

Constructions of a Life

(Be)Longing and (Dis)Location in the Autobiographical Writings of Edward Said, Eva Hoffman, and Ihab Hassan

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Abstract

Denne masteroppgaven tar for seg tre selvbiografier skrevet av Ihab Hassan, Eva Hoffman og Edward Said og forsøker å belyse hvordan deres subjektive opplevelser av kulturell og geografisk forflytning ikke bare kom til å få avgjørende betydning for deres liv, men også deres selvbiografier. Alle de tre tekstene, Hassans *Out of Egypt: Scenes and Arguments of an Autobiography* (1986), Hoffmans *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1989), og Saims *Out of Place: A Memoir* (1999), er skrevet av emigranter og gjenspeiler deres liv før og etter deres første møte med det amerikanske kontinentet. De er skrevet fra en immigrants ståsted og gir en unik og særegen beskrivelse av hvordan det føles å komme til et fremmed land og starte et nytt liv. Hver enkelt forfatter vier også sine opprinnelige hjemland stor oppmerksomhet og skildrer hva de måtte etterlate der. Deres reiser er beskrevet som ytre og geografiske, men de skildrer også en indre, mental reise hvor en forståelse av egen identitet er grunnleggende. Diskusjonen blir beriket av at de tre tekstene de er svært ulike og gir uttrykk for hvordan geografisk forflytning og eksil kan oppfattes som traumatisk, dramatisk eller befriende. Hassans historie skiller seg fra de to andre ved at han valgte å forlate sitt hjemland frivillig, i motsetning til Hoffman og Said, som i stor grad opplevde at historiske og politiske hendelser bidro til deres eksil i Amerika. Hassans opplevelse av å være ”fanget” i sitt eget hjemland bidrar i stor grad til at hans historie står i sterk kontrast til Saims og Hoffmans beretninger. Oppgaven tar for seg hvordan den indre reisen mot en forståelse av egen identitet blir påvirket av ytre faktorer som fremmed kultur, fremmed språk og fremmede steder. Samtidig tar diskusjonen høyde for at det familiære og velkjente også kan være roten til fortvilelse og indre kaos. Ingen liv er identiske, ingen historier er like, og dermed gir også disse tre forfatterne stemme til hver sin helt unike historie. Hoffman beskriver den traumatiske opplevelsen å måtte forlate sitt hjemlige paradisi i Cracow, en hendelse som sammen med et ublidt møte med Canada og USA preger biografien og gjør den til en svært sentimental og melankolsk leseropplevelse. Saims personlige historie om forvirring omkring egen identitet er uavhengig av, men også ytterligere komplisert av, at hans fødested Palestina opphørte å eksistere. I stedet for å skildre en tilsvarende historie om tap av og lengsel til sitt eget hjemland, beskriver Hassan sin søken etter frihet og selvrealisering utenfor Egypts landegrenser. I motsetning til Said og Hoffman, har Hassan aldri returnert til sitt hjemland, noe som gjenspeiles i hans tilsynelatende kritiske refleksjoner og tanker omkring Egypt. De tre selvbiografiene anerkjenner også behovet for en forståelse av ”hjem” utover det konkrete, i en mer billedlig og symbolsk forstand.

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Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Migration, Exile and Self-Writing	5
The Immigrant Genre and “The Ethnic Passage”	7
Becoming Eva	9
Acceptance of Self	13
The Quest for Self-Realization	17
Self-Construction Through Narration	21
Chapter Two: Space, Place and Geographical Translocation	27
Empty Spaces, Meaningful Places	28
The Relational Aspect of Self	30
Placeless and Homeless	31
A Lost World	33
A New World of Continuing Confusion	36
The Garden of Eden	37
Terra Incognita	40
Paradise Lost or Gained	42
The Autonomous Being	44
The Existential Outsider	46
Departures and Arrivals	50
Chapter Three: From Exile to Home	53
Homecoming in Language	55
Out of Place, Into Exile	61
Home as Exile, Exile as Home	65
Rewards of the Exilic Experience	70
Conclusion	75
The (Im)possibility of Returning Home	77
Finding Closure	83
Works Cited	87

Introduction

This thesis will examine the autobiographical writings of Edward Said, Eva Hoffman and Ihab Hassan, and the main objective will be to study how their individual experiences of cultural translocation shape their narrative constructions of their lives. All three of the selected autobiographies, Said's *Out of Place: A Memoir* (1999), Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1989), and Hassan's *Out of Egypt: Scenes and Arguments of an Autobiography* (1986), are narratives of transit written from an immigrant perspective. These personal narratives are chosen not because they give voice to the classical or universal experience of entering into a new world, but because they realize and foreground many different aspects of the immigrant condition. Numerous autobiographers have investigated the nature of their home country from the perspective of forced or voluntary exile. All displacements are experienced subjectively and individually, and these autobiographical accounts have managed to capture and describe three unique experiences of translocation, whether traumatic, dramatic or liberating.

Hoffman's autobiography depicts the author's experience of being taken away from Poland, the site of what she called home and paradise. The presence of loss is vividly depicted in Hoffman's account when she describes how she was "being pushed out of the happy, safe enclosures of Eden" (5). The traumas of physical, involuntarily removal from her native Cracow turn *Lost in Translation* into a predominantly nostalgic literary expression. In Said's *Out of Place* the reader is introduced to a young man whose world feels more strange and unfamiliar than homelike. Bereft of his native home in Palestine and dislocated from several other places, Said explains how these events have marked his entire existence: "To me, nothing more painful and paradoxically sought after characterizes my life than the many displacements from countries, cities, abodes, languages, environments that have kept me in motion all these years" (217). This thesis concerns itself with three different stories of displacement, yet to the extent that displacement implies a prior experience of being in place, Hassan's story is positioned somewhat on the borderline. Rather than offering a nostalgic portrayal of a lost home, *Out of Egypt* describes his acute sense of being misplaced and his desperate longing for what he calls his "escape" from Egypt. Hassan has never returned to his homeland, which he experienced as physical and emotional imprisonment, so for him the thought of home of origin as a *particular* place seems distant.

Given these premises, the life stories provided by Said, Hoffman and Hassan give valuable insight into the physical and mental aspects concerning their transits. Despite the different nature of these narratives, they all do, to a considerable extent, seem to reflect a similar experience of the constant negotiation between origin and destination. Within this state these individuals become subjected to the enormous challenges associated with physical uprooting and translocation. Although they relate to their personal histories with different levels of intimacy, the three autobiographies still mirror some sort of awareness and understanding of how *who* they are reflect *where* they came from. Their autobiographical accounts manage to recount certain crucial aspects of the physically and mentally challenging journeys these writers embarked on, which in turn deserves further investigation.

Chapter One, “Migration, Exile and Self-Writing,” examines the production of autobiography against the immigrant’s experience of dislocation and relocation. While I do not intend to venture into a genre study of autobiographical writing, nonetheless some aspects of self-narration need to be addressed. This discussion takes Phillipe Lejeune’s definition of the autobiography as a vantage point. Lejeune’s writings have been influential and have set the term for many later studies regarding the autobiography. Paul John Eakin’s theoretical work on autobiography moves us towards new perspectives, as he seeks both to map and expand the boundaries of this genre. Ideas from James Craig Holte’s “The Representative Voice: Autobiography and the Ethnic Experience” are also included as it contemplates many of the concerns for the ethnic and immigrant writer. Said, Hoffman and Hassan speak authentically of the experience of changing cultures and crossing boundaries that they felt they could identify. The physical and mental journeys undertaken and recaptured in these autobiographies, demonstrate the possibility of personal transformation following a change of environment. Thomas J. Ferraro’s term “ethnic passage,” which serves to delineate the prototypical immigrant experience, is used as a vantage point in relation to the texts I have chosen, in order to see their narratives of cultural transformation and transplantation against this typical pattern. The three personal accounts examined in this thesis offer profound insight into the process of discovering another self in a new context.

In chapter Two, “Space, Place and Geographical Translocation,” I argue that the politics of place and the politics of displacement both are important for an individual’s understanding of self. With reference to the notion that the autobiographical “I” is always placed in a context, I will use Eakin’s definition of “relational selves” as a vantage point for discussion. This chapter further traces the personal development in the three autobiographies, based on how they represent their relation to the surrounding world and their subjective

experience of their immediate geographical (dis)placement. The discussion in the second chapter aims at investigating how the geographical presence, more than just being a fascinating aspect and background for their stories, comes to provide a very important reference point for an understanding of self. In other words, the *meaningful* relationship between place and individual plays a major part in the formation of self. Said, Hoffman and Hassan are all concerned with their immediate locations. What sets them apart, however, is how strongly they relate to, and identify with the places they have encountered in their lives. I hope to show how *Out of Place*, *Lost in Translation* and *Out of Egypt* can be seen to give expression to a sense of being simultaneously rooted and rootless, attached and detached, in place and out of place.

Several critics and geographers propose theories of geography, space and place and in this chapter I draw mainly on Edward Relph and Doreen Massey. With his *Place and Placelessness* (1976), Relph demonstrates how essential place is to human beings. Although he shows an awareness of the challenges regarding the concept of place in a world of great social and geographical mobility, Massey goes further in offering a renewed emphasis on the understanding of space-place. In *Space, Place and Gender* (1994), Massey questions familiar and well-established assumptions about space and place, and argues for a revitalization of our imagination of these concepts. Her ardent argumentation is based on the idea that how we think about space matters, which in turn opens up for an interesting reading of the three autobiographies presented in this thesis. Massey argues for a conceptualization of place as open and hybrid and in *Space, Place and Gender* she claims that: “Just as personal identities are argued to be multiple, shifting, possibly unbounded, so also, it is argued here, are the identities of place” (7).

Chapter Three, “From Exile to Home,” examines different notions of exile ranging from loss and displacement to freedom and self-realization. The condition of exile often entails loss of home, and as immigrants, Said, Hoffman and Hassan have experienced relocation from their native home. In this last chapter I will draw on theorizing by Dominic LaCapra to enlighten the distinctions between absence and loss with respect to major life-altering experiences such as those that these autobiographies portray. In his *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), LaCapra provides a perspective for a reading that takes into account the psychological experience of trauma connected to exile. My focus will be on his discussion concerning trauma, absence and loss, so as to explore to what degree Said, Hoffman and Hassan are possessed or haunted by the past. In many respects they seem to be exploiting the therapeutic potential of the autobiographical account, as a way to write through the past or

write off the past. Either way, the act of writing becomes a process for Said, Hoffman and Hassan that enables them to come to a new acceptance of home. The journey of life can either be viewed as a circular experience, going away and returning home, or as a linear journey, where return is impossible. None of these writers returned home to stay. Hoffman and Said went back, but both experienced even more profoundly how they had changed when encountering the cultures, places and people they had left behind. Hassan never has and most likely never will return. In many ways writing becomes a destination for the three autobiographers, if not home in the common usage of the word, at least metaphorically, as a place to be grounded or rooted. In other words, writing becomes the closest to home they can achieve.

The autobiographies of Hoffman, Said and Hassan provide valuable insight into what it means to come to a new land and, in some cases, a new language, and what it is like to live in a condition of exile, whether it is physical, linguistic or psychological. In addition to dealing with questions of personal and cultural dislocation, these narratives also seem to acknowledge that their exilic conditions may also imply certain benefits.

Chapter One:

Migration, Exile and Self-Writing

The personal accounts of Eva Hoffman, Edward Said and Ihab Hassan provide the reader with contemporary texts that illustrate an understanding of the autobiography as a life-journey in process. The three narratives employ the structure of departure as a vantage point and thus reflect how individuals who move from their place or origin, simultaneously seem to move on in their lives. However, this chapter is not mainly preoccupied with the length of their physical journeys, but the depth of their individual journeys, the inner transformation of self. Their uprootedness creates an even stronger, more complicated relation to the past, and their autobiographical memories present their way of crossing the boundaries of time and place in an effort to unite the past with the present. In many respects the autobiographies of Hoffman, Hassan and Said describe their physical journeys, but at the same time the actual writing of the autobiography becomes a journey in itself, a journey back in time through memories. The image of the self as a storyteller is an intriguing one, and perhaps contributes to explaining why life narratives are found to be so universally fascinating for both readers and writers. However, among literary scholars, the question of autobiography as a distinct genre, including the long-standing effort to come up with a definition of the autobiography, has been and continues to be a subject of dispute. Therefore, before attempting any analysis of the three particular life narratives in question, a brief introductory mapping of the genre is called for.

Although there are many related forms of life-writing, biographies and memoirs included, autobiography is perhaps the most widely used and most generally understood term for life narrative. Despite the relatively recent coinage of the term autobiography, the practice of self-referential writing is far from a new phenomenon. As Jeremy D. Popkin explains in *History, Historians and Autobiography*, the term autobiography is composed of three Greek words denoting self-life-writing: “*autos*, the portrait of the author’s self that emerges from such a text; *bios*, the narrative of a life that it contains; and *graphe*, the writing of the text itself” (6-7). The autobiography constitutes a genre of “self-life-writing,” with specific conventions and patterns, and foremost among these is the practice that the author speaks about him-or herself. Philippe Lejeune, one of the pioneering critics of contemporary autobiography, coined the following definition of the term autobiography in his well-known essay “The Autobiographical Pact”: “*Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person*

concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (qtd. in Eakin 2; italics in the original).

As previously noted, the autobiographical genre has been one of the most debated literary genres throughout the last decades, and its definition and scope have frequently been reformulated. Some critics have been quite reluctant to expand and make the genre an inclusive one, while others, like Paul John Eakin, open up for a broader definition within this particular field. In *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, the memoir is defined as a “species of AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL writing” (Gray 172), thus postulating a view that emphasizes the resembling characteristics and qualities between the two. Other critics seem to regard the memoir as another particular and distinct variant of first person narrative, based on its somewhat contrasting internal form and focal point. Sidonie Smith, in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, conceives of the memoir as a narrative that “directs attention more toward the lives and actions of others than to the narrator” (Smith 198). This definition seems to be moving in a different direction than Lejeune’s “autobiographical pact,” as it puts its main emphasis on the lives and events of other persons beside the narrator’s own. Distinguishing between different kinds of life writing has never been a simple task, and although there inevitably seems to be a difference between the autobiography and the memoir, it appears to be more or less insignificant to most critics. In this thesis, I adhere to a broad definition of the autobiographical genre, and rather than focusing on the genre’s limits, the main objective centers around the various forms that autobiographical writing can take. Considering the diversity within the field and the complexities of classifications, the main concern in this thesis will be on *what* these stories narrate rather than *how* they narrate it.

The traditional autobiography typically follows the pattern of a chronological framework, and many scholars would agree that for an autobiography to be “pure,” it should encompass the author’s whole life, instead of merely focusing on certain aspects or parts of it. Far from all works of life writing follow this conventional autobiographical form, which contributes to the complexities for critics to unite over one clear definition. Although many have and continue to question the genre, it has gained more recognition within the literary canon, and as James Craig Holte concludes in “The Representative Voice: Autobiography and the Ethnic Experience”: “the autobiography is a central part of the American literary tradition” (25). The attitude towards autobiographical writing has changed within the different academic professions, and has now come to be viewed in more positive terms than previously recorded. Popkin formulates the following explanation: “It is precisely because these critics

now read autobiographies as imaginative re-creations of the past, full of subjective elements and artistic devices, rather than as simple factual chronicles, that such texts can be seen as works of art, embodying intricate authorial strategies as worthy of analysis as those in novels” (25). This statement captures one of the autobiography’s distinct characteristics, namely its reliance on memory, or what Popkin calls “imaginative re-creations of the past.”

The Immigrant Genre and “The Ethnic Passage”

The immigrant genre, also referred to as part of the ethnic genre, constitutes literature much concerned with self-transformation and dislocation. However, these are merely two of the traits that typically characterize such writings, as there are many personal processes that have and continue to be of inspiration for individuals within this literary tradition. An interesting feature of life narratives, and perhaps especially regarding immigrant autobiography, is the mechanisms of self-transformation at work in them. In the writing and construction of an autobiography we are rewriting our lives, but are we rewriting in the sense that the self portrayed in the text is a different person than the one writing from the present time? Many immigrant autobiographies are characterized by a tendency to separate between two selves, often as a direct result of the change in the protagonist’s mental and geographical landscapes. Furthermore, as a result of this split into two distinct identities, another central theme within this genre is what Thomas J. Ferraro refers to as “the paradigm of cultural rebirth – ‘from alien to American’” (1). Mary Antin’s life story, re-told in *The Promised Land*, is considered to epitomize the typical immigrant narrative, where the author’s own personal transformation and Americanization is a central issue:

I WAS born, I have lived, and I have been made over. Is it not time to write my life's story? I am just as much out of the way as if I were dead, for I am absolutely other than the person whose story I have to tell. Physical continuity with my earlier self is no disadvantage. I could speak in the third person and not feel that I was masquerading. I can analyze my subject, I can reveal everything; for *she*, and not *I*, is my real heroine. My life I have still to live; her life ended when mine began. (1)

This confession gives voice to what is often considered to be the classical illustration of an immigrant’s autobiography, where the autobiographical subject emerges as a new being towards the end. Although this is a familiar aspect in the contemporary narratives of Said,

Hassan and Hoffman, it is the latter's that perhaps resemble Antin's story the most, even though, as Hoffman herself points out, they write from different perspectives: "I am a creature of my time – as she, in her adaptations, was a creature of hers" (162).

The autobiography is a particular artistic form within the American literary landscape, but perhaps the quest in more recent ethnic literature has changed from the traditional approach seen in *The Promised Land*. The featuring of contemporary America as a multicultural society has turned the process of assimilation or Americanization in a different direction compared to many of those recorded at an earlier time. Hoffman acknowledges this dimension in *Lost in Translation* as her story very much is concerned with this topic: "In a splintered society, what does one assimilate to? Perhaps the very splintering itself" (197). Thus, the fashioning of an individual identity and voice in America becomes, for the three writers in question, just as much a quest to find oneself and to get a true understanding of one's own being. This is very much reflected in the American literary tradition which, as Holte acknowledges, is deeply concerned with "the American question," which Holte refers to as the "question of self" (25). One of the challenges concerning America, is the complexities and meanings of the word "American," as it may denote so many different things. Due to the continent's history of immigration streams, there is not one simple answer to the questions of what becoming an American entails and what the requirements for such an accomplishment might be. Holte goes on to conclude that as a result of this situation, a major concern of ethnic autobiographies has become "an almost obsessive inquiry into what it means to be an American" (25). But do all ethnic writers aspire to become American? The answer is probably no, and for those who strive to achieve an American identity, the challenges may perhaps reveal themselves to be more complicated than anticipated. In a society marked by its diverse population and history, the definition of "Americanness" becomes somewhat troublesome, which makes the quest to find an individual voice even harder.

