Activating and Actualizing the Third Space in Syrian Diasporic Realities:
An Autoethnographic Interpretation

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Abstract

This essay, part of a larger study, speaks to the Syrian Diaspora's lived reality in Canada, a complex topic that delves into issues of dislocation, displacement, loss, exile, identity, resilience and a desire for belonging (Alatrash, 2019; 2020). The study seeks to better understand these issues and the lived experience and human condition of the Syrian Diaspora in Canada. I engage autoethnography as a research methodology and as a method as I think and write from my own personal experience as a Syrian immigrant so that I could better understand the Syrian refugee's lived experience (Alatrash, 2019). My research participants were three Syrian refugee families in Calgary, in addition to myself as an autoethnographer. As I autoethnographically analyzed, presented, and interpreted the stories of the three families, I identified a number of themes (Alatrash, 2019; 2020); this essay addresses one of these themes: On creating new possibilities: Activating and actualizing the Third Space (Alatrash, 2019).

Introduction

The Syrian Diaspora is a complex topic that speaks to issues of dislocation, displacement, loss, exile, identity, resilience and a deep desire for belonging. My research, as part of my doctoral research, seeks to qualitatively conjure up dynamic ways, through the active participation of the research participants, that may help in better understanding these issues and the lived experience and human condition of the Syrian Diaspora (Alatrash, 2019; 2020). One of the questions that has guided my research is: What do Syrian newcomers believe are ways in which Canadians can help as they try to make meaning of family and home in their new homeland, and as they negotiate and remediate their identities? I broach the Syrian diasporic subject by thinking through an anti-Orientalist, anti-colonial framework (Alatrash, 2019; 2020). As a participant-observer in my research, I engage autoethnography as a research methodology and as a method, "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 1; Alatrash, 2019; 2020). I reflexively think through and write from my own personal experience as a Syrian immigrant so that I can better understand the Syrian refugee's human experience.

As part of my doctoral research (Alatrash, 2019), I conducted three open-ended, unstructured, interactive interviews in which I engaged with the participants' voices and their stories in order to co-construct knowledge on my research topic. The arrival of Syrian newcomers to Canada was first marked on November 4, 2015 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2017). My research

participants were three Syrian refugee families living in Calgary, Alberta. The interviews conducted with the adults in each family were held in Arabic, and afterwards, I translated and transcribed them into English (Alatrash, 2019; 2020). I employed the notion of a "cultural *verstehen* of others," or an empathetic understanding of others, and I reflected on how it can act as an important tool in a process of "cross-cultural pollination" (Chang, 2008, pp. 27-29) between Syrian newcomers and Canadian hosts. One theme that has surfaced in my findings, which I will address in this essay, is: On creating new possibilities: Activating and actualizing the "Third Space." I have divided this paper into three subthemes: On issues of language; on finding cultural intersections and third spaces; and on how Canadians be of help: Activating and actualizing the "third space" (Alatrash, 2019; 2020).

Research Participants

My research invited a heterogeneous representation of the peoples of the Syrian Diaspora, and my interviewees included three Syrian families (husbands and wives—all parents) with a diversity in religious and ethnic backgrounds (namely, a Syrian-Christian family, a Syrian-Druze family, and a Syrian-Sunni-Muslim family). They were also diverse in their educational and socio-economic backgrounds, political affiliations (pro or anti-Syrian regime), as well as in their immigration sponsorship routes (private or government). The following is an overview of the participants. All names used are pseudonym (Alatrash, 2019; 2020).

Family 1
Antoine and Mary—a husband and a wife in their mid-forties with one child. They are a Syrian-Christian family and are privately sponsored refugees by a local church in Calgary. They both hold university degrees from Damascus University in Syria. Their immediate families remain in Syria to this day. Their interview was held on October 12, 2017 in their home in Calgary.

Family 2
Daniel and Miral—a husband and a wife in their late-twenties with one child. They are a Syrian-Druze family, privately sponsored refugees by a Canadian Group of Five (G5). They arrived from Lebanon after having fled a war-torn Syria. Daniel holds a two-year-certificate in a business-related field. Miral holds a university degree in Education. Daniel's brother lives in Canada while Miral's immediate family remains in Syria. Their interview was held on October 13, 2017 in their home in Calgary.

Family 3
Adam and Brianna—a husband and wife in their mid-forties with five children. They are a Syrian-Sunni-Muslim family sponsored as Government Assisted Refugees (GAR). They arrived from a refugee camp in Jordan. Their home in Syria was destroyed in the war. Adam owned his own small business in Syria. Brianna was a housewife and holds a high school certificate. Their interview was held on December 10, 2017 in their home in Calgary.

