are recurring problems for them. Bromley refers to the concept of a border, and, quoting Stuart Hall, he writes about the adoption of a viewpoint of “people moving in and out of borders constructed around co-ordinates of difference and power” (1). Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz continuously cross over these borders and in out of their different worlds. Their narratives are platforms from which to give a voice to their displaced selves in society, and anchor them in a way that would be unavailable otherwise. This platform becomes their space from which they interact with their readers. Seyhan in *Writing Outside the Nation*, explains that for most fragmented authors neither a return to a homeland nor adopting a host country is a viable option. Texts that sensitize readers to the power of language, its capacity to mark cultural differences and its responsibility to respond

creatively to these cultural differences add to new mutual understandings of people (Seyahn 14).

These authors search for an alternative space, a third geography, a “space of memory, of language, of translation” (Seyhan 15). She suggests that this terrain, this alternative geography can be figured as a ‘terrain of writing’ (15). The Third Space of Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz lies in the ‘terrain of writing’ of Seyhan; the authors are compelled to find their own space in a geographical and national frame that is constructed in a white world (Fernandez 155). The term ‘terrain’ refers to something solid, something earthy – one can grow roots in it. Although the Third Space is a virtual and abstract space, it too can be interpreted as a ‘terrain of writing,’ a space that has the ability to ground someone. Symbolically, it is the space in which Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz find belonging and fixidity. It is the space where displacement, identity negotiation and the search for belonging come together. Writing anchors them, without writing they would be forever floating above the spaces unavailable to them and never finding solid ground.

CHAPTER V

AFTERWORD

I selected Mai Ghoussoub, Zena El Khalil and Naima El Bezaz and their respective books because they represent different versions of displacement. Although they have different reasons for their displacement, the emotional struggle of being displaced and their strategies for dealing with their displacement are the same. Mai Ghoussoub typifies the Lebanese migrant who left Lebanon during the civil war and grew new roots in another location. Like many Lebanese, she returned many years later to a country that did not resemble the country she remembers. Unable to sever her roots in Lebanon or her new roots in England she was left to permanently straddle these two places and as a result suffered from a mental displacement. I identify with Ghoussoub the most because when I return to the Netherlands I also find that the country I remember has changed. As anxious as I am to go the Netherlands during the summer, as anxious I am to go back 'home' at the end of my holiday. Home being Lebanon, my host country. Zena El Khalil resembles a modern day nomad who seems to belong everywhere but does not feel at home anywhere. She is forever traveling and relocating. She resembles a master key that opens all locks but does not fit in any specific lock. Naima El Bezaz is trapped between cultures and at the same time dislocated from both – an eternal outsider. To handle their displacement all three wrote and told personal stories to help them in their negotiation of their divided worlds and selves.

A question suggested by this research is whether gender plays a role in how displaced persons use writing. I explored the writings of three women, I could easily

have looked at male authors. Abbas el Zein's *Leave to Remain: A Memoir*, is a comparable work on displacement and negotiation of one's identity. Amin Maalouf's *Origin: A Memoir* is another example of a male author expressing in writing his search to belong. Perhaps male authors emphasize concrete historical facts more to explain their current situation than female authors do but they also engage their readers in a process of selfdiscovery. This whole process of creation and expression would lead the male authors into a Third Space of their own as well. I choose to look at female authors because I am a woman and wanted to research other women's approaches to displacement and their negotiation of multiple identities.

Through closely reading the narratives of Ghoussoub, El Khalil and El Bezaz I revealed how writing opens up a space away from their multicultural challenges. It is in this Third Space they are their authentic selves and find stability. The question remains if this created Third Space offers a permanent place of abode for the authors. The process of writing lands them there but whether or not they have to revisit it from time to time by writing new books is a question that I did not answer. Perhaps the catharsis reached through writing needs to be repeated frequently, almost like a suntan which lasts for about a season before it fades and loses its glow.

In chapter I, I outlined the different definitions of displacement, belonging, negotiation and Third Space to create a framework for my research. I looked as well at the ambiguous state of migrants and analyzed how belonging seems to be a matter of the law rather than of the heart (Nagel). I discovered that even if the law approves one, it is essential to identify and feel part of one's surrounding (Ralph). I concluded therefore that belonging is in fact more a matter of the heart than the law. For a

displaced person this means a permanent ambiguous position that is continuously renegotiated.

The need to belong that seems to drive the three authors may not be present in everyone. In contrast to the view of needing to belong, Bauman and Malpas argue that in the postmodern world individuals are always on the move, belonging for them means stagnation. Postmodern individuals are consumers of customs and ways of life, life is a series of new beginnings and the more fluidic it is the better. According to Bauman and Malpas, individuals have choices and they do choose not to belong, old identities are relegated to the trash can and new ones are invented continuously. These are the generations of Third Culture Kids who seem at home everywhere and developed an ability to move on without ever needing to look back. For them the world has become a global village, they pack up and start anew whenever and wherever they want. It is important to keep in mind though that this is only possible for those with the right passport and the right bank account (Malpas 2).

Further research could focus on the importance language has on feeling included or excluded by society. By not understanding and speaking the language of your surroundings you are excluded by default. What exactly are the effects of not speaking the host language and how debilitating is it? Is speaking English sufficient at all times? Because I am not able to speak and read Arabic, I find myself outside the Lebanese society as I do not understand the inside jokes. I feel an outsider. Speaking English is not sufficient to join my surroundings.

The success of El Bezaz's book *Vinexvrouwen*, it has sold to date more than 60.000 copies, has not remained unnoticed by commercial television and the film rights have been sold to Endemol, a powerful entertainment mogul. I would think that a

commercial success like that will give El Bezaz a permanent and accepted place in Dutch society. El Bezaz has since written a sequel called *Meer Vinexvrouwen*, (*More Suburban Wives*) and as with all success, respect and agency. El Bezaz might focus on new and other issues; her voice will be certainly one that is listened to.

Likewise a screen script has been written for El Khalil's book, *Beirut I Love You*, a short preview, posted as a book trailer, can be found on YouTube.¹⁷ For El Khalil, her personal success might also give her stability and reduce the need of a Third Space. She has recently started writing again on her blog¹⁸, which she started during the 2006 war. She is definitely someone to follow, she has a creative spirit and her courageous honesty will lead her to new unexplored roads. I am quite confident that Zena El Khalil's next novel, personal narrative or memoir is one to be reckoned with.

Ghoussoub passed away unexpectedly in February 2007, while on a visit to Beirut. We can only speculate what more Ghoussoub could have added to her already substantial creative repertoire. Her passing away meant a great loss for Arab cultural life in London not easily replaced.

¹⁷ www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tDcbvOrYbE

¹⁸ <http://blog.zenaekhalil.com/>

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