A recurrent theme in much immigrant and ethnic autobiography, seems to be the individual's conversion, an aspect further illustrated by Ferraro's term "ethnic passage." The life stories conveyed by Hoffman, Said and Hassan are, to a various degree, concerned with the theme of adaption to a new culture and with the progress of finding and defining a personal identity. In *Ethnic Passages: Literary Immigrants in twentieth-century America*, Ferraro used the term "ethnic passage" as a way of describing an important aspect within the field of ethnic literature, "the movement out of immigrant confines into the larger world of letters" (8), or the immigrant's "passage" from one identity to another. What Ferraro aimed at enlightening with this concept, was the (inevitable) transformation or translation of the

autobiographical subject. However, does this individual transformation necessarily have to involve the extreme crossover, the total transformation “from alien to American” (1), as suggested by Ferraro? This thesis centers around three autobiographers, all of whom present their own narratives of personal growth and transformation, argued by Ferraro to be a necessary experience for the immigrant in order to become a participant in what he refers to as the “world of letters” (8). *Lost in Translation*, *Out of Place* and *Out of Egypt* are valuable objects of study, considering how they vary in content, thus providing a nuanced picture to the complexities concerning the immigrant experience. Hoffman engages in a struggle between the division of her Polish and American self, and which one to choose. Accidentally born in Egypt, Hassan regards himself as an American by heart and sets out to realize his inner self. His inner conflict, and his inability to relate to either side of his personality, whether its Arab or American, defines Said’s autobiographical story. Each one of their personal narratives represent a distinct voice providing first-hand accounts of their lives, in addition to realizing three very different textual expressions of the immigrant’s process of “becoming.”

Becoming Eva

As I already have established by referring to Ferraro’s term “ethnic passage,” a familiar progress in immigrant narratives tends to concern the immigrant’s transformation from one identity to another. However, as Hoffman’s text describes, another important aspect concerning the immigrant’s experience is further complicated by the crucial process of not only transforming, but also translating the self. André Aciman acknowledges this critical challenge when he writes that many different “kinds of shifts must take place for a person to acquire, let alone accept, a new identity, a new language” (“Foreword: Permanent Transients” 14). Of the three autobiographical texts, Hoffman’s narrative seems to be the one giving the vital link between language and identity particular attention. In contrast to Said and Hassan, Hoffman faces the challenge of not only inventing a new American identity, but also acquiring a whole new language. Emigrating to a foreign linguistic environment, Hoffman thus faces a number of different obstacles. Apart from being lost in a new language, her biggest fear is perhaps losing track of her own Polish self.

Being an immigrant implies continual change and continual growth, and a major aspect of the immigrant’s experience is associated with entering a “space where you let go of one identity, invent another, and end up being more than one person though never quite two” (Aciman, “Permanent Transients” 11). The division between two selves is a familiar trait

within the immigrant genre, as the geographical journey very often leads to a questioning of the individual's identity from different perspectives. The transition from one place to another often involves a re-invention of identity, and as already mentioned this quest very often appears to be a central theme in much ethnic or immigrant literature. The title, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, alludes to the divisions of Hoffman's narrative structure, but moreover it reflects the autobiographer's division of self. Hoffman's life story begins at the very moment when life as she knows it is coming to an end. Along with her family she is leaving Poland behind, for what her parents anticipate will be a better future for all of them in Vancouver, Canada. The physical removal from a familiar world entails also a separation from the person she used to be, and Hoffman confirms how, as one part of her life ends, another one begins: "From now on, my life will be divided into two parts" (100).

Before her self became divided, Hoffman was certain of her Polish self. However, as she faces the realities of the New World, the English language and the social settings have a profound de-familiarizing effect on her character. Not long after their arrival in this new, foreign country, Hoffman has a nightmare and wakes up in a middle of a scream, which she described as "The primal scream of my birth into the New World" (104). This nightmare becomes a symbol for the challenges and the long process of de-alienation and personal transformation that awaits Hoffman. Crucial to this process is Hoffman's own readiness to let go of her past, to allow herself to be uprooted, a decision that comes at a price, her second birth. Another step in Hoffman's Americanization process is one of her biggest sacrifices, when her Polish name Ewa is being replaced by the American equivalent Eva, and as such the English language invents another version of herself. This "careless baptism" (104), which presumably is done to make the transition easier, perhaps turns the new world into an even more "incomprehensible space" (104). But would her Polish self be buried along with her name? For quite some time, Hoffman finds herself torn between nostalgia for the pastoral past, and a desire to assimilate into the present, split between her Polish and American self, and unable to decide which one to choose for the future. "I can't afford to look back, and I can't figure out how to look forward" (116), writes Hoffman at a point in her story when she barely "exist[s] in the stasis of a perpetual present" (117). Hoffman's narrative is very much characterized by this internal conflict and her frustration at being torn between detachment and engagement.

How is she supposed to make sense of the new surroundings, when she can't even make sense of herself? Hoffman might still prefer her Polish self, which she knows by heart, but acknowledges that there is no room for Ewa in this part of her life: "I can't be her. I'm

losing track of her” (120). Even though she is reluctant to sacrifice her Polish self for this new American identity, which is demanding more and more attention, she also knows that the alternative, existing merely as an in-between creature, constantly oscillating between the past and the present, is no viable alternative. Although Hoffman concludes that there is no alternative other than “being just one person”(139), how she is going to “achieve that simple identity” (139) remains an unresolved issue. This challenge also presents a dilemma: “if I don’t want to remain in arid internal exile for the rest of my life, I have to find a way to lose my alienation without losing my self. But how does one bend toward another culture without falling over, how does one strike an elastic balance between rigidity and self-effacement?” (209). This passage brings into focus the notion that although Hoffman’s voyage was physical, from Poland via Canada to the United States, her journey is just as much internal.

From the very beginning of *Lost In Translation*, it is obvious that Hoffman’s life story is characterized by the author’s nostalgia for the past. However, as time progresses, and she realizes that the American continent is meant to be the place where she will live not only for the present but also in her future, Hoffman’s nostalgic memories for the life she had in Poland is balanced by the desire to capture the present and perhaps even more so, to fully arrive. The idea of arrival is essential in Hoffman’s story, and is perhaps best captured in her decision to make English the language of her new existence. By writing her diary in English, Hoffman not only decides to construct a new version of her self; at the same time she relegates parts of her Polish self to the past, making them history. Nevertheless the growing sense of a new self is reward enough for Hoffman, who comes to value this written English version of her self: “That self is the most American thing about me; after all, I acquired it here” (251). In keeping with the diary, the very act of Hoffman’s autobiographical writing contributes to the making of a personal identity that departs from the Polish part of it. Even though Hoffman experiences “being remade” (220), she is still very conscious about keeping the parts that are most “real” about her. The invention of her American self is taking its toll on Hoffman, and she is afraid that she will end up like previous “successful immigrants” before her, who “have lost some of their meaning” (142). Hoffman is aware of the risk of losing the most essential and genuine part of herself in the translation process, but the temptation of a life of American “middle class convention” (143) is perhaps what she dreams of as she confesses: “They’re a version of what I might become, and even a temptation for what I might become” (142). This statement to a great extent sums up what is at work in *Lost in Translation*, namely the central engagement with the loss and acquisition of language and identity. The original Polish self becomes less visible as the narrative progresses, and ultimately it is in the part entitled “The

New World” that Hoffman finds her true fulfillment, not in “Paradise,” which focuses on her early years in Poland. Hoffman’s quest becomes in many respects the translation of herself without being totally absorbed by her new reality.

To remain outside such common agreements is to remain outside reality itself – and if I’m not to risk a mild cultural schizophrenia, I have to make a shift in the innermost ways. I have to translate myself. But if I’m to achieve this without becoming assimilated – that is, absorbed – by my new world, the translation has to be careful, the turns of the psyche unforced. (211)

Starting out as a thirteen-year-old girl, who had no idea or comprehension of her destination or her own destiny, Hoffman has come a long way when she finishes off her story with the following words: “I am here now” (280). Hoffman has arrived at what is the place of her present and her future, and she shows that she has successfully achieved a unity between the old and the new, even though she might never stop questioning “the strange sort of creature [she’s] become!” (48).

Hoffman’s story is an obvious transformation narrative which raises the essential question so many immigrant’s have been confronted with: what is an American? In comparison with *Out of Place* and *Out of Egypt, Lost in Translation* is the life narrative that mostly repeats the traditional immigrant trajectory. Are their narratives Arab-American and Polish-American or just American? Are they ethnic or immigrant authors, or are they just American? Coming from outside the United States, perhaps all three represent something that is placed somewhere outside the American mainstream? Hoffman is the only one actually referring to herself as an immigrant; Said and Hassan, never do in their autobiographies. However, although Hoffman addresses her own position as an immigrant, it is hard to grasp how she would position herself as the narrative comes to an end. Does she progress from a Polish identity to an entirely new, American one, or is she best characterized as a Polish-American? Hoffman posits her own thoughts regarding this matter: “I only know that the hybrid creature I’ve become is made up of two parts Americana, that the pastiche has lots of local color. Despite my resistance, or perhaps through its very act, I’ve become a partial American, a sort of resident alien” (221). Perhaps Hoffman deliberately chose to remain only “two parts Americana,” in order to preserve perhaps the most essential part of her own self, the certainty of her Polish identity. Hoffman is strongly attached to her roots and provides an explanation for her refusal of total Americanization and the reason for preserving one part of

her self in an unassimilated private place: “We all need to find this place in order to know that we exist not only within culture but also outside it” (276).

Hoffman addresses the difficulties of having one foot in the past and one in the present. The division between two selves is a complicated feeling that she has a hard time coming to terms with, and as is revealed by the following passage, the transition involves a complicated and nuanced process where one easily can get lost: “Can I really extract what I’ve been from myself so easily? Can I jump continents as if skipping rope?” (115). Although, she at some point got “*Lost in Translation*,” the second part of the autobiography’s title strongly suggests Hoffman’s re-birth into a “New Language.”

Acceptance of Self

In terms of portraying the typical immigrant trajectory, Said’s story is placed somewhere between the self-creations of Hoffman and Hassan. While the voice of nostalgia, melancholia and loss runs throughout the narrative and resembles that of the displaced immigrant, Said’s focus is not so much concerned with the “ethnic passage.” Both Said and Hassan use the words “Out of” in their autobiographical titles, *Out of Place* and *Out of Egypt*, thus alluding to their choice to focus on the past rather than the present in their life narratives. This, in turn, leads their stories to divert from *Lost in Translation* and the more typical immigrant account, where the focus is placed on the transformation that the arrival in a new geographical setting brings about. Said is very much preoccupied with his past throughout his life story and consequently he directs his attention towards where and what he came out of, rather than what he turned into. Like Hoffman, Said also experiences the struggle with having two distinct identities, but his split self is not a result of his translocation.

Starting from the vantage point “who am I” which also lies at the core of much immigrant literature, Said formulates a quest to get a firm grip of his own identity. In contrast to Hoffman, Said does not encounter the emotional strain of being deprived of an identity, and he never experiences the challenges of establishing a new self in a completely foreign setting. Said’s traumas concerning self stem from a somewhat different source, as the confusion and depression of being without a solid sense of his own personal identity, is present in Said’s existence long before he steps onto American soil. The awareness of his conflicting identities is something Said is made aware of from an early age, and he expresses a profound wish that matters would be less complicated. Why could he not have been “all-Arab, or all-European

and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian” (5) instead of “the non-Arab, the non-American American” he feels like (236)? These passages are concerned with the autobiographer’s constant uncertainties towards himself, in addition to Said’s frustration with not having a unified, coherent self. Said’s autobiographical account is not so much concerned with re-birth and re-invention as it is a construction of a self all together. In this sense, *Out of Place* becomes the narrative of an individual undergoing a creation process, a process wherein the narrator’s intention is to come to an acceptance and understanding of himself by attempting to reconcile with the distressing sense “of many identities – mostly in conflict with each other” (5).

From an early age, Said is told by his father that he is an American citizen, yet he has never been to the United States, and his own uncertainty over his supposedly American identity is further complicated by the “foolishly English name yoked forcibly to the unmistakably Arabic family name Said” (3). Said never learns the origin of his family name and consequently has a hard time figuring out and make complete sense of his family’s and subsequently his own history. Because of his parents’ secretive attitude, Said came to acknowledge how “the total picture was never quite right” (6). Said’s existence is further complicated by the fact that he lived in between two different stories. The story his father told him was one, and what he thought of himself was another. They represented two very different and conflicting stories, showing great disparities between his own perceptions and what evidently was the reality. Because the two sides of his identity are “forced” upon him, Said is compelled to live through years of inner alienation leading him into an existence colored by deep self-estrangement. The reasons behind his lack of identity and his lack of self stem from many different sources, but perhaps mostly from his father, who had the authority to deprive Said of his much needed self-confidence and self-assurance. Said’s main objective in *Out of Place* thus becomes not a quest to invent another self, but an unified and coherent self, regardless of his geographical placement. Even though he was confused before his transit, that is not to say that the American reality did not have an impact on Said’s life altogether, but rather that the process of creating an independent self, whether American or Arab, goes back as far as he can recall. “Who am I” is asked repeatedly by Said, and just as he questions himself, so does his audience: Is he an American in Egypt, an Arab in Egypt, and Egyptian in America, or is his destiny perhaps to be an American in the United States? No matter the country, no matter the school, no matter the setting or situation, Said’s story always seems to have the same outcome, wherein the protagonist always feels like an outsider, which again, he writes, “reflected my inner deformations” (55).

In comparison to *Lost in Translation*, *Out of Place* pays little attention to the actual transformation process and the author's admission into the American society. However Said is constantly reminded of his hybrid character. If by coming to America, Said had hoped he would not only arrive geographically but "arrive" mentally as well, he was sadly mistaken. Said's struggle to get a complete understanding of himself neither begins nor ends upon his arrival in the United States. Said's confusion of self seemed to exist independently of his geographical location and thus he had to face the harsh reality that "It was as an American businessman's son who hadn't the slightest feeling of being American" that his life would proceed in the new world (80). Because he is regarded as an alien and once again is left feeling like a misfit, Said describes the new home as a somewhat inaccessible place, an "ideal America that I could never gain admission to, but which held me enthralled at the gate" (282-83). Based on this initial impression of the American reality as somewhere he would perhaps never fit in, Said decides to acquire the shape of a "simple transparent soul" and to become "as anonymous as possible" (137). However, the anonymity of this vast, impersonal space comes to provide Said with the opportunity to pursue his own personal freedom.

Said finds an infinite freedom in the awareness of the fact that perhaps he could play the most important part in creating his own life. Said explains: "New York's tremendous scale, its towering silent, anonymous buildings reduced one to an inconsequential atom, making me question what I was to all this, my totally unimportant existence giving me an eerie but momentary sense of liberation for the first time in my life" (140). On this note, Said's story resembles that of Hoffman, who also experienced that part of the comfort in making a life and residing in America, came from the anonymity that she was able to attain in such an immense environment. For Hoffman, much like Said, it was precisely "the freedom from insignificance" that made her feel at ease (160). In his transparent existence in the United States, Said experiences a different kind of solitude than he had previously done. This time, he becomes aware of his own possibilities of creating himself anew, of how the past no longer has to dictate his future. Said has a hard time letting go, although he is aware that if he does he can continue to evolve. Identity is a term associated with many different characteristics; it can be displaced and replaced, or it can be hybrid and multiple. Instead of thinking of identity and self as something stable, Eakin prefers to "think of 'self' less as an entity and more as a kind of awareness in process" (x). This way of thinking is valuable, considering how life and self are constantly undergoing construction, conversion and transformation. Perhaps the most important aspect of Said's life experience derives from his physical and mental journey towards new knowledge and his acquirement of a new way of

seeing himself in the light of his past. This is a past that he never seems to fully comprehend or reconcile with. Growing up, Said was aware of the immediate presence of two different worlds in his life, the Arab world and the American world. The uncertainties of this dual aspect appearing both in his physical and mental world remained somewhat unresolved, until Said arrived at some acceptance of the recognition that he would perhaps never be “quite right” and always remain in some sense “out of place” (295).

One may observe that *Out of Place* and *Lost in Translation* represent forms of life writings which convey the problems of arriving at a closure. Said must acknowledge at the end of his narrative that he continues to be out of place, he never arrived in a sense. But, much like *Lost in Translation*, *Out of Place* may be seen as an account of a relatively successful process of coming to terms with one's otherness. As such, these life stories open up for the possibility of coming to terms with and accepting an identity that is perhaps not totally unified, but enough so, that the life here and now can be fully appreciated. A fundamental aspect of Said's personal narrative is his vulnerable sense of self, as he does not seem to understand the connection between his seemingly unrelated parts, but in time, Said comes to, if not embrace, then at least accept, the complicated mix of his origins. This is also reflected in the title, which alludes to Said's position, perhaps both geographically and mentally, of being out of place, once and for all, now and forever. However, Said manages to accept his fate, and he actually comes to regard his existence and himself as “a cluster of flowing currents” (295), and he comes to view this constant motion as an aspect of his life that gives him a kind “of freedom” (295).

Said and Hassan, whose story I will turn to next, both had different prospects and reasons for coming to the United States than Hoffman did. Said and Hassan lend their voices to a somewhat different version of the many immigrant stories, as both of them emigrated to take advantage of the better educational and academic opportunities of the West. Said writes: “I have only the most shadowy notion of what my life might have been had I not come to America. I do know that I was beginning again in the United States, unlearning to some extent what I had learned before,” and he continues by expressing that “though I believe I have no illusions about the ‘better’ life I might have had, had I remained in the Arab world, or lived and studied in Europe, there is still some measure of regret” (222). Much like Said, Hassan was the son and product of the privileged classes, educated both in the English language and the Western values. Thus the autobiographical accounts of Said and Hassan seem to be less concerned with the transformation process, as they focus their narratives more on the creation and the possibilities of self-realization and freedom in the new world. This has proven to be

another major driving force behind much immigrant literature, an aspect which is described by Benjamin Franklin in his *Autobiography*, often read as an autobiographical model for “freedom and progress” (Holte 33).

The Quest for Self-Realization

Following the pattern of the traditional immigrant autobiography, Hassan’s story starts with the announcement: “Thus began my passage to America. New birth or false rebirth?” (1). The irony of this opening proposition, though, is that the autobiography actually is set mostly in Egypt. Hassan’s story offers a compelling contrast to the more typical immigrant autobiography manifested in *Lost in Translation*, where the greater part of the storyline is centered around the writer’s life after the translocation. Both regarding structure and theme, Hassan makes an effort to separate *Out of Egypt* from the more traditional approach. Accordingly Hassan seems to be devoted towards his own pursuit and resolute decision to get “Out of Egypt,” and less towards his “transition into America” (Waïl S. Hassan 15). Where Hoffman’s trajectory follows the typical pattern of the “ethnic passage,” including her re-birth and personal transformation, Hassan’s narrative, despite the opening passage, is gesturing towards a somewhat different trajectory. Regardless of the introductory remarks, *Out of Egypt* devotes its attention to the first twenty-one years of the autobiographer’s life, the years before Hassan had the means to “escape” Egypt for the first and last time. Hassan did not foresee any bright future prospects for himself in Egypt, and his academic skills provided him with the opportunity to achieve everything he had dreamed of outside Egypt’s borders. The quest to gain freedom and, perhaps more importantly, the possibility of creating himself anew, and realizing his fullest potential as a human being, becomes the main drive behind Hassan’s self-made destiny.