Myself as an autoethnographer

In my research, I became a "participant observer" (Ellis, 2004, para. 6; Lichtman, 2010, pp. 168-170). As a participant observer, my analysis of the stories first took place while observing and interviewing the research participants. Then, as I thought through their conversations, I recognized the raw emotions and dormant memories that the interviews awakened in me. I wrote these moments in an attempt to "describe the conscious experience of both subject [the three families of the Syrian Diaspora] and researcher [myself]" (Ellis, 1991, p. 30).

On Creating New Possibilities: Activating and Actualizing the Third Space

On issues of language

Freire and Macedo (1987) explain that "language should never be understood as mere tool of communication; language is packed with ideology" (p. 203). And, in his memoir *Out of Place*, Said (1999) writes,

> Everyone lives life in a given language; everyone's experiences therefore are had, absorbed, and recalled in that language. The basic split in my life was the one between Arabic, my native language, and English, the language of my education and subsequent expression as a scholar and teacher, and so trying to produce a narrative of one in the language of the other—to say nothing of the numerous ways in which the languages were mixed up for me and crossed over from one realm to the other—has been a complicated task. (pp. xv-xvi)

I too deeply believe that experiences are lived and constituted in the language they are had. As a Syrian woman, and as I autoethnographically think through the experience of the peoples of the Syrian Diaspora, I understand on a deeper level how language can be a key struggle, for there are certain nuances that are in my opinion untranslatable. Here, I am reminded of an article I wrote on May 15, 2009, more than twelve years ago, which I titled "The deeper meaning of the Arabic word '*ghurba* [*ḡurba*].'" I began the article with, "I have found that there are certain words in a language that are simply untranslatable"(Alatrash, 2009) as is the case for the Arabic word *ḡurba* which is a derivative from the verb *ḡaraba*: to go away, and it is linked to the word *ḡarīb*: *stranger*—where all meanings embody the experience of living life as a stranger in a far-off land. I further explained how I found that in Arabic-English dictionaries the word *ḡurba* is defined with phrases and not in one word, for the lack of one analogous word in English. Its definition according to the *Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* is: "absence from the homeland; separation from one's native country, banishment, exile; life or place away from home." I also found that the word is frequently translated as Diaspora. In my article, I go on to explain,

> But it [*ḡurba*] is much more than that. The word *ḡurba* also carries an intense feeling along with it, a melancholic feeling of longing, of nostalgia, of homesickness and separation, of a severe patriotic yearning for a place where one's heart was not only living, but also dancing to the beat of a father's or a mother's voice, to the words in a grandmother's tale, to a melody from a native instrument, to the pounding of feet

stamping in a group dance, to a merchant's voice shouting out the name of his merchandise in the streets of neighborhoods, or simply, to a place where one's heart danced to the silence of a homeland's soil. (Alatrash, 2009)

Back in 2009, as a translator reflecting on this word and trying to make sense of its meaning, I was interested in understanding the reason behind the lack of an English counterpart for the word. I thought perhaps it is because Canadians and Americans are fortunate to live in a wealthy land where it is either by choice or for reasons of pleasure that one leaves a homeland and immigrates (with the exception of soldiers), and that this may be a reason behind the absence of "intense melancholy" expressed in the English definition of the word. When I wrote this article, I was thinking of my father's feelings of longing, and of mine as an immigrant who is continuously living here and there (between a native homeland and a new homeland). But today, within the context of my research, the word has taken on yet another depth. I could have never imagined back then that I would be sitting today with Syrian newcomers and trying to make sense of what it means to have lost a homeland, my homeland, for the people of the Syrian Diaspora, my people, who have been dispersed in all parts of the world and are in desperate need of a remedy that may alleviate their burning and charred souls.

On this autoethnographic note, as I began each of my interviews, I gave my Syrian participants the option to speak and express themselves in the language of their preference, whether Arabic or English. They all chose to speak in Arabic. Five of the six participants spoke solely in Arabic. Adam tried to speak in English during parts of the interview but switched quickly back to Arabic, especially when emotions and nostalgic feelings began to surface. Daniel explained, "maybe if I wanted to say all this in English, maybe I will die before I can learn how to say it all," and later added,

> "…if I were to tell you what I've told you in English, they [the words] would not come out with me—you would think that I am a little child trying to express something…The most difficult thing for me was and still is the barrier of language…Because language is the door to many matters. For example, if I needed to tell you something but couldn't explain it to you; I have the idea in my mind but am unable to express it; so language for many people is a big barrier."

And so, in addition to the idea that each experience is lived in the language in which it is had (Said, 1999), the participants' positions, as beginner English learners, have an added difficulty of not having the fluency to express themselves and relay their complex emotional lived experiences in a new language they are only beginning to grasp. Antoine asserts,

> "Language is our principal difference as it is the key to dealing with others in this society; we've accepted this challenge and we are trying to be as adaptable as possible in order to integrate into the Canadian society and to find a way to living."

However, Daniel expresses that the current English language classes have not been of much help to him. He specifically speaks of his experience in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to

Canada (LINC). He finds that the skills he is taught are ones that speak to basics like "how to buy things from the restaurant, how you eat, how you get your shopping needs, how you go to a physician, these basic things." Daniel further adds that the way in which language is being taught takes away from his drive to learn, specifically as an adult learner who is interested in talking about, he says, "a subject I love." Through his experience with LINC in Calgary, he finds that language is taught in a "stiff way" where as a student he feels as if he is "mimic[ing] language like a parrot." He insists, "what really drives me to learn a language as an adult is to learn about a subject that I love." He goes on to explain that he resorts to YouTube videos such as English Central to find depth in his language learning process and visits sites that speak to his interest in philosophy, for example. On this idea Ray McDermott (1993) writes,

> Language and culture are no longer scripts to be acquired, as much they are conversations in which people can participate. The question who is learning what and how much is essentially a question of conversations they are part of, and this question is a subset of the powerful question of what conversations are around to be had in a given culture. (p. 295)

Cummins (2014) further suggests that "student engagement is likely to increase dramatically when instruction enables them to co-construct knowledge with their teachers and to develop the critical literacy skills necessary to understand and act on the world around them" (p. 153). Daniel's process of learning English lacks cultural conversations in English, seems to abide by a "stiff" script, and is ultimately disengaging. Norton and Toohey (2001) argue that "good language learning requires attention to social practices in the contexts in which individuals learn L2s [second languages]", where a space is made for them to "participate more actively in the social and verbal activities" of their community (pp. 315-318). Daniel and other participants in my research seem to have not yet found this social space or community in which they can practice their target language and improve their English skills. As discussed later in this paper, Cervatiuc (2009) suggests that a solution perhaps lies in a "two-fold social action paradigm" in which both host country as well as newcomers and second language learners take an active approach in finding and creating these spaces.

As I continue to reflect on Daniel's thoughts and as I autoethnographically think of my own experience of learning English, I am cognizant of the fact that I came to the U.S. at a young age and that my adult research participants are situated in much different experiences. When I arrived in the U.S., I was in the seventh grade and the process of second language acquisition as a young teenager came easy for me. My research participants however are adults and "second language acquisition of adults is difficult and complicated . . . a long, painful process, and it will encounter many setbacks" (Deng & Zou, 2016, p. 779-780). But despite their awareness of this difficulty, they are hopeful. Miral says, "language to me is not a challenge or a hindrance at all. Language is undoubtedly an attainable goal." Brianna also boasts her progress in English since their arrival over two years ago and explains how at first, after their arrival to Canada, she was unable to understand her neighbor except for the "hi, how are you?" However, she finds that things are different for her now as she is better able to understand his English and his "nature." Laughingly Brianna expresses in Arabic, "before don't understand," implying that things are

different today with regards to her English comprehension. As put by Thomas Ricento (2005), "One's linguistic competence in a new culture reflects a process of transformation rather than one of replacement, in which the ultimate outcome represents an identity that is not exclusively anchored in one culture/language or other" (p. 904). There was hope embodied in Brianna's laughter, and indeed there was also transformation and resilience.

As I think of language within the context of my research, I also turn to Plamentaz (1973) as he writes,

> A human being becomes an individual, a rational and a moral person capable of thinking and acting for himself, in the process of acquiring the language and the culture of his people. He becomes a person distinct from others, in his own eyes and in theirs, by developing potentialities which can only be developed in assimilating a culture and learning to belong to a community. (p. 28)

I thought of my family and friends who are members of the Syrian Diaspora, Syrian immigrants who came long before the war began in 2011, and who until this day avoid interaction with natives of Canada as language constitutes a barrier, and a difference, for them. In her study "Identity, good language learning and adult immigrants in Canada," Cervatiuc (2009) suggests a "twofold social action paradigm" (p. 268) for newcomer and second language learners in which [o]n the one hand, it is necessary to raise the level of awareness of people who were born or grew up in Canada about the hardships and realities of marginalization that immigrants experience and their challenges in learning the target language and accessing social networks so that those who were born or grew up in Canada can become more inclusive toward newcomers and extend them more opportunities for communication. On the other hand, L2 learners may gain in the long run by claiming their internal power in order to get greater access to external power and by deploying some strategies extrapolated from the experiences of immigrants who have reached high L2 [second language] communicative competence and achieved their career goals in the new country. Here, as I reflexively think of my research participants, I ask: Will they gradually come to speak better English? I deeply believe that the answer to this question is yes. But will they come to a point where they can voice in words and language their inner emotions in English? To this, Indian Raja Rao (1963) thinks that English may be/become the language of "our intellectual make-up...but not of our emotional make-up" (p. vii).