Entitled *Out of Egypt*, Hassan’s autobiography plays on the Israelite Exodus from Egypt, perhaps the most important event in the Israelite history. The biblical account tells of the oppressed Israelites’ exodus from Egypt, in search for freedom in the “Promised Land.” Hassan’s story has much in common with the biblical story, as his narrative recounts his own flight to achieve freedom in the United States, freedom in the sense that the American scene provided him with the possibility of re-making himself. By this I am referring to Hassan’s strong individualistic character, which he perhaps only had the possibility of fully realizing outside his native land. In *Between the Eagle and the Sun*, Hassan confirms this aspect by

stating: “I lived better in the gaps and cracks of American time; I found in its discontinuities freedom to grow” (55).

Through the writing of his fragmented autobiography, Hassan very much has the opportunity to reflect on his origins in Egypt, turning his autobiographical work into a meditation of sorts. Why he comes to concentrate his narrative around “the old Egypt I knew and the new Egypt I ignore” (14) may come as a surprise, given Hassan’s self-proclaimed disregard for his native country. The descriptions of Egypt compose a crucial part of the narrative, and in most of them, the underlying voice is that of someone questioning the country’s progression and future prospects. The author portrays Egypt as a “a slow land corruptly dreaming” (7), and he moves towards the conclusion that, despite the possibilities the country has been given, nothing really has changed, and as a result “Eternal Egypt endures” (14). Sentiments such as these may, to some degree, explain Hassan’s lack of affinity towards his native country and might also render the attempt of the autobiographer to reconcile with, or at least move closer to an understanding of his origins. In more than one way, then, *Out of Egypt* can be interpreted as an act of “self-recreation” (6) on behalf of the autobiographical subject, as the very act of writing might provide some sort of explanation to himself and his audience as to why he “chose America to escape mummy memories and rhetoric of the blood” (*Between the Eagle and the Sun* 54).

Ferraro, in *Ethnic Passages*, engages with immigrant literature and more specifically with the literary representation of the conflict between ethnic heritage and the possibilities of “upward mobility” through self-transformation and assimilation (1). This aspect of the immigrant genre is a familiar concept within the American literary canon, given the continent’s recognized position as the land where anything is possible and dreams become reality. Throughout history, the continent has been regarded as the Promised Land and the place for acquiring a brighter future, resulting in a substantial amount of autobiographical narratives where the main concern is the achievement of a personal version of the illustrious “American Dream.” *Out of Egypt* in many respects follows this pattern of “cultural rebirth” (Ferraro 1) wherein Hassan dreams of how coming to America will be “the start of *another* life” (92; emphasis added). Unlike Hoffman and Said, Hassan seems to be determined to separate not only from Egypt, but also every piece that is Egyptian about himself. The loss of his Egyptian identity is everything but traumatic for Hassan, whose character embodies the notion that “Out of the ashes of one life, another is made” (Holte 44).

Following Hassan’s determination to leave Egypt and even his biological and cultural origin behind, his trajectory reflects another one of those “idealized cultural patterns” that

Brunner according to Wail Hassan, finds to be a common characteristic in much ethnic literature (qtd. in Wail Hassan 10). In the same article, Wail Hassan suggests another common path much Arab immigrant autobiographies seem to follow, namely that of “the self-reliant (male) achiever of the American Dream” (10). Hassan confirms this notion when he writes in *Rumors of Change*: “I am in the American grain, a tradition of men and women who crossed an ocean to reinvent themselves” (251). *Out of Egypt* could then be read as an expression of Hassan’s premeditated decision to disregard his Arabic and Egyptian heritage in exchange for the possibility of reinventing himself in what he perceives to be the most desirable of all destinations. When Hassan, after twenty-one years, finally managed to leave for America in 1946, it was a decision that in many respects reflected his ultimate goal, the start of what he sensed would be his own “version of the American dream” (45). Hassan’s narrative is very much colored by his determination to achieve his fullest potential, to become a free individual, and thus it exemplifies the kind of narrative wherein this quest is central to the storyline. The autobiographer elaborates: “More than others – or so I thought – I dreaded humiliation, and both dread and pride conspired in my need for self-creation, perpetual re-creation” (6).

Victor Seidler, in *Rediscovering Masculinity*, remarks on the ethnic male writer’s denial of his cultural distinctness and heritage, and what he describes as the “*incidental* aspects of yourself” in order to fit into the dominant society. Seidler further asserts that, “we are encouraged within a liberal moral culture to think of our class and ethnicity as ‘emotional attachments’ we will eventually outgrow” (125). In respect to what Seidler proposes, Hassan’s character seems to be embodying many of these characteristics. He was never at one with his culture, he was foreign in his own language due to his “battered native tongue” (62), and consequently Hassan disregarded his heritage and roots, perceiving himself as a “westerling spirit” (57). I believe this aspect may serve to describe much of what Hassan’s narrative is all about, as he shows no regret when discounting his Egyptian identity, and as he clearly seems to be defining himself as an American. In *Between the Eagle and the Sun*, another one of Hassan’s reflections, he confirms this by declaring that, “Though born in Cairo, I feel wholly American” (51). Although he was fortunate enough to come from a privileged background, Hassan was never given what he desired the most, the possibility of freedom and personal growth. Hassan describes his intentions behind his “escape” to America by writing: “What then, had I really hoped to discover in America? It was not holiness: rather, scope, an openness of time, a more viable history. I also looked for some private space wherein to change, grow; for I had not liked what I foresaw of my life in Eternal Egypt” (*Out*

of Egypt 107). This passage reveals another fascinating aspect of Hassan's story, the individualistic side of his persona, and moreover his strong determination to turn himself into a success story.

The first chapter in *Out of Egypt* is titled "Beginnings and Ends," wherein Hassan describes his passage to America in terms of "New birth or false rebirth" (1). By this allusion, Hassan strongly implies that it was in the new world he actually was born and really came to life, seeing how America enabled him with a new beginning and the opportunity to achieve his full potential. In another of his works, Hassan further reveals these thoughts as he declares that: "I like to think that, crossing the Atlantic, I have come part of the way, though part of me may remain lost in *translatio*, in the passage or translation. And what have I found in American education to make up for the loss? Something akin to the power of self-creation?" (*Between the Eagle and the Sun* 123). This passage provides additional information as to how the journey affected Hassan's life, but it also reveals an important aspect of more conventional life narratives by immigrants, as it confirms that there is more to the concept of translation than translating language; it is just as much about translating oneself.

Even in Egypt, Hassan was more "*rumi*" than Arabic and he seems never to define himself according to others, only in reference to himself. In comparison with Said, who also regarded himself as an independent individual, Hassan declares: "I am no tribal man; I believe in free affiliations. That is why I came to America in the first place and reject myself hyphenation. Arab-American is to me redundancy, pleonasm. Is not America a land of immigrants rather than exiles?" (*Rumors of Change* 250). This passage reveals how reluctant Hassan is to being associated with his heritage, with his culture and history, but more importantly it confirms how the freedom of not being associated with anyone or anywhere particular, was the primary reason behind his choice to come to a land of his equals, individuals seeking to accomplish their dreams. There is never any way anyone can imagine or tell what the future will look like, as the future has no known destination. For Hassan life is a continuing journey, a journey that symbolizes development, growth and the acquisition of (self-)knowledge. Although he acknowledges how "voyages whisper loss, departure" (97-98), Hassan refuses, at any point, to be rooted. Instead of the scream of re-birth, signalling a loss, Hassan's re-birth is a recognition of the freedom and possibilities that come from his embracement of the new world.

Self-Construction Through Narration

There is no such thing as a universal experience of life, and consequently every autobiography depicts its own unique personal story. A survey of this literary field would be an enormous task to undertake, given the fact that the possibilities of the genre have been greatly enlarged, hence opening up for a production of numerous different kinds of life writing over the centuries. Accordingly, it becomes extremely difficult to typecast any of these writings. However, despite their differences, the three autobiographical accounts under scrutiny all share the fact that they give voice to an immigrant's story. The questions of transformation and relocation are given different amounts of attention in their stories, but all three touch upon the theme of the alterations and possibilities following the movement away from the familiar. Just as these autobiographies exemplify journeys from one continent to another, so does the act of writing exemplify an inner journey, wherein the destination point comes to be the power of self-knowledge. The power of knowing who you are, and more importantly accepting that person, provides you with the ability to move beyond past limits and the means to move forward. With this in mind, life narratives may be used as a device for personal archeology, a way of coming to terms with and understanding who we are becoming.

The author produces an autobiography, but simultaneously the autobiographical narrative produces a self as well. Thus, the autobiographical accounts of Said, Hoffman and Hassan can be viewed as acts of personal archeology, as many unanswered questions will resurface through the process of writing. The narratives discussed in this thesis depict the complexities of the experience and development of self, hence making the autobiographical project a paramount one in terms of self-understanding by way of revisiting the past. However, following Jerome Bruner's notion in "The Autobiographical Process," autobiographical writing refers to more than "what was," as Bruner claims that "an autobiography is *not* and cannot be a way of simply signifying or referring to a 'life as lived' ... there is no such thing as a 'life as lived' to be referred to" (161). According to this view, autobiographical writing becomes more than just a rewriting of a life lived, as "a life is created or constructed by the act of autobiography" (161). Bruner acknowledges the significance of autobiographical writing as a way to self-knowledge, where past experiences becomes part of the present through the act of remembering. One of the main objectives concerning first-person narratives is to reach an understanding, or at least gain some knowledge, regarding who we are, what we are, and perhaps most importantly, why we are

who we are. For someone like Said then, the recollection of his memories becomes what he calls “self-making with a purpose” (10).

Besides being subjective and personal accounts, the autobiographies of Hoffman, Said and Hassan share the fact that all three narratives can be read as extensions of their academic work. “Why this greed for self-witness?” asks Hassan, why this need to confess to the world your most intimate and personal thoughts? Perhaps, instead of writing mainly for their fellow professionals, these writers use their self-creations to escape the limits of academic disciplines, thus targeting a different audience through a less academic medium. The attitude towards autobiographical writing has changed within the different academic professions, and more and more scholars and academics have started contributing to the genre with their own life writings. Popkin reports that Philippe Lejeune questions the breaking down of the boundary between who we are and what we study, and seeing that many academics have become autobiographers, Lejeune has remarked the following on the intellectual autobiography in general:

I am often confused by the naïveté and the simplicity of mind that takes hold of people who are nevertheless intellectually gifted, and who have acquired a reputation in literary, psychological, or philosophical areas, when they take it into their heads to talk about their own life. Not only does critical sense vanish, and they no longer estimate very well what might interest other people . . . but it especially surprises me that they themselves might be interested in what they are relating. (qtd. in Popkin 64)

Whatever their motivation might be, the need to reflect on their own experiences nevertheless has certain risks, as they turn very personal and intimate details about their own private sphere into a public affair.

The connection between the autobiographical and the academic is evident in *Out of Egypt*, which may be interpreted as a hybrid combination between autobiography and academic criticism. Ihab Hassan is a prominent critic, scholar, and theorist in the academic study of literature. The bulk of his academic career has been devoted to postmodernist thought, as he was among the first to articulate and frame the concept of postmodernism. In addition to this, Hassan’s academic work also includes extensive writings within the fields of literary criticism and cultural studies. Hassan is what one may call a critical personality, and although he continues to be engaged in the major debates within literary theory, his writing seems to be moving away from the more formal, scholarly perspective, towards a more

personal style. This is very much evident in the autobiographical *Out of Egypt*, which is what one might call an unusual personal narrative. *Out of Egypt* has a complex form, but being chronological in its narration, it is not that different from the typical autobiography, even though Hassan is not afraid to move outside the genre's conventions. As Hassan's introductory remarks indicate this subjective account is not a complete rendering of his whole life, but composed out of "slips of memory, scraps of thought" (ix).

Hassan's autobiography is a blend between the personal and the more critical reflections, which becomes evident when one sees the structure of this autobiography. Throughout there are numerous passages entitled "On ideology," "On the Colonial Complex," "On Evolution," "On Knowledge," and "On Travel," which reveal some of the professional thoughts that shine through. This is not to say that he otherwise remains objective in his account, because all of his narrative is based on and colored by his personal and academic ideas, of which his own notebook references are yet another example. Such citations from his younger years influence his book in a positive manner, and these insertions are in keeping with precisely how Hassan intended to write his own story. The multilayered style of writing might be seen as mirroring the very life of Hassan, who declares: "Scholar, critic, teacher, I have spent some part of my life in thought. Thus story and meditation mingle in this work, rumor, rumination, and recall. Nor is it easy, in our present world, to see where history begins, autobiography ends" (ix). These lines are found in the preface to the first chapter entitled "Beginnings and Ends," which might imply exactly how Hassan views the ambiguity and complex ideas embedded in the concept of autobiography, as it is a genre with such great diversity. Hassan further goes on to acknowledge: "Nor is it easy, in our present world, to see where history begins, autobiography ends" (ix), thus confirming Eakin's idea of how our lives become stories.

Throughout *Out of Egypt*, the reader can sense the academic aspirations of the narrator, and Hassan displays an admirable determination to become something and someone. In this respect his autobiography can be read as a quest of self-realization, something which, in his eyes, can only be accomplished in America: "I turned to work, sensing that my Great Escape from Egypt depended on professional achievement more than on existential quests" (87). Writing and reading are two of Hassan's obsessions and he portrays himself as a lover of literature from a very young age and proclaims that it is in the written word he finds his "verbal dreams" (55). Based on small revelations like this, one can trace backwards to find reasons and explanations for why Hassan has become a well-known writer and critic of today. This, in turn, is another element which is given focus in this narrative, as Hassan questions

how his past in Egypt and his experiences there have made him who he is at the moment when he is writing his self-reflections. He writes:

This tardy reckoning, though, may evade both the old Egypt I knew and the new Egypt I ignore. Still, my feelings run strong, flow in channels surprising in their twist: anger here where I expected none, reconciliation there where I thought least to find it, bemusement veining a mental landscape like the delta of the Nile. And I wonder how all these emotions touch my American career as “teacher,” “critic,” “humanist.” (14)

This passage illustrates how Hassan has reflected upon the effect of his academic career, and to what extent his profession has and continues to affect his personal life.

What these three examples of life writing have in common, is the process of residing between two worlds, the academic and the personal, simultaneously as they reside between the past and the present place in which they dwell. With this perspective as a starting point, it becomes meaningful to elaborate on the history and stories found in these narratives. What is it that makes these stories academic autobiographies? Is it the mere fact that they are written by a person from the world of academics and scholars, or is the answer to be found in the content of their writings, which can be said to be influenced by their professional careers? Said’s loss of his Palestine has left him a strong and prominent figure in the debate over this subject, which in turn has influenced much of what he has written later, and *Out of Place* is no exception. Throughout the book there are numerous mentions of the Palestine – Israel conflict, but I find that they are included for reasons beside merely the political, as this conflict has had a great impact on the physical landscape in which Said grew up. Thus the core of his identity both as an academic and as a human being has been influenced by this historical event. As an extremely prolific writer and a prominent literary and cultural critic, Said is one of the most influential intellectuals of our time. Said has gained prominence as a writer with the publications of his eighteen books, but he is also well-known as an eloquent spokesman for the Palestinian cause in the West. Said started working on *Out of Place* after he was diagnosed with leukemia, and most of the writing took place during periods of treatment or illness. Prior to the publication of *Out of Place*, Said’s persona had been somewhat absent from his academic work. However, what becomes clear when one reads his scholarly texts is the preoccupation with many of the same themes that run through his autobiography, like those of homelessness, exile and nostalgia.

Said claims to have started his autobiographical project with a desire to record memories of places and times that have now vanished, but also out of his own need to reconcile with times of crisis and change in his past. As an academic, Said has continually tried to grapple with themes from his own life, without becoming too personal. However, with *Out of Place*, Said is writing from the perspective that the personal often is more powerful than what is purely political, without entirely disregarding the fact that he is an academic first and foremost. As stated earlier, autobiography is an inclusive term, and because it is a narration of a person's own life and experiences, it is perhaps the most accessible of all literary forms. Given this fact, there are inevitably many different forms of life writing, just as there are many different narrators within this genre. Some would claim that this is exactly what contributes to their fascination with this genre. Like poetry, drama or the novel, life writing too constitutes a vital form of literature, and it has become a genre that widely attracts all kinds of narrators, from the infamous to the famous. As Holte acknowledges, "We have no anatomy of the autobiography" (28). What is interesting, however, is to see how groups of intellectuals have crossed over to a genre far from their familiar territory, and are producing more and more personal criticism. The themes Said, Hoffman and Hassan wrestle with throughout their autobiographies have, in great part, determined and shaped their scholarship and academic careers.

The form of an autobiography may vary, just like the people who narrate them have different intentions for embarking on the journey of self-exploration involved in the process of writing of one's own memories. What these academics have in common with most writers within the genre of life narratives are their sources for inspiration. Times of crisis and change have especially proved to be fruitful for the production of autobiography. Alongside these subjects, progress, mobility and change are other conditions which tend to produce and inspire autobiographical accounts. *Lost in Translation* is proof of what displacement and exile can ignite in a human being, and moreover how the lack of language at one point, can produce a never-ending need for articulation in later life. Hoffman experiences a radical shift in her linguistic environment, while Said and Hassan were both accustomed to the English language, given their upper-class background and schooling. In this sense Hoffman has a harder time adjusting to the new environment, which explains her strong focus on this experience in her life-story. Hoffman recounts, in her narrative, the grief that came with the new English language and the inner exile that followed. Writing becomes a necessary activity for Hoffman from an early age, and she explains why: "When I write, I have a real existence that is proper

to the activity of writing – an existence that takes place midway between me and the sphere of artifice, art, pure language” (121).

Through her own retrospective reflections in *Lost in Translation*, Hoffman comes to acknowledge how her experiences of displacement and exile had profound effects on how she turned out. She explains: “But being ‘an immigrant,’ I begin to learn, is considered a sort of location itself – and sometimes a highly advantageous one at that” (133). This passage shows how Hoffman comes to value the double vision as an immigrant alien in the United States. Because she had all this time alone with her own thoughts and frustrations, Hoffman had the opportunity to acquire and use in her own career the perspectives and reflections of someone who had seen two different worlds. After receiving a PhD in English literature, Hoffman is encountered by an editor asking, “where did you learn how to be a critic?” thus, questioning her power of critical and detached reflectional skills. “I suppose it’s that I’m an immigrant,” Hoffman replies (226-27). The implication is that the immigrant experience, and Hoffman’s notion of herself as an “observer” (131), provided her with a new perception of the world and self, a new set of lenses through which she and other immigrants could come to understand and write of the world. This confirms Eakin’s suggestion that “life writing – whatever else it is or may be – certainly involves the assumption that the self and its experiences may somehow be represented in a text” (99).

It shines through, in many immigrant autobiographies, that it is the autobiographer’s deeper loss, the loss of one’s self, that is the force behind their written life constructions. On many levels this loss relates to where the self is located. Hassan dwells on this vital concern in *Between the Eagle and the Sun*, when he poses the question: “But for a plain American immigrant like myself, already once displaced, where does dispossession leave him?” (xvi). Each of these trajectories, *Lost in Translation*, *Out of Place* and *Out of Egypt* portray the outer world’s effects on the inner being, resulting in a displaced but not replaced, or in a displaced and replaced identity. Removed from the familiar or imprisoned within the familiar, Hoffman, Said and Hassan can relate to the dispossession and alterations of self, and to the familiarity of becoming a stranger to oneself, to become other than oneself. This idea involves a rather drastic change in personality, a profound personal transformation. Displacement in these writings does not merely refer to the inner, mental landscape, but the physical landscape as well. The deepest loss comes when there is no dialogue between person and place, no bond between the individual and where he or she is situated. This leads to the central concern of the next chapter, which is the vital link between individual and place.

Chapter Two:

Space, Place and Geographical Translocation

In the previous chapter my focus was on the ethnic autobiographer, and on the immigrant's (supposed) identity transformation. As previously established, a vital question for the ethnic autobiographical account and for life writing in general often culminates in the essential question, *who* am I? This chapter will continue to elaborate on a related subject, but takes a different approach to the individual's formation of self, namely the interconnections between person and place. Thus, the aspect and question of life construction I seek to enlighten in this context is *where* am I? According to the characterization of the immigrant genre as one that constitutes literature influenced and marked by the experience of dislocation, these autobiographers should be concerned with the significance of the geographical places in their lives, which again should be reflected in their autobiographies. There are many important aspects concerning life construction, and this chapter seeks to illuminate the relation between the autobiographer and the geographical location, or as Frédéric Regard puts it, "the spatial modalities, the layout, of the author's writing self" ("Topologies of the Self" 89). Even though treated differently in the three autobiographies under investigation, each one of these trajectories have to some degree been defined and marked by geographical presence. Like Ferraro suggested with the term "ethnic passage," identity is continuously being reproduced, and perhaps it is altered more profoundly for the immigrant who experiences the consequences of physical and cultural translocation. A central concern in this chapter will be to examine how geographical places define and provide the context for this experience, based on the assumption that the interconnection between place and individual may contribute in the making and remaking of self.

Given all of its different qualities, the immediate significance of a place may be difficult to grasp, but nevertheless, places are the geographical locations that very often seem to display and exude the deepest meanings in our everyday lives. However, their significant value is quite often unconsciously overlooked or forgotten, and places are more commonly experienced as given, thus leaving the multitude of different components like smells, sounds, human interaction, memories, traditions and settings to be taken for granted. The aim with this chapter is to explain the impact and enrichment our everyday encounters with places seem to be capable of, and moreover show how and why geographical places play such an integral part in the human experience. What all of the three autobiographies discussed share is the

difference between where they came from and where they are at, but they differ in how they portray their environments. The value and significance of everyday experiences of geography can either be ignored or acknowledged. By following the latter approach one also recognize the existence of a mutual relationship between places and people, where they are equally important to each other. People give life to places and in return places give meaning to lives. The close relationship between self and geography is, however, not a given, and sometimes the physical world can be perceived as being meaningless, placeless geography.

Empty Spaces, Meaningful Places

Place is such a familiar word, that it has become a term to which we don't ascribe much thought. However, despite this characterization, it is valuable to see the different factors that contribute in making place an integral part of so many people's lives and moreover, their life progression. First of all, it is important to endorse the fact that the construction of place goes beyond its obvious and visible qualities, even though the significance of place is commonly ignored or disregarded in our everyday lives. Tim Cresswell, for instance, in *Place: A Short Introduction*, suggests how place is "both simple" and "complicated," central to "both geography and everyday life" (1). The three autobiographical narratives scrutinized in this thesis will indicate how place is more than just a setting and more than just the physical location where we enact our lives. For the purpose of this thesis, it becomes valuable to play out the concept of place against the concept of space. There are many different ways of conceiving of and defining both of these terms, but a valuable starting point becomes Yi-Fu Tuan's description of space as "an open arena of action and movement" whereas his understanding of place involves "stopping and resting and becoming involved" (qtd. in Cresswell 20). What can be gathered from such an assessment, is that when the more abstract concept called space becomes filled with cultural meaning and shared history, places emerge. Thus, human beings more or less find themselves in a state where they are crossing spaces, but inhabiting places.

Cresswell established what he sees as a natural linkage between people and places, believing that one is constitutive of the other: "there was no 'place' before there was humanity but once we came into existence then place did too" (33). In this reading and understanding of place, it is the symbiotic relationship between people and space that comes to be place, thus making place a space which is made meaningful by people's interactions and involvement

with it. In *Lost in Translation*, Hoffman confirms this conceptualization of place as fundamentally connected to human situatedness by writing, “The apartment has been transformed from a place in which people have lived cozily and for a long time into a space from which they are fleeing” (82). Without the people, their conversations, laughter and stories, Hoffman describes how the same places “now echo with emptiness” (83). These passages thus validate Cresswell’s suggestion that the fundamental aspect of place is grounded in its symbiotic relation to human beings; thus, place becomes lived-in geography. This understanding of place as the “where” of the human being’s most intimate experiences of, and connections to, the underlying values of geography, in turn should make space its binary opposition. The counterpart to being invested with meaning, thus easily leads to the description of space as a considerably more empty and meaningless concept. This is possibly a dangerous generalization to make, but nevertheless, the idea fits very well with the non-existent relation between Hassan and Egypt. In *Out of Egypt*, Hassan articulates his ambivalent relationship to the places of his childhood, but more than anything else, it is his indifference and careless attitude towards Cairo that color his narrative voice. The distance between Hassan and his native environment, albeit not physical yet, is hinted at throughout the autobiography, but the phrase “My childhood space” (3), strengthens the impression that Hassan does not feel connected to Cairo as a place. The way he comes to describe his home in terms of somewhere without meaning and lacking in terms of his emotional attachment to it, partly explains why he felt estranged and distanced, which he undoubtedly did both before and after he left Egypt.

A similar account can be found in Hoffman’s autobiography where a distinction is drawn between the meaningful place of Cracow, “one’s mooring” (104), and the feeling of being “cast adrift in incomprehensible space” (104), which is how she describes her first encounter with Canada. In so far as Hoffman is concerned it is Cracow, and only Cracow that can provide her with the stability and security that she needs from a place. While Canada could never replace Poland, *Lost in Translation* nevertheless depicts how Hoffman comes to embrace the new world in the end. This goes to prove that the distinct image someone has of a particular place, can indeed change, as the relation between human beings and places are not necessarily everlasting, static or unchangeable. The emotions attached to a place can change over time and hence contribute to altering the whole atmosphere and identity of a certain place. Places do not necessarily acquire deeper meaning simply because we live in them, but undeniably the more strongly you feel that you belong to a geographical location, the more strongly does that location, become a place. Establishing a natural linkage between places and

people, involves the one being constitutive of the other, but as one can deduce from narratives like *Out of Egypt*, the places we live in do not always live in us. Even as a place comes to have meaning to one individual or a larger group of people, the exact same place can at the same time be meaningless to others. Thus, a reasoned inference would be that a place's significant quality is never automatically given: more than anything it is a subjective experience.

The Relational Aspect of Self

The dynamic interaction between place and self, which I emphasize in this chapter, addresses a perspective on human existence that warrants further exploration. To illustrate how self and location are intimately connected, let me again return to Paul John Eakin. What Eakin's work is constantly gesturing towards is the idea that a life is under constant development and construction, continually undergoing changes affected by factors outside the individual. One of the main points Eakin posits in *Constructions of a Life*, is the awareness of autobiography as reaching beyond the literature of the first person, as he comes to question a general misconception of the autobiographical account, which typically involves thinking of it as solely the story of the self. On this assertion, Eakin sets out to demystify the claim that, "the subject of autobiography to which the pronoun 'I' refers is neither singular nor first" (43). By foregrounding the "I" of first-person narratives there has been a tendency to forget, or at least ignore, the fact that there are many factors, other than the self, that are crucial in the formation of a person's identity. These factors or influences, which Eakin in turn sets out to scrutinize, prove conceivably to be of equal importance in the process and making of self.

By way of escaping the misconception of the autonomous autobiographer, Eakin ventures into an interesting territory by introducing what he calls "relational selves," a conception which foregrounds the decisive role of external factors in the process of individuation. Embedded in this term is the notion that the "I" of the autobiography does not only refer to the singular, as "the self is defined by – and lives in terms of – its relations with others" (43). What lies at the core of this proposal is one of Eakin's main ideas in *Constructions of a Life*, namely that a life or a self is never autonomous but always influenced by those significant "others." This proposition points to what will become the main focus of this second chapter. However, my intention is to expand Eakin's idea by proposing an alternative reading of his term "others." This understanding goes beyond the most

conventional interpretation of Eakin's concept, to include the physical places we inhabit, thus suggesting that locations can affect a human being as much as human relations do.

In the reading of Said's, Hoffman's and Hassan's narratives, it becomes quite apparent that their lives, and in turn their autobiographical stories, have been influenced not only by the people, but also the places they have encountered along the way. Their identities mirror all the people they have met and all the places they have either seen or experienced, in the inmost depths of their beings. Relations between people are obvious and explicit due to oral expressions and communication, but the relationships between people and places are indeed harder to spot immediately. This, however, does not indicate that an individual is incapable of bonding and connecting with a place in similar ways as with people. Taken together, it is the sum of all the places they have seen, the places they have experienced, and perhaps most importantly the places they have left behind, that have set in motion the writing and life construction that make up the three unique stories analyzed in this thesis. Their personal transformations are in fact proof of the inevitable truth that the places we live in, and which in turn live in us, have a tremendous impact on the persons we become. The strength of the dynamic relationship, very often recognized between human beings and the landscapes they move in, comes from their similar features as processes: just as a place is continually being reproduced, the self is continually being reproduced as well. Because neither are static, but constantly undergoing changes and developments, they come to relate to each other in the deepest ways possible.

Placeless and Homeless

The question of geographical relevance is immediately given attention in *Out of Place*, as Said reveals already in the preface to his book that one of the main reasons behind his narrative is to make it a manifestation "of an essentially lost or forgotten world" (xiii). Thus, Said's intention with *Out of Place*, in many respects seems to be an effort to re-create and revive those places from the past, the lost world of his childhood. For anyone, but perhaps especially the immigrant, the narrated loss stems from the departure from a specific place, often with a specific meaning attached to it. The separation of the individual from his geographical roots can in itself prove to be devastating, but for Said matters are perhaps even more complicated, as his loss does not involve just one, but several places, many of which no longer exist:

Along with language, it is geography – especially in the displaced form of departures, arrivals, farewells, exile, nostalgia, homesickness, belonging, and travel itself – that is at the core of my memories of those early years. Each of the places I lived in – Jerusalem, Cairo, Lebanon, the United States – has a complicated, dense web of valences that was very much a part of growing up, gaining an identity, forming my consciousness of myself and of others. (xvi)

As this passage clearly states, Said's autobiographical story reflects in great part the importance of the complex relationship to all of the geographical places and locations in his existence, but perhaps in particular the reference is made to the single most important place for him, one of the places where he grew up, and that no longer exists: Palestine.

In brief summary, the title, *Out of Place*, alludes to the importance of Palestine, the place Said came out of, and later was unable to return to. However, Said's narrative does not only express how Said never felt "at home" or "in place" in the geographical sense of the word, but also how he at no time experienced being "just right" in his own skin. In Said's case, the geographical location never seemed to correspond to who he was, who he was told he was or who he wanted to be, and this confusion and uncertainty is reflected in one early sentiment when he explains how he constantly was questioned and confronted about his character: "How come you were born in Jerusalem and you live here?"; 'You're an Arab after all, but what kind are you?'" (6). Unanswered questions like these followed and marked much of Said's existence because he never came to see the connection between himself and the immediate place where he was situated. This conflict between who he felt he was on the inside and who he was perceived to be from the outside, came to define Said's out-of-placeness. In *Space, Place and Gender* Doreen Massey confirms how vital the link between place and the individual is when she states: "A 'sense of place,' of rootedness, can provide ... stability and a source of unproblematic identity" (151). The "unproblematic identity" Massey refers to seems to be one wherein *who* we are corresponds to *where* we are, a vital connection Said sadly was bereft of experiencing. Growing up and living most, if not all, of his life with a fragmented sense of self, is in many ways the result of Said's lack of belonging or being firmly anchored in one place, which left him with "only a fragile sense of security in self and surroundings" (46). Considering his own fate, Said in "No Reconciliation Allowed" admits to feeling a bit envious of those "who had lived in the same place all their lives ... or who truly belonged, but I do not recall ever thinking that any of that was possible for me" (102). Thus, it

is a sense of confusion that lies at the core of many features of Said's identity, whether relating to his own name, body or nationality. Said came to question his own self, because time and time again, he was reminded that he did not seem to rightfully belong anywhere.

Throughout his entire life the haunting ghosts from his past would resurface, constantly challenging Said's self-perception. Said was not fully aware of the significance of his Palestinian roots until after he was an adult, and then he faced the dilemma of claiming to belong to a place that had been replaced by Israel. In "The Voice of a Palestinian in Exile," Said elaborates on this decisive event: "'Look, I wasn't born in Israel.' They said, 'Where were you born?' 'Palestine.' 'Palestine doesn't exist any more.' I say, 'Yes, but I was born there and Israel didn't exist when I was born'" (154). Based on his own uncertainty regarding his own self, and then being questioned about his nationality, Said's recognition came to define not only his own but all Palestinians' existence, as they were constantly reminded "by the Israelis that in a certain sense we don't really exist" (155). In this passage, Said describes his "placelessness" as more or less being imposed on him, and how his conception of self was being radically transformed without his approval or ability to influence the decision. Said's out-of-placeness was very much a consequence of the loss of Palestine, and without an "authentic" place of origin, Said was left without any clear sense of place and belonging. Given the special circumstances of his past, Said continually experienced the feeling of being *out of place* as opposed to being *in place*. Tim Cresswell writes: "to be human is to be 'in place'" (*Place* 23), thus suggesting the significance of being and feeling in place. The circumstances of Said's personal and cultural past made him miss out on this vital aspect of human existence, and Said confirms his own sad fate by asserting: "I felt that coming from a part of the world that seemed to be in a state of chaotic transformation became the symbol of what was out of place about me" (248).

A Lost World

Out of Place is very much set in motion because of the places Said has been forced to leave behind, and Said himself is very much the product of these events. Accordingly, the title of Said's narrative enlightens the very core of his existence. The autobiography attempts, in many ways, to unravel and describe the subtle complexities that exist between an individual and his or her place, and Said's narrative highlights the importance of place in *displacement*. The fall of Palestine deeply changed the world for a lot of people, including Said and his

immediate family, perhaps first and foremost his beloved mother, who because of her lack of citizenship, came to be regarded as a “nonperson” (132). What he describes as the disappearance of Palestine, proved to be one of the most decisive events in Said’s life, especially as he looks back on momentous events. The deeper meanings of a place often prove most visible when it is gone, and Said reflects on his own lack of response to the situation in Palestine when he writes in retrospect: “What overcomes me now is the scale of dislocation our family and friends experienced and of which I was scarcely conscious, essentially unknowing witness in 1948” (114). From his own perspective, Said describes how his own response to the fall of Palestine did not come immediately, but how later in his life, it would become perhaps the main concern of his intellectual and political career. However, even if he did not fully grasp or foresee how the fall of Palestine would haunt him for the rest of his life, Said experienced the profound impact of the occurrence as he soon realized that he had been deprived of “a place to return to,” and now felt the haunting grievance “of being unprotected by any national authority or institutions, of no longer being able to make sense of the past” (119). By writing *Out of Place*, Said creates an opportunity whereby he could elaborate on his complicated involvement with Palestine:

I was suffering a dissociation myself about Palestine, which I was never able to resolve or fully grasp until quite recently, when I gave up trying. Even now the unreconciled duality I feel about the place, its intricate wrenching, tearing, sorrowful loss as exemplified in so many distorted lives, including mine, and its status as an admirable country for *them* (but of course not for us), always gives me pain and a discouraging sense of being solitary, undefended, open to the assaults of trivial things that seem important and threatening, against which I have no weapons. (142)

In this passage Said manages to capture another important aspect of place, which he had “no weapons” to fight, the inside-outside division. A place is very much something you want to be inside of; in this sense the experience of place is based on protection, security but also discrimination, the discrimination between “us” and “them.” In many respects Said is a victim of this inside-outside division where a certain place has boundaries that excludes, setting up boundaries between “insiders” and “outsiders.” Upon his return to Cairo Said, once again faces the all too familiar feeling of out-of-placeness, when he realizes that “what had been ‘our’ environment became ‘theirs,’ ‘they’ being Egyptians” (272).

Said's personal experience of being "displaced" from many of the places he loved and cared for the most, and particularly Palestine, the one place where he truly felt he could belong, lies at the core of *Out of Place*. The issue that complicates Said's story even more, is the fact that historical and political events prevented him from ever returning to Palestine. Given these circumstances Said had to abandon his past physically, but he could never give up on his native place all together. Although Said was left homeless after the fall of Palestine, he still continued to conceive of the place as what Edward Relph in *Place and Placelessness* refers to as an "irreplaceable centre of significance" (39). In the early years of his life, Palestine did not have a special place in Said's consciousness as it was merely a setting to which he paid no particular attention and somewhere he felt no strong attachment to. Since Said didn't reflect much upon the presence of Palestine, it became somewhere he "took for granted": "My early memories of Palestine itself are casual, and considering my profound later immersion in Palestinian affairs, curiously unremarkable. It was a place I took for granted, the country I was from" (20). This passage reflects in many ways Said's unawareness of the great impact and enormous relevance of place in his everyday encounters with it. In such a situation, Said's relationship to Palestine resembles that of what Relph describes as an "existential insider," to whom a geographical "place is experienced without deliberate and selfconscious reflection yet is full with significances" (55). However, though the awareness of Palestine had somewhat drifted from the young Said's consciousness, it was a place destined to become more than just a "remote memory" (141), as the former distance had, if anything, laid the ground for what would later emerge as a profound and deep engagement within the Palestinian debate. Regardless of his early unawareness, Said's emotional attachment to Palestine and the hidden implications of this attachment came to represent Said's "most fundamental form of insideness" (Relph 55).

What exactly was it that had occurred in Palestine? This question and many others came to haunt Said, as he experienced how the places from his past and his history became exactly that, history. At least two of the places from his past, Jerusalem and Cairo, both came to represent places with their own distinct memories, rooted in an essentially irrecoverable past. The former place, which had been part of Palestine, had been replaced by Israel, and the latter had become, as Said confesses, "closed to me for legal reasons" (217). Thus, at least two of the places where Said grew up assumed the meaning of incomprehensible loss, as the once familiar scenes of his childhood were no longer accessible or available to him. Nonetheless, the disappearance of Palestine would lie at the bottom of all of his queries attached to his past, and at the core of his confusion was the decisive fact that he never was

able to “piece together all the different narrative fragments to understand what had really happened in Palestine” (114). Unresolved aspects of his past like this culminated in Said’s search to gain greater knowledge of, and closer connection to, Palestine, which again led him into a deep engagement in the battle for Palestine. When it dawned on Said what it entailed being not only an Arab, but a Palestinian, he experienced what he describes as a “great explosion” culminating in a life-altering process for Said: “I discovered then that I had to rethink my life and my identity, even though it had been so sheltered from the start, and that was a process that really is continuing. It hasn’t ended for me” (“The Voice of a Palestinian in Exile” 155).