In his poem "A Rhyme for the Odes," Mahmoud Darwish (2013) writes,

> Who am I? This is a question that
> others ask, but has no answer.
> I am my language.
> I am an ode, two odes, ten.
> This is my language
> I am words' writ:
> Be! Be my body!
> No land on earth bears me. Only my

words bear me. (p. 91)

Like Darwish, I too feel like I am my language. I feel that Arabic is the language of my soul and English is the language of my heart. What I mean by this is that English is the language in which I write and speak with my children today in Canada, and it is the language in which I express and voice my thoughts and emotions in a Western hemisphere. As for Arabic, it is the language to which my soul was born. Arabic is the language that brings me closer to my father's spirit as I think of him, and to the words of my grandmother's prayers. Indeed, it *is* about this complex relationship "language and spirit" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995, p. 296). Hall (1994) articulates it perfectly: "We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific" (p. 392). We *are* our history and we *are* our languages. Also, on language, Antoine adds,

> "I still consider myself a visitor in the Canadian society; I am uncomfortable, embarrassed, self-conscious [laughs]. So many times, at work, when I feel like saying something, I quieten myself as I am worried that my statement may be misunderstood, although they [Canadians] are very comforting, and they call me by nickname and they encourage me to talk to them about whatever I wish, and to be direct without worrying about expressing things in their way of expression."

Antoine's inability to express himself in English triggers a discouraging affect and brings him to "quieten" himself and resort to silence. Gabryś-Barker and Bielska (2013) describe the affective component as follows:

> The experience of being a foreigner and using a new language is linked by the students to a variety of emotions: homesickness, loneliness and alienation in the new world, embarrassment of being the object of evaluative gaze, anxiety, stress and frustration at the inability to make yourself understood and anger sparked by rejection and marginalization. (p. 21)

Here, language also impacts Antoine's "motivational energy" (Méndez López & Aguilar, 2013, p. 113). In their article "Emotions as learning enhancers of foreign language learning motivation," Méndez López and Aguilar (2013) speak of the role of emotions in language learning motivation and look at how self-efficacy shapes the language learning process. They engage Bandura's (1994) notion on self-efficacy as it refers to ". . . people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 71). Méndez López and Aguilar (2013) further explain that
these beliefs are the ones that shape how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. According to this theory, people with a high level of self-efficacy engage in tasks with the conviction that they possess the capabilities needed to succeed in them. In contrast, a person with a low level of self-efficacy avoids difficult tasks and resorts to their personal weaknesses to justify their lack of effort to pursue certain goals. (p. 111)

As I contextualize Antoine's words within the notion of self-efficacy, one can see how he is experiencing a negative self-efficacy as he tries to negotiate his new identity within a terrain that speaks a language that he struggles to understand. Language becomes a barrier and a limitation and carries a negative impact on Antoine's motivational energy and behavior. It becomes both unsettling and discouraging for Antoine, for as explained by Méndez López and Aguilar, "[e]motional experiences play a significant role since behind the reasons for deciding to study a foreign language or keep up with the task, emotions and feelings are involved" (2013, p. 112). Moreover, I have found that a weaker command of English positions the speaker in a disempowered and helpless position for as in the words of Braj Kachru (1986), "The English language is a tool of power, domination and elitist identity, and of communication across continents . . . Whatever the limitations of English, it has been perceived as the language of power and opportunity, free of the limitation that the ambitious attribute to the native languages" (p. 4). In their study "Resettlement of Syrian Refugees in Canada," Oudshoorn et al. (2019) suggest that for Syrian newcomers, English language development is "their central and consuming concern, perceived as the barrier preventing them from accessing employment, advocating for housing rights, building friendships, and generally integrating into Canada" (p. 900).