A New World of Continuing Confusion

As noted at the beginning of this chapter a vital question the ethnic autobiographical account often seeks to answer is the important question, *where* am I? Said reflects on this when he writes: “Where was I? What was I doing here in an American setting that had no connection at all to what I was, or even with what I had become after three years at an American school in Cairo?” (136). This passage captures the confusion Said feels, as he comes to acknowledge that the vital link between himself and his location seems to be lacking. The awareness of the importance ascribed to the close connection between place and self is evident in *Out of Place*, as Said’s narrative highlights the tragic outcome when the correlation between the two seems to be missing. Neither Cairo, nor the American setting could relieve him of feeling as the odd boy out once again. What was he supposed to be and in what setting did he rightfully belong, was he an Arab in Egypt, an American in Egypt, a placeless Palestinian, an Egyptian in America or an American in America? The confusion is complete as Said confesses that he did not have “the slightest feeling of being American” (80).

Out of Place has truly captured the story behind one man’s experiences of dislocation, loss and a fragmented identity, all of which can be explained by the inconsistency and constant change in his physical environment. As an autobiographical act Said’s story captures the immediate presence of geography in his awareness of himself, an awareness that lead him to describe himself as being somewhat “unusual because of my exceptionally complicated background” (191). A firm sense of self is in great part based on being rooted and securely grounded, something that seems hard to achieve when the places surrounding you seem to disappear right before your eyes. Place “is a profound and complete aspect of man’s

experience of the world” (Relph 1), and the power of place encapsulated in *Out of Place*, shows the dangers of continuous dislocations and of being without a stable place as a source of reference. For Said it was not the places themselves that alienated him, but the lack of time he was given to connect and bond with them, which inevitably deprived him of the satisfactory feeling of experiencing a place in the most personal and intimate way, from the inside. In another of his literary pieces, “No Reconciliation Allowed,” Said reflects upon the challenges of growing up in a world of continual changes in the geographical landscape. Said asserts that a familiar feeling he had throughout his formative years was one where he would be “standing on the wrong corner, in a place that seemed to be slipping away from me just as I tried to define and describe it” (97). This phrase once again confirms Said’s out-of-placeness, as he struggled, but never truly lived to experience how it would feel to belong anywhere.

The feeling that this experience generated, is in many respects the main objective behind this autobiographical account, thus making *Out of Place* a testimonial to the fact that a sense of placeness is predicated on the ability to know where you belong in the geographical landscape. If anywhere, Palestine would have been the place Said felt most connected to, but due to overriding circumstances beyond his understanding, he never got to develop his relationship with Palestine. Given the fall of Palestine, Said was never provided with a stable place of origin and in turn was not allowed to experience the profound at-oneness with that place.

The Garden of Eden

Like much of Said’s narrative was centered around an irretrievable past, so is a major part of Eva Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation*, as she devotes a notable portion of her autobiography to the memories of her lost childhood world. The feeling of loss, especially for the immigrant, is very often grounded in the departure from one particular place with a specific meaning attached to it, and in Hoffman’s case, the desired and longed for object comes to be Cracow. In his theorization of place as humanized space, Relph values the emotional development between people and places. He further develops the notion of different levels and qualities of what he calls insiderness, a term relating to the strength of the affective bond between place and individual: “To be inside a place is to belong to it and identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is this identity with the place” (49). Through her descriptions of Cracow, Hoffman seems to fit Relph’s criteria of someone who is an

existential insider, which entails “knowing implicitly that *this* place is where you belong” (55).

Lost in Translation illustrates an individual’s emotional encounter with two different continents and three different places, and the three chapter headings in Hoffman’s book designate these three locations, all of which have marked the different phases of her life profoundly. The first chapter is entitled “Paradise” and is a description of Cracow, which seems to be embodying all the things most dear to Hoffman. At the moment of departure, it represents all she has ever known and all she has ever seen, and as such it represents all of her first loves:

No, I’m no patriot, nor was I ever allowed to be. And yet, the country of my childhood lives within me with a primacy that is a form of love. It lives within me despite my knowledge of our marginality, and its primitive, unpretty emotions. Is it blind and self-deceptive of me to hold on to its memory? I think it would be blind and self-deceptive not to. All it has given me is the world, but that is enough. It has fed me language, perceptions, sounds, the human kind. It has given me the colors and the furrows of reality, my first loves. The absoluteness of those loves can never be recaptured: no geometry of the landscape, no haze in the air, will live in us as intensely as the landscapes that we saw as the first, and to which we gave ourselves wholly, without reservations. (74-75)

A passage like this, better than anything, shows how differently an insider comes to describe a place as compared to an outsider, the main difference being embedded in Hoffman’s ability to experience a place, and to view Cracow in terms of its uniqueness and distinct characteristics. The first landscapes are often the most real and the most familiar, and thus become the places that exist in our unconsciousness. Intimate experiences of place, like Hoffman accentuates, lie buried in our innermost being, and as such we are rarely aware of them. Throughout her narrative, Hoffman continually refers back to Cracow in a way that clearly indicates her deep love for and connection to all that this place encapsulates. *Lost in Translation* is full of similar characterizations like this of Cracow, each one capturing Hoffman’s intoxication with the landscape. Interwoven in the fabrics of Cracow’s identity, Hoffman experienced a personal kind of love, and by giving all parts of herself fully and wholeheartedly to the landscapes of Cracow, she came to feel like she was part of it and belonged to it. Consequently Hoffman went into mourning upon her realization of the actual departure: “I don’t want to leave Poland

at all; I hardly see how I can be extracted from all of this, from everything I've experienced so intensely" (85).

Throughout the narrative Hoffman plays on obvious distinct features in her comparison of Poland, Canada and the United States, Poland signifying the place closest to her heart. The first love, the first place she gave herself to without any reservations, the place that had provided her with the affirmation of stability, was the one place that would prove hard for Hoffman to imagine or actually live without. It was in Cracow everything began, it was the place to which parts of her identity could be ascribed, and for Hoffman leaving Cracow behind seems like an impossible task. Cracow embodies so much of Hoffman's history, so many of her first memories, and it is also the place that filled her with the sounds of her first language. Cracow symbolizes the most genuine place of all for Hoffman, her home, based on "layers and layers of reality" (39). In Hoffman's reality, Cracow is a place of exceptional bliss, which leads her to pose the question: "Why look any further if you've discovered complete satisfaction?" (41). Nothing and nowhere can perhaps ever challenge the position of Cracow as an earthly version of Paradise. As Eva wanders around Cracow, embracing her last days in the Polish garden of Eden, she realizes that the bond between the country of her childhood and herself, is one that is a "form of love" (74), and that this place holds, as she admits, "a bit of myself" (88). The memories of Cracow yield intense nostalgic feelings with each recall, and at the moment of departure, realizing she is leaving Cracow, which to her represents "both home and the universe" (5), Hoffman also becomes aware how even "Ordinary streets become luminous with the light of loss" (88).

Considering Hoffman's firm attachment to Cracow, her level of insiderness was a result of how she was part of that place and that place was part of her. Someone who experiences this close and mutual relationship stands the risk of being an existential outsider in all other places, grounded in their inability to connect on the same intimate level. Uprooted from the familiar, secure haven that Cracow represented, Hoffman becomes reluctant and sceptical towards the immediate world. The challenges of committing wholeheartedly to new, foreign geographical locations may prove to be overwhelming for many immigrants, and Hoffman narrates how she encountered the new settings: "As long as the world around me has been new each time, it has not become my world; I lived with my teeth clenched against the next assault of the unfamiliar" (276). Hoffman would soon encounter the unfamiliar in Canada, and throughout the autobiography contrasts between Cracow and Vancouver are played out through a series of images expressing how Hoffman is dedicated to "hold[ing] on to what I've had with all my might" (86). Although she was separated from her first love,

Hoffman kept remembering the place where she felt most intimately understood, and throughout her story, her autobiographical voice is colored by nostalgic undertones. The presence of Cracow in *Lost in Translation* proves to reach far beyond that of merely being or functioning as a physical location where Hoffman happened to be born and live the thirteen first years of her life. Her personal attachment and relationship to Cracow proved to be highly significant in Hoffman's life, as parts of Eva's Polish self remained in Cracow, and in turn, parts of Cracow continued to live in her long after her departure. As the next two chapters in the autobiography reveal, Hoffman would continue to refer back to the former happiness of Cracow for a long time, and at one point she writes: "We are not yet divided" (74). Because it had such great impact on her, the place of her childhood continued to live within her even though, physically, they were separated.

Terra Incognita

As *Lost in Translation* progresses and the next phase of Hoffman's life in Vancouver, Canada, begins, the storyline takes a different turn. Based on the life-altering, and in many respects devastating, experiences Hoffman encountered in Canada, the second chapter, recapturing the autobiographer's encounter with a new, foreign reality, is rightfully entitled "Exile." For Hoffman, like for Said, the vital link between place and self becomes an underlying theme throughout the narrative, a link that Relph sees as a fundamental aspect of people's existence in the world: "A deep relationship with places is as necessary, and perhaps as unavoidable, as close relationships with people; without such relationships human existence, while possible, is bereft of much of its significance" (41). Hoffman articulates a deep and profound love for Cracow, but like Said also experienced, it was perhaps not until she realized the immediacy of her departure, that Hoffman fully came to comprehend the significant part Cracow had played in her life: "I'm filled to the brim with what I'm about to lose – images of Cracow, which I loved as one loves a person" (4). This phrase offers evidence of Relph's thesis regarding the existence of an emotional relationship between people and places, not only between human beings. The dislocation and separation from Cracow, thus, implies not only the loss of home for Hoffman, but also something perhaps even more precious, a dispossession of her own self: "I hardly have an identity, except that most powerful one of first, private loves" (88). This statement indicates how leaving the secure haven of Cracow entailed not only a change in Hoffman's geographical world, but also

a radical change in her personal world. Entering into a totally different reality, Hoffman was at a complete loss, and as the “journey of pain” began (78), her existence as she knew it subsequently came to an end.

Identifying with a place is not an automatic given. Sometimes you experience being on the inside and sometimes you experience being left on the outside, and as Relph claims, the meaning of a place varies according to how you relate to it: “From the outside you look upon a place like a traveler might look upon a town from distance; from the inside you experience a place, are surrounded by it and part of it” (49). This assessment enlightens the interesting notion of how come certain places speak to us, relate to us, attract us, while others evoke the exact opposite feelings. Relph categorized the various levels of insideness by describing how the outsider, personified by a tourist or a traveler, comes to have a totally different perception of a place, as compared to someone who is on the inside, a permanent resident. Being on the outside, on the other hand, you are deprived of these experiences and view a place through the eyes of a bystander. In Hoffman’s case, a profound attachment to a geographical place is essential in order for her to feel that she belongs, and Canada or “terra incognita” (99), as Hoffman names it, seems to fail in this respect.

“I see what is indeed a bit of nowhere” (101), Hoffman declares upon her first encounter with Vancouver, thus affirming how the vital connection between her and this Canadian location seems to be altogether absent. From the moment of arrival the sense of impending loss makes Hoffman quite determined to hold on to the sentimental yearning for the happiness of a former place and a former time, and living in Vancouver only makes her realize how it is the complete opposite of where she came from. The whole atmosphere seems alien to her, and the net of stability and familiarity she had formerly taken comfort in, seems to unravel before her eyes in what she regards as a cold and unfriendly environment. Vancouver represents everything Cracow never was, and more than anything it represents a place of both “visual confusion” (135) and interior chaos. Hoffman experiences her alienation to and from the Canadian location and thus comes to experience the mode of place experience Relph denotes as outsidersness. Realizing that the places in Vancouver “reject me, because I reject them” (134), Hoffman’s outsidersness is grounded in her alienation from her new environment and subsequently she suffers nostalgic feelings of homesickness. The past in Cracow, to her, was intimately personal, and in the unpersonal landscapes of Vancouver she begins to suffer from the paranoia common to outsiders. The fragmentation of self comes to be reflected in the falling away from the place she experienced, Cracow.

Assembled from the second chapter, the feeling of exile Hoffman experienced as long as she stayed in Canada, was a result of her inability of taking in and connecting to the environment: “I can’t imagine feeling that I’m part of them, that I’m in them” (100). Unable to escape the feeling of being an outsider, the landscape of Vancouver remains desolate. Watching from a distance, with the eyes of an observer, the sceneries of Vancouver, although spectacular in many ways, lacks the inexpressible aura of familiarity which makes Hoffman want to be part of their history, and more importantly, make them part of herself. A place, and a home, for Hoffman needs to have certain indefinable qualities that she cannot seem to find in Canada; thus the mountain settings of Vancouver continue to be, “something you look at rather than enter” (134). Unwilling, or incapable of infiltrating the Canadian space, Hoffman is bereft of the most essential part of belonging, namely experiencing a place from the inside. Acknowledging that she, for the first time in her life, is an outsider, deprives Hoffman of her confidence and her hopes of regaining complete happiness, and she asserts that, “Vancouver will never be the place I most love, for it was here I fell out of the net of meaning into the weightlessness of chaos” (151).

Paradise Lost or Gained

One major challenge for the immigrant is to overcome the obstacle of being regarded as a permanent outsider, or as belonging to “the others,” and in this respect people like Said, Hoffman and Hassan do not only face the challenge of translating themselves, but they also have to translate their new environments in order to be able to enter into them. Belonging is a key factor, and in order to achieve the highest order of insideness it is vital for someone like Hoffman to “know all the issues and all the codes” of the place she hopes to enter into (169). The third and last chapter in Hoffman’s autobiographical account is entitled “The New World,” and describes the last part of Eva’s journey, her moving to the United States. “I don’t know what one can love here, what one can take into oneself as home” (159) she writes about her encounter with the New World. However, realizing that this might be her last stop, Hoffman seems determined to become part of its history, its identity, just like she was part of Cracow’s. To be accepted, to integrate into this overwhelming American scene is important for Hoffman, as it dawns on her that this might be her last destination: “This is not a place where I happen to be, this happens to be the place where I am; this is the only place” (171). Upon the realization that the new world most certainly could be the place holding the keys to

her future, Hoffman seems determined to become part of every aspect of its reality, which in turn leads her to embark on a new kind of journey, the quest for a “way in.” The ultimate goal she seeks to accomplish is to be a part *of* as opposed to merely being a visitor *in* the United States, to start living as opposed to residing in the new place.

The centrality of Cracow in Hoffman’s autobiographical narrative owes much to how it was the place of Ewa’s first love, but when she realizes how the United States is the land of her present and future, it is the city of New York that perhaps represents the adult Hoffman’s love. Eventually it is the United States, not Canada, that comes to be the place where Hoffman regains a sense of self and again feels the intimate bond to a place other than Cracow. However, some of Hoffman’s descriptions of New York emphasize the ambivalent emotions it sparks in her: “This goddamn place is my home now, and sometimes I’m taken aback by how comfortable I feel in its tart, overheated, insecure, well-meaning, expansive atmosphere” (169). Even though described as a “goddamn place,” Hoffman is not suggesting that somewhere else necessarily would be better. The displacement from Cracow first led Hoffman into a deep nostalgic state, but as her life story comes to prove, distance does not inevitably lead to eternal placelessness. Hoffman’s affirmation and recognition of New York as compatible to herself, sums up *Lost in Translation*’s essence, wherein the unfamiliar has to be penetrable and understandable in order to become filled with meaning.

Lost in Translation is marked by three geographical locations, all of which came to have an important impact on the life of both the young and the adult Eva Hoffman, and although they complicated her life in many respects, the geographical presence continued to capture Hoffman’s awareness on so many levels: “No matter what happens to me, I think, there will always be this. There will always be landscapes, and I’ll always have the liberty to breathe them in, the wherewithal to contemplate them” (198). Eventually, what had been a portrayal of one person’s nostalgic yearning for the happiness of a former place, ends on a positive note. As the last chapter comes to an end, it seems as if New York, in its own peculiar way, comes to generate a feeling of familiarity in Hoffman, and leaves open the possibility that the mourning of Cracow may eventually be overcome. Remaining strategically placed on the outside was and could never be fulfilling enough for someone whose identity so much depended on her surroundings, and thus *Lost in Translation* re-tells the story of a life wherein the protagonist successfully entered and felt the empowering embrace by belonging to her immediate location. Considering the development of Hoffman’s narrative and how she ends her story, “I am here now” (280), she seems to have reached a reconciliation between her past and her present. Yet, the fully unified being can perhaps only

be achieved in a state of complete harmony between person and place, which means that in order to be at ease with one's self, one needs to be at ease with one's surroundings. In the end the United States eventually turned out to be the place where Hoffman felt that she belonged, and where she eventually was able to assure herself with the fact that: "I fit, and my surroundings fit me" (170). Suggesting their mutual compatibility and alluding to how her fragmented self has been made whole by this relation between her and place, finally all the pieces of the puzzle fit, and Hoffman is firmly placed, thus making the picture complete. Hoffman's journey started out from "Paradise" and ended in "The New World," and in retrospect Hoffman can conclude affirmatively: "But the wonder is what you can make a paradise out of" (5).

The Autonomous Being

The two preceding life stories have displayed the importance of locations, and more specifically geographical placement in the individual's understanding of the world and the self. What strikes me as interesting about the discussion so far, is the often extraordinary ways in which people seem to engage with places on so many different levels, often without their own conscious awareness of it. Most of the time places have no or little meaning to us, perceived only to make up the background or context for our everyday lives, but *Lost in Translation* and *Out of Place* bring into focus how place is important to the way we see, experience, know, and make the world meaningful. Captured in the life writings of Said and Hoffman is the symbiotic relationship between place and personal identity, as both narratives clearly verbalize a similar feeling of how changes in the outer landscape are reflected in the inner landscape. By way of ascribing place with such meaningful attributes, their stories confirm Eakin's idea of the relational aspect of identity, and further highlights the notion of place as a way of being-in-the-world.

Adopting the significant values of roots and attachment, Hoffman's and Said's narratives endorse the powerful impact of place. *Out of Egypt*, however, outlines a somewhat different encounter between a person and the environment, by raising questions regarding the importance of their synergic relationship. Hassan's story is narrated from a perspective that seems to ascribe a subordinate role to the geographical environment, considering how it is his own accomplishments as an individual that are highlighted. As a self-made man, Hassan considers himself less through his relations to others, as he defines himself more in terms of

an autonomous individual, and unlike Said and Hoffman, he never experienced being firmly grounded or attached to one particular place. Although Eakin focuses on the relational aspect of self in *How Our Lives Become Stories* by setting out to question “the myth of autonomy” (43), he also shows a recognition of the autonomous being, by asserting that, “‘Relational’ selves and lives are neither better – nor worse – than ‘autonomous’ ones” (52). Nevertheless, Eakin relies on the perspective that all lives are relational, “developed collaboratively with others” (68-69). Whether Eakin’s “others” were meant to strictly include people and not places can only be assumed. In any case, significant connection to people and places seems to be missing in Hassan’s narrative. Hassan can very well be described as an autonomous being, a “personality” that Louis Bickford described with the following characteristics: “the autonomous self is, at core, a ‘chooser’ which is ‘antedecedently free of all attachments’” (Bickford).