On another autoethnographic note, I would also like to reflect deeper on the fact, as mentioned by Antoine, that his original Arabic name is nicknamed in his Canadian place of work into an English nickname. Although for ethical considerations and for the protection of Antoine's identity I am unable to reveal his real name, the truth of the matter is that all of the letters in Antoine's original Arabic name are ones that are also part of the English alphabet. Unlike my name where the Gh in Ghada is pronounced gutturally (and sounds similar to the French R), all letters in Antoine's original Arabic name can indeed be easily pronounced by English speakers as they are also part of the English alphabet. However, his name is Canadianized, Anglicized (Said, 1999, p. 4), sort of like how Arabs are called "Sam" in place of the Arabic Sameer, Samer, Hussam, and even Ehsan (this happens to be the case with many of my Arab friends). But the question is, why is it necessary to change one's name to fit into a dominant Western culture? I grew up in the Southern part of the United States. My name, "Ghada" was poked fun more often than not—when Americanized, it was pronounced in the same way as the slang American "Gotta," and so each time I introduced myself to my classmates, they would cynically say, "oh, as in gotta go!" I used to often laugh this off; as a matter of fact, I enjoyed the attention that my name brought me as I was looking for ways to "fit in" and to belong. But as I began to critically think this about topic in my graduate years at the University of Oklahoma, I quickly realized that by pronouncing my name the American way, I too had fallen prey to the influences of a hegemony of culture that was inclusive to particular forms of knowledge and suppressive to others. It was then that I began to introduce myself in the way my name, Ghada, is pronounced by my Arab father and mother. Until this moment, as I live in Canada, I insist on pronouncing my name authentically; I reject any form of "Anglicization" (Said, 1999, p. 4) of my name. Perhaps Antoine may too one day come to insist on having his Arabic name pronounced authentically and holistically, without any erosions or omits, whether in Canada or in any other corner in our world. To allow an "Anglicization" of my name is to also allow colonial discourse to redefine and rearticulate my identity and to alienate it from its essence (Bhabha, 1984).

On Finding Cultural Inter-sections and "Third Spaces"

Although some of my interviewees felt, after a year of their presence in Canada, that "there are no intersections whatsoever" with the Canadian culture as was the case of Antoine, Miral on the other hand suggests that like in marriage, people of "different worlds" are brought to live together in that space of "a partnership;" she continues to call this space a "third space in which the connection could be made." By way of example, she refers to the recent European music that has emerged as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis in which displaced Syrian musicians today are performing new pieces alongside European musicians. She believes that the new pieces embody a third dimension engendered by the inter-section of East and West. As I sat and listened to Miral, Homi Bhabha's (1984; 1988; 1990; 1994) notion of "third space" naturally came to surface in our conversation. I later asked her if she has read Bhabha's works and she said that she had not; I was surprised to hear her suggestion of a "third space." Bhabha (1988) speaks to the idea of looking for a space that "may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*-national culture, based not on the exoticism or multi-culturalism of the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of the culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter'…the *in-between…* that carries the burden of culture" (p. 22), and he names this the "Third Space." He explains that "[it] is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this hybridity, this 'Third Space', we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (p. 22). He also refers to the third space as a situation that "enables other positions to emerge" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 216), to be reexamined, reconsidered and extended. I find this notion of third space to be helpful in offering us a space to draw on multiple discourses to make sense of the world (Bhabha, 1994) where third spaces bring together "traces of certain meanings or discourse" giving "rise to something different, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (p. 211).

As I think of Bhabha's words and of Miral's, I also autoethnographically think of my life as a third space in which I live in the in-betweenness of both worlds of East and West, Syria and Canada. I consider myself an inter-national human where my soul is a product of hybridity between East and West, I find that this Third Space is a territory in which the boundaries are blurred; it is where epistemology and knowledge are inter-changed. As importantly, this Third Space is not where identities are "amalgamated" into one, or where "characteristics of one efface …or conquer the other person's" as suggested by Miral, but it is where we may look for ways to "preserve…traditions and customs…in one land." As put by Bhabha (1988), "Cultural diversity . . . [becomes] the recognition of pre-given cultural 'contents' and customs, held in a time-frame of relativism; it gives rise to anodyne liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange, or the culture of humanity" (p. 18). As discussed by Rahat Naqvi (2015), the goal becomes "not an assimilation of culture, but an integration of ideas, values and viewpoints" (p. 51). Following Giroux (1992), Naqvi cautions that "assimilation entails nothing less than the annihilation of the 'Other'" (p. 53), where ultimately, as put by Guo (2013), an "internalization of an assimilationist mentality supports the supremacy of white, Eurocentric norms and behaviours" (p. 34). As member of the Syrian Diaspora, I often introduce myself as: "I am Syrian hyphen Canadian," and I locate my identity on the hyphen between the Syrian and Canadian. I have come to feel that

the hyphen embodies this Third Space, this hybrid space in which I live with and through difference. It is the space in which I believe my identity is located today, for like Said, I too feel that I "belong to both worlds, without being completely *of* either one or the other" (1994, p. xxvi).