Hassan does not depend on anywhere or anyone in order to feel whole. He is free of all attachments and thrives on being a solitary soul wandering the earth, incapable or at least reluctant to grow firm roots anywhere or connect to anyone in particular. Apparently, neither places nor people seem to be a decisive factor for Hassan’s perception of self and the world. Hassan’s choice to be an outsider turns his autobiography into one which is expressed more on singular than collective terms. Furthermore, through the consistency of his contentment to live in an isolated state, Hassan comes to disregard his connection to others, thus challenging Eakin’s idea of self construction, by writing: “There is a violence learned early by every child. As I escaped Egypt on the Abraham Lincoln, creaking now in the long, gray swells of the Atlantic, I thought of my father, my mother, my uncles, and why I had so fiercely longed to leave them all behind” (18). Hassan describes in this passage not only what is obviously his escape from a place, but also what is evidently an escape from his own family. The missing link between himself and his family is made even more explicit when Hassan goes on to confess: “my parents, long dead – dead to me perhaps before they entered their grave” (31). The emotional relationship between Hassan and prominent figures in his life, even his own blood relations, seems obviously to be missing, at least as rendered in *Out of Egypt*. He is apparently incapable of relating to his nearest family, a connection that, for most people, represents the core of human existence. Ironically, it was his memories of the atmosphere of Cairo that invigorated Hassan to write down his story of how the liberation from this particular place became the decisive event that altered his entire life.

Out of Egypt tells the story of someone who has become, or perhaps more accurately, always has been, an outsider, not only outside Egypt but also concerning relations in general.

Hassan is reluctant to be tied down, and however lonely his situation might appear, Hassan evidently grows intellectually from the solitude. Despite the obvious lack of interconnection between him and the enclosing atmosphere of the physical world, Hassan is unaware and unconscious of his surroundings, but his choice is in fact a deliberate and self-made choice. In a passage taken from *Out of Egypt*, Hassan questions the possibilities of his un-rooted self: “As I write this, aged fifty-five, in a foreign city, I wonder about my traveling mood, if I could leave all my friends, belongings, books, all familiar faces and places, back in Milwaukee, never to return, as I never returned to Cairo” (98). As the preceding passage vigorously demonstrates, Hassan’s actual escape from Egypt and the following fantasy of escape years later only strengthen the idea of Hassan as a constant traveler, a cosmopolitan of sorts. As testimony of a person reluctant to give himself fully to any place, Hassan’s *Out of Egypt* can be read as a counterpoint to *Lost in Translation* and *Out of Place*, wherein the protagonists regarded place as the main site of authenticity. A reassessment of the significance of place may be appropriate in the reading of Hassan’s narrative, as his autobiography clearly stands out from the two former. In the context of this narrative lies the implication of place as limiting, closed and imprisoning. The great open emptiness, the possibilities of the unfamiliar and the challenges of the unknown are the driving forces behind Hassan’s character. Accordingly, his reclaiming and understanding of self must be done detached from place, not attached to place.

The Existential Outsider

Hassan’s story offers a great contrast to the writings of Said and Hoffman, and in comparison to the two former writers, Hassan seems to be the one displaying the least acknowledgment of the importance of place. “I was born on 17 October 1925, in Cairo, Egypt, and though I carry papers that solemnly record this date and place, I have never felt these facts decisive in my life” (2), writes Hassan at the outset of his autobiography, and thus reveals how he was never one to be place-bound, not even regarding the place of his birth. Origins seems to mean little for someone like Hassan, and this passage shows how he never felt that his birth in Egypt was his destiny, but more a random coincident. What sets Hassan’s story apart from the two other narratives, is the fact that he did not experience being removed from Egypt, as he changed place voluntarily. Whereas Hoffman and Said experienced dislocation and the emptiness of exile following thereafter, Hassan set out to explore his travelling mood by fleeing from both his home and family. Considering the difference between the three narratives, one realizes

how place obviously has different connotations and significance for different people. Where some thrive on the close and dynamic relationship with the geographical presence, others live without acknowledging and reflecting upon their placement in the world. Relph acknowledges how places are perceived differently and subjectively by each individual when he writes:

“Images of places have both a vertical and a horizontal structuring. The vertical structure is one of intensity and depth of experience and has layers corresponding basically to those of the various levels of outsidership and insidership” (56). Relph’s idea of insidership and outsidership serves not only to define the strength and depth of a person’s attachment to a place, but also distinguishes between those on the inside and those on the outside of the complex and close-knit textures of a place. The vertical structure, indicating the roots to his native environment, is at no point described as significant in *Out of Egypt*.

The deepest meaning of a place will perhaps only reveal itself to those who see it from the inside, something it can be argued Hassan never accomplished before he departed to the United States. But how did Hassan come to experience his outsidership? As mentioned above, Relph defines an outsider as someone who is incapable of experiencing or becoming involved in the scenes of a particular place, and as a result can only observe it from the outside. Considering these characteristics the chances of experiencing one’s own home from an outsider’s perspective seem quite foreign, given that commonly, people relate most strongly and intimately to the place they were born. Louis Bickford also recognizes this when he writes that, “Attachment to place occurs most powerfully during childhood” (Bickford). When compared to *Lost in Translation*, Hassan’s outsidership gains further strength, as the difference between the two narratives evidently is based on their descriptions of Cracow and Cairo respectively. Hoffman’s insidership is mirrored in all her descriptions of Poland, each one of them invested with love and care in the most intimate way, whereas Hassan’s outsidership “involves a profound alienation from all places” (Relph 50), even his own home. Hoffman expressed her unconditional love for the place she first experienced, which only comes to prove that Bickford is right in his assessment that, “*seeing* a place is different than *experiencing* a place” (Bickford). Hassan’s narrative clearly lacks a fundamental component in the inside-outside division, namely his inability of “*experiencing*” Egypt as opposed to just “*seeing*” it as a random place. Wandering around, roaming the ancient quarters of Cairo, Hassan “discovered much which had been denied me” (70), and considering his own outsidership, he realized how this situation had left him in a state where he “became a tourist, wide-eyed and fastidious, in my own native place” (71).

Hassan's involvement with his immediate setting never seems to be presented in the autobiography, whereas his failure of ever getting under the surface of home is revealed early on in his personal account. Hassan's descriptions of Cairo are based on the physical attributes of the place and do not come across as the words of someone talking from the inside. As Hassan commences his story, he confesses how the "narrow doors and blank shutters" of home "seemed always closed against my gaze as if holding some riddle" (2). Noting already at the outset of his story that he always felt shut off from the deepest meanings of Egypt, Hassan, even then an outsider, never made sense of Egypt's secrets. Consistently choosing the position of an outsider, Hassan became more and more set on leaving, and his descriptions of Cairo and feelings towards Egypt never correspond to those Relph finds to be characteristic of an insider. Instead, Hassan appears to have closed himself off from Egypt, like Egypt had closed him off. In trying to explain how he never came to belong in Egypt Hassan asserts: "I do not know how to 'speak Egypt' any more. For I was even there, even then, a stranger: in my native land young beggars on the Cairo streets followed me crying, 'Baksheesh, ya khawaga (Mr Foreigner), baksheesh'" (12). Under the circumstances where he experienced being perceived as a foreigner "presumably because my appearance diverged from their idea of an Egyptian" (*Rumors of Change* 249), Hassan too began to conceive of himself as a stranger. Because the assumption that he was not an Egyptian due to his physical appearance, Hassan did not feel like an Egyptian within either. This sense of unbelonging and alienation had once again contributed to sealing Hassan's destiny, bound for another destination.

The title *Out of Egypt* epitomizes what lies at the core of Hassan's narrative: the desperate need to leave what he supposedly should ascribe with qualities of comfort and love, but apparently never did, his home. The autobiography represents what Hassan summoned from his past, a strong determination to never grow roots anywhere. When the place of his origin, which held many of his childhood memories, could not be the place he wanted to make his home, how could anywhere else be? For someone who is an existential outsider, places are backgrounds without meaning or significance, and when the crucial relationship between a person and place is non-existent, some sort of division arises between the two, instead of a close connection. It is common knowledge that no two people are alike, and as a result their perceptions of the world also come to differ. Thus, a place that is identified as meaningful to some, can just as easily be recognized as meaningless by others. As an existential outsider Hassan never seemed to acknowledge or value any place as significant. As Relph observes, "In existential outsidership all places assume the same meaningless identity and are distinguishable only by their superficial qualities" (51). The meaningless identity of a place is

easily discerned from *Out of Egypt*, in which Hassan comes to describe the geographical landscapes in these terms: “Some places dampen our vibrancy; however genial or picturesque, they soon become for me desolate” (82). Evidently, this phrase captures Hassan’s conception of place as somewhere deserted and gloomy, however visually alluring it might appear. Firmly convinced, “knowing well that it soon will fade” (82), the unique qualities of any place are never fully absorbed by Hassan. Describing places as settings more or less drained of meaning, Hassan comes to regard them as unimportant to his existence. Places, for Hassan, become spatial imprisonments and he portrays even his own home as a misery.

Hassan never felt like an insider, not in his own native country or anywhere else. But even if *Out of Egypt* tells the story of a person’s escape from the ancient land “breeding and dying in the rich loam of the Nile” (4), the paradox is that Hassan still seems to be devoting much of his narrative to the place he so desperately wanted to leave. Ironic in many ways, this only comes to show how you can take a person out of his place, but you cannot take that place out of the person. For that reason, even if Hassan successfully managed to escape the landscapes of Egypt physically, as the autobiography clearly shows, he did not escape the haunting ghost of his Egyptian past and his childhood memories. Accordingly, *Out of Egypt* could be read as Hassan’s attempt at writing off the past, by way of writing through it, because by denying his past Egyptian life and heritage, he would also be denying parts of his own self. Even though he can never escape the fact that he is an Egyptian, Hassan never had the need, like Said and Hoffman, to go back physically to re-live the past once more. He was determined never to return to Cairo, which he believed had “displaced the scenes of my childhood” (64). Given Hassan’s associations and memories of Egypt as the place of unbearing isolation, it always remained for him the symbol of a remote past permeated with an underlying negative aura, somewhere he would never return to. Given his relationship with Cairo, or lack of relationship, Hassan left without regret and without mourning. Cairo evoked “no kinship feelings” in Hassan (4), and for that reason he only saw the advantages and possibilities of leaving, sensing that he had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Throughout his account, Hassan comes to depict the powerful notion of the worthless reality of blood relations and the hollowness of geographical places, a feeling Relph recognized as “placelessness.” The first chapter of Hassan’s autobiography is entitled “Beginnings and Ends,” and describes his relationship to Cairo, the place where everything began but also where the Egyptian part of his life ended. “My story began in Egypt, continues in America” (ix), Hassan writes in the preface to his book, thus revealing how he could never foresee his own future taking place in a “slow land corruptly dreaming” (7). Relph’s idea of

placelessness involves a “weakening of distinct and diverse experiences and identities of places” (6), and a conceptualization of place, possibly all places, as capable of disappearing in a “labyrinth of endless similarities” (141). This corresponds to Hassan’s perception of place as physical locations without deeper meaning. As argued above, place can be understood space invested with meaning, but for Hassan his life is lived not in relation to place, rather without the acknowledgement of any place’s relevance. His existence, thus, becomes less dependent on the location and the “where” of his being, and as Cresswell argues, it has become more common for many to experience this feeling of geographical homogenization, seeing that “more of our lives, it has been argued, take place in spaces that could be anywhere” (43). This is very often the result of in a modern society where “that sense of attachment to place has been radically thinned out” (Cresswell 43), something that is mirrored in Hassan’s own descriptions of himself as someone who pays little attention to where he is stationed in the world, someone who has been cursed with or blessed with “an insensitivity to the significance of place” (Relph ii). Unable or unwilling to identify with any place, Hassan’s character comes across as more cosmopolitan in his mind-set than Said and Hoffman, both of whom show an awareness of the enormous relevance of place in their lives and who experienced the deep-rooted significance of the geographical presence.

Departures and Arrivals

As diverse as these three autobiographies indeed are, they come to offer examples of the different “fusions of human and natural order” (Relph 141). All of the autobiographers write of their own subjective encounters with their native environments, and thus their life narratives come to illustrate a wide range of place experiences. Hoffman’s memories of Cracow, as an adult, are perhaps more nostalgic than real, whereas Hassan’s narrative portrays another extreme, wherein his firm decision never to return resides in a deep sense of entrapment from which he had to escape. Of the three accounts *Out of Place* is, in many respects, the story displaying the most complex relationship between a person and his placement in the physical world. Looking back, Said came to identify with Palestine, and thus his story goes to show that insideness is not necessarily predicated on geographical placement. Hassan’s story also proves this, as his placement in Egypt never brought him to acknowledge Cairo as home. Thus, insideness may devolve into outsideness, and outsideness can, and hopefully will, evolve into insideness.

As immigrants, Hoffman, Said and Hassan have experienced first-hand the challenges of arriving in new settings and fitting into new stories, already on-going stories. Massey describes the experience of transplantation in the following manner: “Arriving in a new place means joining up with, somehow linking into, the collection of interwoven stories of which the place is made” (*For Space* 119). This statement captures a major challenge that these writers are faced with, in the sense that their identities are based on their ability to relate and integrate into the new world. Dispossession of self and of social heritage is incorporated in the place left behind and thus complicates the “joining up with” and becoming an insider in a totally foreign world. Hoffman writes of this experience:

I’ve become caught between stories, between the kinds of story we tell ourselves about ourselves. In one story, circumstance plays the part of fate, in the other, character. In one, I’ve been poised against my surroundings at an embattled tilt because I was thrown into an alien world. In the other, the world was alien because I was prepared to make it so, and all events registered on me as dye making patterns in the grain of already woven fabric. (268-69)

Chapter Three:

From Exile to Home

The anatomy of the present world is one marked by dislocation, fragmentation, alienation, placelessness and homelessness, all of which may encompass related experiences of exile. Exile as a concept seems to have a wide range of connotations, but narratives of loss and displacement are often associated with the term. However, if taken in this narrow sense, another significant aspect of exile seems to be forgotten, namely expatriation which Bharati Mukherjee in her essay “Imagining Homelands” defines as “an act of sustained self-removal from one’s native culture” (71). The conscious decision of voluntary exile tends to be marked by a more detached and less nostalgic reading of the experiences of leaving one’s home of origin. The three trajectories discussed in this thesis take different directions, and thus represent three distinct perspectives concerning the exilic experience. As autobiographical acts, *Lost in Translation* and *Out of Place* lend themselves to be read as stories of dislocation, whereas *Out of Egypt* is the account of Hassan’s own intentional desire to relocate. Despite their differences, Hoffman, Said and Hassan are familiar with feelings of homelessness and exile, two closely linked concepts. What sets their narratives apart is how they account for their own subjective experience of exile, loss and trauma, consequently epitomizing the problematic conception that everyone is a victim and that all historical losses involve trauma.

Exile is a multidimensional condition which evokes diverse connotations, which further complicates a simple understanding of the concept. For purposes of clarity, a brief introductory mapping of the term's origin is called for. Exile originates from the Latin word “exilium,” where the prefix “ex” means “out” and the root “solum” refers to “ground, land or soil” (McClennen 14). The historical idea of exile as merely denoting (political) banishment has been challenged, partly as a result of mass migration and the breakdown of traditional notions of individual belonging in the twenty-first century. Exile is often understood as a physical state of being, often associated with absence, into which an individual unwillingly or willingly enters. However, exile may not only relate to geographical dislocation; it can also be used metaphorically, thus interpreted as an intellectual, mental state, which again may spur creativity. The purpose of the present chapter is to explore the concept of exile, and the term’s varying definitions, ranging from catastrophe to a new a new state of freedom. While it entails loss, exile may also become a journey of self-discovery, translation of self, and a necessary stage for maturation grounded in an individual’s solitude.

The selection of these particular writers allows for a study of certain features often found in different forms of life-writing, such as the prevailing notion of the autobiographer's problematic relationship to the past, particularly regarding the "lost home," and my argument will draw on the idea that the concepts of home and exile implicate each other. In *Dialectics of Exile* Sophia A. McClennen acknowledges this vital link when she writes: "Without the belief that there is a connection between an individual and a place, exile has no meaning" (21). However, a massive shift has taken place in both the political and social landscape, which in turn has had a profound effect on the notions of exile and home. When one takes into consideration that today people seem to find themselves to be less place-bound than ever before, it makes sense to speak of a shift, from a pre-modern to a modern, or from a modern to a post-modern, notion of exile. As more and more people travel and migrate across borders, it almost seems as if fixity and rootedness are positioned as experiences leaning towards the abnormal, whereas movement and transits are viewed as the norm. In the present world, where seemingly all borders and boundaries are crossable, it would perhaps make better sense to speak of the exiled in terms of the wanderer or what Eva Hoffman calls "the new nomads" ("The New Nomads" 35). In the same essay Hoffman goes on to explain: "In the 'nomadic' configuration, exile loses its charge, since there is no place from which one can be expelled, no powerful notion of home" (58). It may be valuable and necessary to recognize such an expression, seeing that at the present time the exilic experience and its entailed separation might just as easily be voluntarily or self-imposed.

In life, as well as in literature, there are many varieties of exile and homelessness, and the experiences and emotions connected to these conditions are just as diverse as the people writing about them. If one looks behind the fine distinctions between various terms such as exiles, nomads, expatriates and cosmopolitans, one finds that these words all designate a state of not being at home, or of being everywhere at home. Said writes in his essay "Reflections on Exile":

The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience. (185)

With this passage Said manages to capture some of the different aspects of the exilic experience, and moreover he attempts to ground abstract notions of displacement, loss and

creativity in real life. In keeping with Said's argument, I will consider how boundaries can create feelings of imprisonment and isolation, but also how beyond those barriers a new world of possibilities and freedom may await those who are brave enough to transgress them. As it turns out, homes may only be provisional and therefore it is intriguing to explore how these autobiographies delineate various conceptualizations of home, and moreover how these authors have been motivated by a conception of "home" as a writing practice.

There does not necessarily have to be a connection between physical removal and physical exile; as it turns out it is possible to remain in the place of origin and still suffer from internal exile. *Out of Egypt* reveals how Ihab Hassan is physically situated in Egypt but nevertheless feels exiled on a mental level, as he finds himself trapped inside the borders of his own native land. On the other side, Eva Hoffman outlines a totally different picture in *Lost in Translation*, where she depicts the contingency of being situated in one place physically, and at the same time being somewhere completely different mentally. Gathered from these stories it is possible to derive the conclusion that there is a difference between where these individuals *find* themselves at home in the world, and how they *make* themselves at home in the world. There is a significant distinction between the two; where you happen to be may not at all correspond to where you find yourself at home. One of the most challenging aspects of the term exile is the many different perceptions and connotations associated with it, which is why this chapter seeks to illuminate some of the possible ways of conceiving of this concept. As the narratives of Hoffman, Said and Hassan display, there may be no possibility or desire of returning "home." However, there is always the possibility of remaining homeless, to transform exile into home, or creating a new home.

Homecoming in Language

Loss of home and loss of self is perhaps an all too familiar feeling for the exiled immigrant, thus the very act of (autobiographical) writing may serve as a way in which these individuals are capable of reclaiming a sense of home and self. Although these selected texts are narratives of exile and dislocation, they also describe the variations in the intensity or devastating impact of personal afflictions, thus illustrating how loss, nostalgia and trauma may correspond to the experience of exile. The ways in which these writers translate their own subjective experiences of exile into pieces of literature also illustrates how self-writing can be used as therapy, as ways in which one may "write off" the past or write "through" the past. Autobiographical writings can be used as a tool to look back, to dwell on the past, or it

can serve as a device to close off the past and look forward. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominic LaCapra provides a critical study into the complexities of post-traumatic writing. LaCapra acknowledges how writing through the past may be important for acquiring a sense of the future and explains how the written word may be used as reenactment: “When the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance, and perspective, one has begun the arduous process of working over and through the trauma” (90). In itself, *Lost in Translation* as well as Hoffman’s diary, both serve as means in which Hoffman found ways to use memory as an aspect of working through the past: “It is strange, in spite of all we know about such transactions, that the Looking Glass through which I step into the past releases me to go on into the present. Perhaps now I can get the different block of my story into the right proportions” (241).

As mentioned earlier the exiled person often has a problematic relationship to the past, and many remain possessed or haunted by the past for the rest of their lives. The traumas often associated with the exilic experience entail being uprooted and dislocated from the familiar and intimate. Of the three writers, Hoffman in particular depicts this kind of traumatic experience in her narrative, when she describes how she was taken away from Cracow, her own private paradise: “We can’t be leaving all this behind – but we are. I am thirteen years old, and we are emigrating. It’s a notion of such crushing, definitive finality that to me it might as well mean the end of the world” (3). The presence of trauma in autobiographies written by immigrants is not an uncommon feature, and LaCapra’s discussion opens up for an interesting debate concerning exactly this subject:

When absence is converted into loss, one increases the likelihood of misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality or fully unified community. When loss is converted into (or encrypted in an indiscriminately generalized rhetoric of) absence, one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted. (46)

What LaCapra posits here, strikes me as a good description of the feelings Hoffman narrates in *Lost in Translation*. The conversion of absence into loss becomes a major aspect in Hoffman’s life story, as she seems almost unable or unwilling to let go of Cracow, and there is a strong sense of nostalgia and mourning running throughout the entire book. The

autobiographical account can be read as a mourning process, in which Hoffman writes through the past, in an attempt to come to terms with her own fate as an immigrant. For the exile, and for Hoffman, the site of authenticity remains continually displaced, located in another country, thus transforming the absence of Cracow into a massive loss: “As I walk the streets of Vancouver, I am pregnant the images of Poland, pregnant and sick ... The largest presence within me is the welling up of absence, of what I have lost. This pregnancy is also a phantom pain” (115).

Entitled *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, Hoffman’s autobiography makes reference to a loss that exceeds her removal from the geographical location of Cracow. Characteristic of her physical exile is Hoffman’s habitation in one place, whereas she continually remembers and refers back to another, her native home. As such Hoffman’s exile is defined only in relation to the past, and accordingly she perceives the present world in terms of nostalgic memories. However, Hoffman’s geographical exile is made more complex and complicated by her simultaneous experience of internal exile. Hoffman’s notion of home does not only indicate the physical place called Cracow. Home is also captured in a nostalgic and melancholic remembrance of something else that is absent and lost, namely the Polish language. Even though a person may be able to “jump continents” (115), language and identity do not necessarily travel across borders with the same ease, resulting in an outcome where most certainly some pieces are bound to get “lost in translation.” Translation becomes a major aspect in Hoffman’s autobiography, referring both to the translation of language and of self. The absence that creates Eva’s nostalgia and mourning comes mainly from the loss of her mother tongue and the loss of the “living connection” between her internal and external reality (107), resulting in her linguistic exile. The falling away from the wholeness she received from the familiar Polish language and the fragmentation of self that follows her alienation within the English language, leads Hoffman into a state where she is involuntarily silenced and feels ungrounded verbally. For a while her existence is bereft of any real substance, as she is imprisoned and silenced by her own inarticulacy.

Without the means to articulate herself and without the voice to translate her inner, Polish world, Hoffman experiences the torture of linguistic and verbal strangeness, referring to what she describes as living in a “verbally deprived condition” (181). Language seems to be the cornerstone in Hoffman’s existence, the way in which she familiarizes herself with the world and how the world familiarizes itself with her. Trapped in a linguistic exile, speechless and with an “untranslatable” past (120), Hoffman is “stuck in some betwixt and between place” (216), wherein she has no capacity to make the present world understandable or to

make herself understood. The missing link between what she experiences and what she can articulate, creates a barrier preventing Hoffman from playing a significant part in the mainstream culture. Unable to translate herself from Polish into English, Hoffman confirms the profundity of her own in-articulation by accentuating her own conviction that, “Nothing fully exists until it is articulated” (29) and seeing that she is “not filled with language anymore,” Hoffman draws the conclusion that “in this dark and empty state, I don’t really exist” (108). A pursuit to restore the vital link between the signifier and the signified, leads the protagonist on her main quest, which demonstrates that Hoffman truly believes that the mastering of the English language will serve to mark her re-entrance into the “authentic.”

The untranslatable gap between the two parts of her self comes to create a mind-wrecking situation for Hoffman. The past Polish self and the present American self live in opposition and constant conflict with each other, creating an unbearable situation, and Hoffman articulates how this divide comes to take its toll on her: “being cut off from one part of one’s own story is apt to veil it in the haze of nostalgia, which is an ineffectual relationship to the past, and the haze of alienation, which is an ineffectual relationship to the present” (242). A major turning point in *Lost in Translation* comes when Eva receives a diary from a Canadian friend and is given the chance to unite the Polish and American parts of her persona, and her diary provides her with the means to translate her past and apply writing as a way to work through her traumatic translocation. Hoffman’s way out of the exiled body, silenced by an alien language, must come from within, and eventually it becomes the outcome of her decision to write her diary in English. Hoffman tries to recover the condition of completeness and the construction of one (Polish-)American self and decides to reconcile the past with the present by means of the English language. When Hoffman is faced with the dilemma of which language to write in, although she is very much directed by her past, she decides to embrace the future. Hoffman’s way of responding to her loss and personal trauma at this juncture was critical for her being able to lay ghosts to rest, and to distance herself from the haunting revenants from the past. The past is lost. Thus the life of an immigrant depends not only coming to terms with the past, but also on coming to terms with the present. The way in which Hoffman is able to unite her two parts, is to re-write her life story in her new language:

The way to jump over my Great Divide is to crawl backward over it in English. It’s only when I retell my whole story, back to the beginning, and from the beginning onward, in one language, that I can reconcile the voices within me with each other; it

is only then that the person who judges the voices and tells the stories begins to emerge. (272)

When Hoffman is confident enough to trust English to speak for the past, she is able to face the present, confidently knowing that she is blessed with a voice that can articulate her whole existence. She is not merely rooted in the past; she is more importantly rooted in the present. Working through the trauma involves the articulation of the loss rooted in a complicated past. That is why the acquisition of the English language is so important to Hoffman; it allows her to articulate and reconcile with the loss she experienced in the past: “To some extent, one has to rewrite the past in order to understand it” (242).

The metaphor of home, in *Lost in Translation*, is closely connected with language and the feeling of inferiority and alienation caused by voicelessness. In many ways Hoffman’s autobiography represents the conventional immigrant narrative with the characteristic focus on pure beginnings where something is lost, the middle part of confusion, while at the end what was lost is recovered, at least on some level, but in a different form or shape. In Hoffman’s narrative, although she gets “lost in translation,” home is recovered in language and in writing. Najem Wali recognizes the existence of home as a metaphor which may be intimately connected to the issue of control over language: “the writer’s homeland is the language in which he writes, and his house is the world which he constructs through his work, just as the homeland of the traveller is wherever his feet may fall” (Wali). A significant number of autobiographical texts written by immigrants point to the reparative nature of writing, and Hoffman’s text is no exception, in the sense that writing becomes an important aspect in her process of working through her loss. The main desire she expresses is her wish to recover the loss in part by returning home, but not to the physical home Cracow, but the home in language. It is through writing that Hoffman finds her way of working through the nostalgia. Her autobiography becomes her literary expression of exile, and her diary signals her first step towards another language and culture, her own translation of the exiled self within. Thus, Hoffman’s diary represents an important textual expression of the crossing of another border, albeit not a physical one. At the same time it becomes a means for the ultimate transformation, whereby Hoffman translates exilic depression into exilic expression. The English language, which was a major obstacle causing her internal exile, eventually turns into the vehicle for Hoffman’s exit to the present.

For Hoffman, exile is not solely measured by her geographical distance from Cracow, but also by the distance from her native tongue, and by the divide within herself created by

her own internal language and the exterior English language. Excluded from the terrain of speech, being without language in the present is described by Hoffman as her exile or prison: “I can’t live forever in a windy, unfurnished imagination; I have to make a comfortable habitation there ... I have to add a bottom to the language that I learned from the top” (217). Finding her way out of this condition thus becomes her major quest until she finally learns how to start from the bottom, learning her new language from scratch, and translating herself all the way from the past to the present in this language. Hoffman realizes that “it’s only coming from the ground up that I can hit the tenor of my own sensibility, hit home” (276). When she feels like she is mastering the English language, Hoffman declares that she has hit home and how the most crucial and decisive piece in the puzzle of life has finally come into place. Hoffman chooses English as her language of literary expression, a process that inevitably leads to her feeling of being “at home” within this once foreign language. She makes a new identity for herself through the process of artistic self-expression, in writing. The English language enables her to articulate the present and the future, whereas Polish could never revive anything but the past. Thus, Hoffman writes herself out of exile and hits home through her own translation and writing process; hence she becomes a translated immigrant writer.

Writing itself becomes Hoffman’s therapy, a dialogue of translation. The dialogue is internal, manifested in her own translating process, but it is also external, evidenced in her writing. Hoffman wants to “live within language” (194), and she decides that to achieve this she has to open up to the English language: “If I take in enough, then maybe I can incorporate the language, make it part of my psyche and my body,” make it home (216). Unity for Hoffman signals how the two parts of her identity, originally so far apart, have eventually, after all the grief and triangulation, finally forged a common language. This is achieved in her translation process, which shows how language is not only a means of communication with the outer world, but perhaps just as importantly, language opens up for a way of communicating inwards and keeping in touch with one’s self. Eventually, as she is “back within the music of the language” (186), Hoffman is finally able to claim a new home, firmly rooted and anchored in the English language. *Lost in Translation* ends with the affirmative “I am here now,” conveying how Hoffman has arrived in the sense of making her new geographical place her home. More importantly she feels at home, comfortable and secure in a language that gives her the opportunity to articulate her whole life from beginning to end. And although she eventually learns to translate forward, from Polish to English, from past to

present, Hoffman realizes the impossibility of the opposite, confirming that, “I can’t translate backward” (184).

Out of Place, Into Exile

Just as the personal account conveyed by Eva Hoffman in *Lost in Translation*, Edward Said, with *Out of Place*, also manages to translate the sad accidents of his life into literature in a way that is both captivating and fascinating. The feeling of distress over the misfortunes taking place in his native land is expressed throughout Said’s autobiography, while one of the main preoccupations in *Out of Place* seems to be the author’s personal tragedy, his loss of home. The dispossession from and loss of Palestine seems to place an extraordinary historical burden on Said; he is left homeless and constantly seeking for some kind of grounding. With reference to the autobiography’s title, Said seems to suggest that home is somewhere or something unavailable to him, and in many respects the curse of exile manifests itself in his own sad realization of how “in the deepest sense ‘home’ was something I was excluded from” (42). In many ways, exile is a word that designates a state of being nowhere at home or being everywhere at home. Given the title of Said’s autobiography, it is the former aspect of exile that describes his piece of life writing best.

An exile is always out of place and an exile never belongs in his or her surroundings, are two assertions that both serve to represent Said’s character. For Said, exile is a mixture of *where* he is not (Palestine) and *what* he is not (comfortable in his own skin), which makes Said’s displacement, created out of absence, twofold: absence of homeland and absence of connection to self. An important aspect of Said’s exile, none the less real or traumatic, is thus manifested by how he feels on the inside, a type of internal exilic presence, which would have a tremendous impact on his person. Wali confirms this notion in his article “Homeland as Exile, Exile as Homeland” when he declares that exile is a concept not only related to geographical (dis)placement: “Exile knows no borders, and emotional attachment is not measured by distance. It is internal and deadly” (Wali). Said’s exile is indeed internal and destructive in the sense that he is trapped inside his own body, the most immediate place of all. Said feels, first and foremost, like a prisoner in his own skin and within his own body, an experience which he at no point feels comfortable with. Growing up, too “protected and enclosed” within the “little world” (24) created by his parents, Said was imposed with a personality that would serve to complicate his whole perception and attitude towards the world and his own self. The loss of the vital connection between “Edward,” his “public, outer

self” (137), and that other private part of his self that stemmed “from some region inside myself that I knew existed but could only rarely have access to” (89), left Said without the vital control over his own body. *Out of Place* is descriptive of how Said not only had to translate between cultures and languages, but also had to struggle to oscillate between the two distinct parts of his personality.

To have some sense of self is perhaps one of the most fundamental aspects of human existence, and the deprivation of such an important part of his self-understanding may have contributed to Said’s deprivation of the ability to live a fully functional life in relation to his surroundings. His own uncertainties concerning his own identity came to reflect how others also regarded him as an outsider, an alien. By describing his own feeling of being helpless and unable to escape the mental boundaries created by his conflicting personalities, Said is pointing to yet another aspect of the exilic experience, the internal aspect, starting from the inside and out. Baffled over how “Edward” seems to be permeating every moment of his existence as opposed to that other private, exiled part of his personality, Said faces the reality wherein he, for the time being, has to accept that there is a difference between the person he portrays outward and the person he portrays inwards. Continually unable to translate and unite his two inner selves, Said “became ‘Edward,’ a creation of my parents whose daily travails a quite different but quite dormant inner self was able to observe, though most of the time was powerless to help” (19). Although he is not sure where this inner self comes from, or even how he is to make it the most prominent part of his being, the side he wants to reflect outwards, Said is determined to locate and recover what he believes to be the most genuine and real part of himself.

Said presents his childhood as some sort of exile in a artificial cocoon, partly constructed by his parents, and the fact that his parents, particularly his father, maintained strict control over everything he did, Said came to associate home as somewhere “fantastically isolated and almost experimental” (38). The somewhat peculiar family atmosphere, partly attuned to the local culture, partly influenced by his father’s idealization of the West, further deprived Said of any self-assurance. Even within Egypt, Said experienced how his Westernized education provided yet another boundary against inclusion, as Said felt he was exiled from his own cultural heritage. In the essay “Shadow Cities” Said writes: “I found myself becoming an entirely Western person” studying only subjects that he found had no relevance “to my own tradition,” a fact that he concludes “naturally increased my isolation from my own language and background” (100). The effect of Said’s loss, or his overall lack of self-assurance, led him to question his own abilities and possibilities as an independent

person. Who was the real Said supposed to be, and how was he to obtain contact with this inner, isolated being?

Despite the circumstances, Said was determined not to be left powerless by his exile and did not allow for anyone or anything to deprive him of the one certain aspect of his identity, his academic potentials. "My intelligence" Said affirms, "was soon becoming my only certainty about myself" (210), an aspect of self that may have been a direct consequence of the many years of isolation and solitude. Even though he "became quite isolated" under the severe guidance from his father and mother, Said also reflects upon how he simultaneously was "exhilarated intellectually" by the imprisonment (278). Although he endured a lot of pain from the isolated state descriptive of much of his existence, literature enabled and rewarded Said with a lifeline to freedom, a kind of salvation that weighted up for everything he had lost. The overall peculiar upbringing, which acutely cut him off from society and a sense of self, forced Said to look elsewhere for something that would give meaning to his life: "gradually I realized that I could become the author of my own pleasures, particularly those that took me as far away as possible from the choking impingements of family and school" (33). By separating from these restricting and repressing boundaries of home and family, Said found in literature a way to freedom and a vital means for self-exploration, and eventually was able to start living and writing his own life.

Separated from both home and family in the United States, Said experienced how, coming to independence and freedom in this new world, he could make his own future by grasping the opportunities he was given. Much of Said's literary productions may be read as his own way of reconciling with his history, both personal and cultural. *Out of Place* is easily interpreted as an attempt at unity and rootedness in the face of disjunction and fragmentation, a literary construction wherein Said tries to forge his own artificial unity of the world and himself. Writing about Palestine and his split self, Said may succeed in imposing some sense of on self and on his perception of the world. The therapeutic relevance of Said's writings thus manifests itself in his effort to secure a sense of understanding of his past, so as to be able to live in the present. The autobiography is in a sense the story of how what we have experienced has made us who we are today, and Said's self-reflection in *Out of Place* is a textual expression of how loss may be turned into creative writing, and how writing also may be viewed as an act of working through the traumas often associated with loss.

Said's occupation with his past might be read as his most honest attempt to write about his history, so as to write through the apocalypse of loss. Loss of self and home occupies a great part of Said's existence, and also represents the core of the autobiography. Deprived of

his original homeland and a solid sense of self, Said goes through a mourning process, and his authorship may be what provides him with a form of redemption from the loss he experienced. Re-writing the past may in itself become a kind of healing process, a way in which the autobiographer is able to repair some of the damages of life. However, by engaging in narratives like *Out of Place* one may observe that there are certain kinds of narratives which do not seek a resonant closure. The traumatic historical events that took place in Said's early years may have proven to be of such devastating character that he was left unable to ever reach full reconciliation or closure concerning his past. LaCapra explains how "Trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in the existence" (41), and the biggest hole in Said's existence was of course the fact that he never seemed to be able to fully understand what had occurred in Palestine. Said is not only willing to remember, but also determined not to forget, and turns to literature in an attempt to work through and to some extent even overcome these sad past events. Separated from his "authentic" home, Said started the writing process to assuage his sense of loss. The process of writing his personal account was perhaps yet another attempt to weave the past together with the present. Said acknowledges that his autobiographical account may be read as an attempt to open himself "to the deeply disorganized state of my real history ... and then to try to construct them in order" (6). The exile defines the present in relation to the past, and although Said perceives the world according to his own personal history, he acknowledges that the undying memories assembled in *Out of Place* are the result of an "archaeological prying into a very distant and essentially irrecoverable past" (216). Although Said alludes to his past as "irrecoverable," he may still have been able to create a home in writing.

The exilic experience has much to do with constructions of home. However, home does not necessarily have to be somewhere or something that has been taken away from you; instead it can be something you create for yourself. A homeland, Said's autobiographical life story alludes to, is created as much by your own creative writing, as it is by the physical location where you are grounded. Acknowledging how Palestine is lost as home and homeland, Said must look for another kind of home. For the displaced individual, home must be sought at a personal level rather than on a social level. For Said, home above all is associated with his inner capacity to emotionally attach himself with his lost homeland through his own personal memories and re-constructions of the past in writing. As an author, Said turns to memory and writing in order to reconstruct the past. However, as he also implies in the text, certain wounds cannot simply heal without leaving scars in the present. Without question, the many departures and farewells had a deep impact on Said's persona, and exactly

those painful experiences of loss would come to characterize Said's life and personality. Marked by these life-altering past events, Said became reluctant to refer to any particular place as his home. LaCapra asserts the importance of being "able to distinguish between the past and the present and to recall in memory that something happened to one back then while realizing at the same time that one is living here and now with openings to the future" (22). However, even though history left no visible scars, no physical signs of past events, Said nevertheless had to live with "a secret but ineradicable fear of not returning" (216). His deep-rooted fear of not being able to return made him reluctant to become too attached and too secure anywhere. Said's endeavours, both artistically and academically, further confirm or explain how he "always felt the priority of intellectual, rather than national or tribal, consciousness, no matter how solitary that made one" (280). For a man that grew up in the shadow of his peers, loneliness may be perceived "as a form of both freedom and of affliction" (12).