Here, I am also aware of the fact that, as discussed by Mahtani (2002), the "nature of the hyphen" may also be problematic where "these hyphens of multiculturalism in effect operate to produce spaces of distance, in which ethnicity is positioned outside Canadianness—as an addition to it, but also as an exclusion from it" (p. 78). While being critically mindful of this positioning of being an outsider and at time feeling this sense of outside-ness, I do find that the hyphen also allows me "to see and recognise the different parts and histories of ourselves, to construct those points of identification, those positionalities we call in retrospect our "cultural identities" (Hall, 1994, p. 402). Recognizing and living with the differences have come to position my cultural identity as the hybrid Syrian-Canadian woman I am today.

As I think of my research participants as representations of the peoples of the Syrian Diaspora, and as we search for the inter-section in the differences of cultures, perhaps we, natives and newcomers, can both look for third spaces where we may continue to extend invitations to one another. I suggest that it is in this third space that we may make way for a third culture. And it is in this third culture that I too deeply believe that we may "elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the Others of our selves" (Bhabha, 1988, p. 22) where we can celebrate our similarities rather than our differences in a space that is "'attentive to difference, open to the idea of plurality…and grounded on 'the desire to extend the reference of 'us' as far as we can" (Chang, 2008, p. 29). I think of the third space as a space in which cultural exchange is at work and where cultural growth is a product. It is a space where the former others of difference can be seen and understood as others of "similarity by reducing strangeness in others and expanding their cultural boundaries" where this "transformational process…[of] cross-cultural pollination affects both parties" (p. 29). I deeply believe that "difference matters," that difference "challenges the fixed binaries which stabilise meaning and representation," and that it is difference that shows "how meaning is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings" (Hall, 1994, pp. 396-397).

On How Canadians Can Be of Help: Activating and Actualizing the Third Space

To recycle knowledge
I asked Miral what she thought would make this land of Canada a fertile place in which she may grow roots, feel grounded, and find a sense of self-worth. Her reply made sense in its practicality. She said,

> A human being can become fulfilled under certain conditions—if he/she has stability, an income, a ground on which he/she stands; and so what may facilitate our integration here is to find the basic conditions of living. For me, to find a suitable job; I am not saying the job of my dreams, for that may be a long road ahead, but to find the basics that might help establish my self-balance, like a specific job, a ground—so that people

would know you, respect you, appreciate you, and at a later stage, so that you may feel needed by people, because when I feel needed, I feel my self-worth because I would be a source of help for someone else, I would feel that I am offering him/her something that helps him/her continue as well, and so imagine how big and sacred is this—to be able to give something to someone.

The question here becomes—what bridges then may we possibly build that may bring Syrians and Canadians to meet in a third space? Drawing from the works of several scholars (Bhabha, 1994; Gutiérrez et al., 1999; Soja, 1996), Moje et al. (2004) suggested that,

> an integration of knowledge and Discourses drawn from different spaces [calling it] the construction of 'third space' that *merges* the 'first space' of people's home, community, and peer networks with the 'second space' of the discourses they encounter in more formalized institutions such as work, school, or church…where these spaces can be reconstructed to form a third, different or alternative, space of knowledge and Discourses. (p. 41)

Mary further suggests that we look for ways to "recycle" the newcomers' education, knowledge, and experience. She believes that "[in] order to be able to adapt to and to fit in the Canadian culture, you will need at one point recycle some things in your life, your university degree, your education, or your experience." She also points to the idea that when recycled in the "new space", the "first" knowledge may consequently remain present as an acknowledged element in this "merged" new space. Along these lines, Yan Guo (2013) writes, "It is not just the newcomers who need to adapt to the Canadian culture. The receiving society also needs to change in order to recognize cultural, linguistic and economic contributions of immigrants to Canada" (p. 37). As a newcomer, Rita recognizes that there has to be an effort made on their part in which their qualifications ought to also be developed into something that is fit to function within the Canadian system (whether in language or skill), but also suggests that there should be "one-on-one exams" that take into consideration a newcomer's past experience and knowledge in their respective domains and assess him/her based on the assumption of a funds of knowledge model instead of intellectual deficiency (Moll et al., 1992).

I find Rita's suggestion to be empirical in that it brings us to consider new possibilities, based on her individual experience and observations, in which we may find ways to exchange knowledge and experience between the old and new spaces, and "recycle*"* it in a third space that preserves, celebrates and *reuses* the old in the new space. She even goes on to recommend how to put the theoretical into practice by suggesting that an exam is prepared, individualistically, for each candidate—an exam that allows for each person to be evaluated on a personal and individual level and not as done by current exams that do not allow space for unique individual merit to emerge. Daniel characterizes the current standardized ways of assessment as "robotic and machine-like" where he finds that the current methods in place do not "look at you or who you are but looks at what is written only" and that "the human that's behind the name doesn't come to surface in these assessments." Daniel, like Mary, also believes in the strength of his skills and qualifications and considers his "weakness in language" to be his only obstacle. This sentiment is

echoed by every research participant in my study. Each arrived from Syria to Canada with a different level of English proficiency, depending on their educational backgrounds, but none seemed confident in their ability to relay their knowledge or their work experiences in English. Echoing Mary's words, Daniel too finds that the solution lies in finding ways to assess people individually and to humanize the scores by allowing for experience, manifested in individual voice and narratives, to speak to their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). Within this context, Yan Guo (2013) and Shibao Guo (2010) call for a framework that rejects the current deficit model, which seeks to assimilate immigrants to the norms of the dominant social, cultural and educational norms of the host society, and propose a framework that calls for "pluralist citizenship" that recognizes immigrants' multiple attachments to specific languages, cultures and values, and aims to affirm cultural difference and diversity as positive and desirable assets. Although in Syria recycling is not a practice built into daily life as their realities do not afford them this sort of luxury, Rita, who had lived in Canada for less than two years at the time of the interview, quickly learned the importance of recycling and of reusing materials that might have gone to waste otherwise. I find her suggestion of finding ways to recycle immigrants' knowledge to be innovative, and I think it may indeed act as a means for helping Syrian newcomers as they try to reposition their knowledge and past experiences within the framework of a new homeland.

To be open to other ways of knowing the world
As discussed earlier, one goal in writing this essay is to offer an empathetic cultural understanding (Chang, 2008) of Syrian newcomers through engaging narratives that speak to their lived experiences imbued and narrated by *their* voices so that we can qualitatively conjure up, through their active participation in the process, dynamic ways that may facilitate their integration and resettlement in their new unfamiliar Canadian landscape. Throughout the process of interviewing, it had been my hope to engage a language of hope with the goal of adding a deeper understanding of the human experience of Syrian refugees. Frantz Fanon (1963) writes, "I find myself—I, a man—in a world where words wrap themselves in silence; in a world where the other endlessly hardens himself" (p. 178). Mary believes that the lack of engagement and the silence between Syrians and Canadians is due to their lack of knowledge about one another; it is, she believes, about fearing to approach the unknown. She insists that "Knowledge is the key to opening doors between the two and is the bridge…It's about knowledge. Knowledge is an explanation. It is an explanation about yourself." She also believes that it is the "shortest road to meeting the Other." She adds, "When things are put forward, discussed, and explained, then you gain knowledge and your fears are alleviated. Knowledge slowly helps you overcome fear." Mary's words speak to the importance of coming to *know* the Other through breaking silence and looking for other ways of knowing, ways that are different from what has been historically produced as knowledge on the Other. Knowledge then becomes a product of engaging with one another in meaningful conversations, discussions, and stories. Along the same lines, Daniel further suggests that in order to build bridges of acceptance and understanding, we must first "expand our awareness and our perceptions. For example, something that is really important as I said is connecting, talking, talking one to one, not sympathizing. Sympathizing does not yield results." He insists that sympathy alone cannot build bridges of understanding. Karly Kehoe et al. (2019) speak of the need to "engage in a constructive dialogue that breaks

down barriers and offers an opportunity for optimism" (p. 2); I think of it as a language of hope and possibilities.

One of the questions that has guided my research is: What do Syrian newcomers believe are ways in which Canadians can help as they try to make meaning of family and home in their new homeland, and as they negotiate and remediate their identities? I believe that Mary's and Daniel's words provide some answers to this question, where, as they suggest, coming to know the other through engaging with one another is key to understanding one another. I further believe that this sort of knowledge dwells in hearing the stories as told *by* those who lived and experienced them, for as in the words of Dorothy Allison (1995): "stories are the one sure way I know to touch the heart and change the world" (p. 72).

It is also important for me to express that by sharing what is imparted by my research participants, I am seeking to counter an "Orientalist" (Said, 1979) and colonial epistemology and ontology on the Arab subject for as explained by Hall (1994): "Europe was a case of that which is endlessly speaking—and endlessly speaking *us*" (p. 399). I too deeply believe that colonial and imperial discourses have spoken me, and they continue to speak *us*. As an Arab woman, I have battled throughout my life with Western misrepresentations and the assumptions they foster. My reaction has been to find my voice so that I can disrupt a hegemonic narrative, deconstruct, reconstruct and re-present my image as an Arab woman. Today, I am acutely aware of the fact that when standing in a Western space, everything I do and everything I say is attached in one way or another to presenting and representing my identity as an Arab woman. I voice my opinions not only to express my convictions but also to announce, as in the words of Antoine, that "I am Syrian [with emphasis on every word in this phrase]." I write to counter the prevailing "knowledge" on Syrians, on Arabs, on Muslims, and on the Other. This is my language resistance. It is my way of rejecting the Other that I have been said to be. It is my way to show that I am not the "Other" that seems to have been engraved in Western minds, where, as explained by Mary, it is assumed that everyone coming from the Middle East is "cocooned within her *hijab* as a female and in his *kufiya* [a male headdress] as a male." And, it is my way to share my story and to contribute to the epistemology on Syrian Arab women, for as Hall (1994) writes,

> Not only, in Said's 'Orientalist' sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as 'Other'. Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault reminds us, by the fatal couplet, 'power/knowledge'. But this kind of knowledge is internal, not external. It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge', not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, by the power of inner compulsion and subjective con-formation to the norm. (p. 394-395)

To engage empathy as an act
But beyond countering the misrepresentations, I also hope that an empathetic cultural understanding surfaces through the stories, another way of seeing the world. In my interviews,

we discussed the notion of empathy. Mary was eager to speak about this topic. She explains that it is important to distinguish between empathy and sympathy. She suggests that to sympathize is to feel helplessly sorry for another person and she says, "you feel sorry for this person and that's it." She further adds, "Sympathy does not possess any power. At all." However, Mary believes that empathy is a feeling triggered and driven by a desire for action and by a sense of responsibility to help with making change. Empathy, as expressed by the participants, is an act, whereas sympathy stops at a feeling. To Mary, an empathetic act can range from the act of listening to giving advice to a person to being an active part of the becoming change. Daniel is more specific and explains, "It's not about feeling sympathy; it's about knowing what he [a newcomer] needs and how he may fulfill his needs; for example, if I see someone who has a specific skill, and if I want to help him, it's not about giving him money, but instead directing him to the right road—a road where he might find success."

Gladkova (2010) engages a semantic analysis of the terms and speaks to the difference between sympathy and empathy, and she adds a feeling of compassion as a layer in between the two. She defines sympathy as "an emotion caused by the realization that something bad has happened to another person" (p. 271). She then suggests that "compassion, like sympathy, is evoked when something bad happens to another person and one feels something bad because of this…A significant difference between sympathy and compassion lies in the fact that compassion implies a more 'active' response to the bad state of another person" (p. 272). She further goes on to explain that compassion does not result in a helping action but implies at least "a desire" to help. Finally, Gladkova (2010) defines empathy as "a conscious attention to the feeling of another person…The essence of empathy is knowing and understanding the emotional state of another person" (p. 273). And Guiora et al. (1975) write, "Empathy, perhaps most simply described as the ability to put oneself in another's shoes…it is to step into a new and perhaps unfamiliar shoes" (p. 45-48).

Conclusion

As an autoethnographic participant-observer, my aim in this paper was to suggest ways in which Canadians (educators, employers, community organizations, policymakers) can be of help to the peoples of the Syrian Diaspora as they remediate their identities in Canada. Through personal stories on their lived experience since their arrival to Canada, we learn that: language presents a key struggle for the peoples of the Syrian Diaspora, a principle difference, and a limitation that has had negative implications on their self-efficacy and has brought them to feel less empowered; that they are positive and hopeful about their continuous progress as they learn the English language; that they are looking for "third spaces" and "in-between" spaces—hybrid spaces in which their old cultural identity may be preserved and the new celebrated, and a space in which continuity is engaged as part of their always-becoming cultural identity. Displaced Syrians suggest that as we look for ways to activate and actualize third spaces, we ought to consider "recycling" their education and experience in a third space where they are assessed individually in their respective domains based on the assumption of a funds of knowledge model instead of intellectual deficiency, a "space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative intervention into existence" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 12). They also invite

Canadians to be open to other ways of knowing the world and insist that knowledge is key to understanding one another (Alatrash, 2019).

Note:
This essay was a chapter in a doctoral thesis that spoke to the lived experience of the Syrian Diaspora in Canada (Alatrash, 2019).

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