In some ways all history may be said to involve some kind of trauma, and seeing how he had lost Palestine to political circumstances, Said continued to live with the constant fear of not returning, of calling a place home and lose it again. As a result, regardless of his geographical location, Said chose never to allow himself to become too comfortably at home anywhere in the physical world. Perhaps the exile's fate is the impossibility of homecoming or returning? In a passage in *Out of Place* Said goes on to explain: "Now it does not seem important or even desirable to be 'right' and in place (right at home for instance). Better to wander out of place, not to own a house, and not ever to feel too much at home anywhere" (294). Said has lost his homeland and sees no point in regaining or making a new home elsewhere; he rather comes to the conclusion that he can embrace his past and dedicate himself to what he always seemed devoted to erasing, namely his otherness and out-of-placeness.

Home as Exile, Exile as Home

The autobiographies of Said, Hoffman and Hassan all epitomize stories of people who have belonged to places more or less "lost" in time. This loss may be interpreted differently from individual to individual, and compared to the nostalgic accounts of Said and Hoffman, for instance, Hassan's narrative conveys his embracement of the freedom derived from his leaving his home of origin. Edward Relph acknowledges these individual differences by writing: "Our experience of place, and especially of home, is a dialectic one – balancing a

need to stay with a desire to escape. When one of these needs is too readily satisfied we suffer either from nostalgia and a sense of being uprooted, or from the melancholia that accompanies a feeling of oppression and imprisonment in a place” (*Place and Placelessness* 42). There is no nostalgia or mourning accompanying Hassan’s loss of Egypt, and throughout the autobiography, Hassan confesses his thoughts concerning the appalling limitations of Egypt as a place, and he never seems to let go of the memories of it as somewhere that imposed restrictions and offered more misery than happiness. A sense of place and belonging is usually assumed to give stability and comfort in a person’s life, but Hassan’s story shows how this quality of place is just one reflection of the way we choose to think about it.

Out of Egypt offers a different experience of origin, as Hassan emphasizes that it was *within* the borders of his native land he came to feel physically exiled, imprisoned and enclosed. Hassan confesses that his immediate apprehension of Egypt’s fatal influence on his character was an “intuition of prisons” and a “caved-in self” (108), which may explain the abhorrence of any kind of nostalgia. As a consequence, one encounters, by engaging in Hassan’s narrative, a contrasting view to the notion that “All leaving is loss, every departure a small death” (106). The process of writing is valuable for all three autobiographers, but they may have different intentions with their autobiographical accounts. *Out of Egypt* is a personal narrative colored by reason and reflection rather than emotions. Hassan has no need for mourning; as nothing has been lost, in fact he writes how everything has been gained: “Sensing, really believing, that I had nothing to lose, I found that I had accidentally won everything, almost everything” (52). Hassan’s narrative structure is thus very different from Hoffman’s, and the two of them keep referring to the past in their own distinct ways. *Lost in Translation* is a nostalgic and elegiac piece of literature wherein the protagonist remains possessed by the past, making Hoffman’s text intensely emotional, whereas Hassan depicts his past with little or no sentimental yearning.

For Hoffman and Said, the process of writing may be interpreted as a means to “work through,” an attempt wherein they use their autobiographies in an effort to gain critical distance on traumatic historical events, and to distinguish between past, present and future. The very act of writing itself becomes a kind of treatment, a way of reparation for the deep-rooted damages of life. However, while Hoffman and Said experienced being dislocated, Hassan relocated willfully, a factor that contributes to distinguishing his narrative from the two former. Compared to the in-depth nostalgic accounts of Hoffman and Said, Hassan’s autobiography comes across as a far more distanced and detached personal account. For Hoffman and Said the compulsion to overcome some primary loss or trauma through

repetition may have been the primary motivation behind their writings, whereas Hassan seems more likely to “write off” the past. Hassan writes off the past so as to embalm it or to preserve it from oblivion by keeping in it in his memories, and in another one of his texts he questions the therapeutic qualities of the writing process: “What precisely did I, does anyone, expect to find in literature? ... Balm for loneliness, for loss?” (*Rumors of Change* 153).

The traumatic historical and personal events that mark the life stories of Hoffman and Said are more or less non-existent in Hassan’s autobiography, mainly because Hassan’s journeying was undertaken by choice, not by force. In comparison to the two former life narratives, *Out of Egypt* depicts a somewhat different side of the immigrant or exilic experience, since he decided to relocate while they were displaced. The word displacement suggests a previous experience of a place as home. Hassan seems never to have thought of Egypt as home, and thus it would never evoke a sense of longing in him either. As mentioned previously, home is commonly thought to be deeply connected with the place where one is rooted; hence being uprooted may entail being dislocated from a familiar and intimate landscape. However, as Hassan’s own narrative reveals, he never felt a deep-rooted attachment to Egypt: “Roots, everyone speaks of roots. I have cared for none. Perhaps, in my case, they were too old and tangled; or perhaps they withered early from some blight, which I have long ceased to mourn” (4). The bonds and roots between Hassan and his home are obviously not present.

Out of Egypt, the title of Hassan's autobiography, mirrors this absence of loss as it implies his deliberate and purposeful choice to “escape” from Egypt. Hassan is rootless and restless and felt no strong connection to either Cairo or Egypt, a place and a country where he grew up in solitude breathing “the air of make-believe” (8). What is intriguing with Hassan's narrative, is the expression of the sentiment that one cannot lose what one never had, and in his case loss is absent, not present, just like his notion of home. LaCapra writes that, “In an obvious and restricted sense losses may entail absence, but the converse need not be the case” (48). This idea fits with the narrative of Hassan, in which he testifies: “When I returned to Cairo after a fortnight, I realized calmly, though that calmness itself hurt, that I had missed no one, no one at all. I had not been born, it seems, to miss my home” (97). If you don’t recognize a home, then how can you lose it or long for it. According to LaCapra, “In terms of absence, one may recognize that one cannot lose what one never had” (50). This does in fact relate to Hassan and how he did not lose his home. Displacement presupposes roots to a particular place (called home), and if Hassan did not have those roots, he perhaps never came to feel uprooted either. *Out of Egypt* is in many ways an unusual autobiographical account, in

that the author does not seem to be seeking any kind of belonging. Instead Hassan speaks of “a homelessness that is home?” (*Rumors of Change* 247).

The question is whether autobiography may help, and if not to heal entirely, then at least to come to terms with the wounds and the scars of the past. A shared aspect for the three authors is their reliance on memory in order to do the work of mourning, or perhaps to be done with the past once and for all. In *Out of Egypt*, Hassan seems to be seeking resonant closure; in fact there appears to be a strong wish on his behalf to escape not only the geographical setting of Egypt, but even more so, every aspect of his life and environment in his homeland. But why does he experience this need to re-write the past; is it an attempt to finally escape the haunting ghosts of his childhood memories? Displacement is a major aspect of Hoffman’s and Said’s exile, whereas parts of Hassan’s sense of exile may stem from his obsession with memory. When Hassan writes, “just as I have *tried* to escape Egypt” (31; emphasis added), he confirms that, even though he physically left Egypt, he can perhaps never truly escape recalling the impressions forged by his personal history. LaCapra expresses his recognition of the force of past memories when he writes that, “Something of the past always remains, if only as a haunting presence or symptomatic revenant” (49). Hassan is in many respects re-visiting the past through writing, as opposed to going back physically, and he explains his intentions with the autobiographical account: “I return also ... to recover my own youth in Egypt” (27). The essential word in this extract is “recover,” as it may serve to explain why *Out of Egypt* came to be written. Possession by the past may never be fully overcome or transcended, and perhaps Hassan’s decision to write his story was grounded in a personal need to revisit the past, an act that may at best enable the critical perspective and distance he needed in order to move on. By giving himself the opportunity to “write off” the past, Hassan is also creating a way in which he is able to break the boundaries of his own personal history, which have been as tight as prison walls. In order to finally succeed and fulfill this life-long escape from Egypt, Hassan became the creator of his own self and his own home, by replacing those boundaries with freedom of choice.

“Does freedom compel us always into solitude?” (40) Hassan asks, and thus confirms his own way of life, choosing to be the solitary traveler, embracing his psychological exile. Perhaps Hassan’s choice is grounded in his upbringing. Although he did not fear the solitude, Hassan was under his parent’s strict rules and reveals that he dreamt of and longed for the freedom and “fierce solitude of the nomad, moving across timeless sand” (41). Accustomed and familiar with being alone, almost always left to his own company Hassan perhaps felt most comfortable with continuing to live on these terms, thus constructing his own “self-

entrapments of solitude” (36). In many ways Hassan seems to be using his writing as an escape from the physical world, a way in which he creates an existence, simultaneously alienating himself through his own self-imposed exile or solitude. “But why this autobiography now?” asks Hassan, “is autobiography my own warrant for American self-exile?” (106). Hassan finds a strange kind of comfort from not being firmly rooted to one single location; home for Hassan is not so much a physical location as it is a mode of being in the world. In *Rumors of Change*, Hassan describes the intellectual as someone who “is everywhere and nowhere, never and always, ‘abroad’” (250). This notion reflects how his writing also, rather than being constructed with the intention of providing a home away from home, embraces the freedom that comes with his homelessness and his intentions of remaining homeless. In many ways Hassan’s writing and persona reflect the lifestyle of a modern intellectual. As Turner writes: “anybody who takes the calling of an intellectual life seriously cannot be comfortably at home in their home” (126).

Hassan’s way of life is not so much centered on the prospects of being attached to a specific place, considering how he believes you can be everywhere or nowhere at home. Being in the world equals being creative, and Hassan is therefore much more engaged and absorbed with the existential quest, the creation of self. Thus, Hassan has led himself on a path where it is the voyage for possibilities of self-creation and re-discovery that becomes his pursuit, not the settling down and fitting in. It is exactly the feeling of not being defined, of not being “incorporated,” that evokes familiar feelings in Hassan. He represents a counterpoint to Hoffman, in the sense that to *not* be at home, whether in Egypt or anyplace else, is exactly what *is* home for Hassan. The feeling of being uprooted and unanchored presents Hassan with all he needs and expects from a home. For him home is not a place, but an attitude, a feeling obtainable in any location: “Homes are not places, and they are not where hearts are, since we all carry our hearts wherever we go. Home is an attitude, a readiness for death and dispossession, a kind of self-heedlessness that makes the entire universe a home” (*Rumors of Change* 250).

Out of Egypt, the title of Hassan's autobiography, signals the absence of loss and implies the author’s deliberate and purposeful choice to “escape” Egypt, which rendered Hassan’s transition and translation to his land of adoption and effortless process. The question is whether the writers referred to here view themselves as exiles, or if this is merely an identification made by others. This may not be the easiest query to answer, since the condition of exile is a matter of subjective experience, more or less an internal reality or feeling. When exile is voluntary, as in the case of “someone who has chosen to live his life away from his

native country” (Wali), it may make better sense to talk about expatriation. The common usage of the term exile involves displacement from one’s home. But for someone who never acknowledged a home, who felt exiled within the borders of his own native Egypt, and who would never set eyes on his homeland again, does it make sense to talk of physical exile (displacement)? For someone like Hassan, who claims to never have felt exile, it may perhaps be more appropriate to speak of self-imposed psychological isolation or exile. Expatriates have chosen to tear themselves free from their accustomed surroundings, as opposed to being torn away, using their distance and “faux exile” as a model for aesthetic creativity. For Hassan, his chosen exile has no traumatic connotation; it represents an exalting opportunity to discover himself, and he comes to embrace the condition of his self-imposed “exile” as something stimulating rather than stifling. For Hassan, isolation, solitude and detachment are necessary conditions for his literary production, vital in his process of becoming a self-made scholar.

The persona that Hassan constructs signifies mobility and habitation simultaneously, and can be considered as a modernist figuration of existential homelessness, whose authorship represents a necessary, voluntary form of exile. Hassan does not write *about* exile, in the same way as Said and Hoffman do; he rather writes *in* exile, using his exilic position as the vantage point for his literary productions. The motive for his expatriation seems to be grounded in his own need for self-creation, his creative and artistic needs. Loss, in its many manifestations, is the most general connotation concerning exile, but for someone like Hassan, exile becomes a condition of the soul, unrelated to geographical location, and used as a device for his own personal and academic growth. In many ways, a character like him can be said to be exploiting the exilic condition without living through the trauma, mourning and distress that Said and Hoffman evidently faced. Is it all gain and no pain for Hassan? Perhaps it is, at least that is how he portrays his own life story in *Out of Egypt*.

Rewards of the Exilic Experience

Choosing exile as a theme for this chapter, I have been particularly interested in exploring the various ways in which writers “translate” exile, and how in turn exile not only complicates but also complements creative endeavors. Narratives of exile, testimonies of estrangement, expulsion and displacement, have long enjoyed an important position in the literary canon, and what continues to be fascinating about this kind of literature, is how these writers seem to

benefit from their cultural and personal positions. The condition of exile, voluntarily or not, has made them who they are today, and Hoffman, Said and Hassan can all be said to have turned their sad misfortunes into something positive. Said points to a captivating aspect of the concept of exile, its ambiguity and ambivalence when he asks: “But if true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture?” (“Reflections on Exile” 172). This question highlights how, in the modern world, it is time to cast aside the assumed idea of the exile as mainly a victim, and allow for a different interpretation, wherein this environment of solitude, suffering and loss can function as a harbor of freedom, which in turn may spur not only great thinkers but also great literature.

The successful outcome of the exilic experience comes from the ability to turn the struggles of adjustment into a creative condition, which is what characterizes what Said called “intellectual exile.” The tensions associated with the exilic experience may thus not only complicate but also enhance the intellectual aspect of the self, hence leading to a mode of creativity. If one chooses to “perform” exile, rather than being trapped within it, one may see this state as opening up for possibilities rather than deprivation. In “Reflections on Exile” Said provides the reader with the following explanation for the flourishing of creativity and academic skills among exiled subjects: “Much of the exile’s life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule. It is not surprising that so many exiles seem to be novelists, chess players, political activists, and intellectuals” (181). In other words, he insists that exile can have its rewards and may stimulate literary creativity. Perhaps the writer, in order to be creative, has to operate alone, as a strange among strangers. If exile can be turned into a space of creativity, then in turn may it not in a sense give meaning to this way of life? By providing perfect distance and perspective based on irretrievable loss, exile may represent a productive artistic vantage point. Perhaps in the state of exile, through the experience of the pain of separation and the loss of familiarity, the writer finds not only a home away from home, but also meaning in a new way of life, as an outsider, an artist, an academic or even an intellectual.

In many ways, Hoffman’s, Said’s and Hassan’s autobiographical writings bear witness to how their creative and intellectual capacities were born out of their own sense of solitude and loneliness. They demonstrate how the condition of exile can lead to creativity. Said, Hoffman and Hassan all succeeded in establishing themselves in their respective fields. As Said writes in the introduction to *Reflections on Exile*: “I have argued that exile can produce rancor and regret, as well as a sharpened vision. What has been left behind may either be

mourned, or it can be used to provide a different set of lenses” (xxxv). Said’s out-of-placeness and exile became both his curse and fate, and it was not until he could distance himself from the “the whole edifice” of his life (*Out of Place* 244), that he fully managed to find his way into place, at least academically speaking. Continually feeling like an alien, a misfit, Said turned inside and thus realized how he could break down the barriers imposed on him by becoming the author of his own happiness. On some level, Said seems to be coming to terms with the fact that even though he was “out of place in nearly every way,” it was a position that would further encourage him to “find [his] territory, not socially but intellectually” (231). This awakening opened the eyes of a young Said, and also laid the crucial foundation for his powerful political voice and his career as an acclaimed scholar.

The curse of exile also proved to be rewarding for Hoffman, as she gained a new perception of self and a critical perspective for understanding the external world. Mastering the written language became a major issue for Hoffman, as her need to grasp a sense of reality and who she was through language was very important: “Linguistic dispossession is a sufficient motive for violence, for it is close to the dispossession of one’s self” (124). Her verbal obsession set her on a path that would lead her to the point of arrival. *Lost in Translation* reflects Hoffman’s determination to become a fully realized being, and she explains how she was set on converting herself into the best possible version of the self she could possible be: “From then on, my idea of grace is fulfilling your talent completely, and my only idea of sin is misusing that gift. The dread of not becoming completely what you can be is so strong that sometimes in later life it will paralyze me” (69). The underlying need to be a fully realized being is a prominent feature throughout Hassan’s autobiography, but also Hoffman refers to similar feelings concerning her own “Immigrant energy” and “the desperado drive that fuels it” (157). *Lost in Translation* depicts Hoffman’s outer and inner journey, while she is “traveling toward Experience” (162) and toward the prospects of becoming a “fully realized being” (137).

Ernesto Laclau values the opinion that “dislocation is the very form of possibility” (qtd. in Massey, *Space* 253), which supports the idea that exile can represent a quintessential vantage point for a strong cultural, academic or political voice, given that the distance and alienation may engender profound insight and perspective. In this view loss is accompanied by a form of gain, which in many respects mirrors how Said’s personal growth and critical voice came to be a result of the decisive events of displacement and loss in his past. Laclau goes on to suggest that “dislocation is the very form of freedom” (qtd. in Massey, *Space* 253), and this statement provides a perspective for how much of Hassan’s persona may be

understood. Hassan represents the modern exile, the intellectual who thrives on his self-imposed exile. Said describes this personality with the following words: “the intellectual who because of exile cannot, or, more to the point, will not make the adjustment, preferring instead to remain outside the mainstream, unaccommodated, unco-opted, resistant” (“Intellectual Exile” 52), and Hassan can be considered the perfect embodiment of “the intellectual as a permanent exile” (“Intellectual Exile” 56). Hassan’s narrative is structured as a quest for the possibilities for a new and better life outside Egypt’s borders, and thus *Out of Egypt* confirms the idea that artistic creativity can only exist if the writer enjoys a total personal freedom, as suggested by Laclau. We are accustomed to think of exile as a devastating experience of separation and loss. The character of Hassan, however, is pointing to the significance of the confluence between exile and creativity when he writes: “For me, exile is the lack of an attitude toward creation, a loyalty narrower than a pine coffin” (*Rumors of Change* 253).

The distance from the past, combined with the sense of loss and yearning, can be a wonderful stimulus to writing. These immigrant autobiographies are all written by individuals who have experience and transgressed the boundaries that mark them as either insiders or outsiders. Hoffman, Said and Hassan have all learned how to live between selves and between worlds. This experience may provide these writers with a highly valued perspective of the world, an attitude and way of thinking that make them somewhat exceptional. In “Intellectual Exile” Said asserts that, “Because the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective,” thus causing the “intellectual to see a much wider picture” (60). By transferring their experiences and thoughts onto paper, these autobiographers have provided valuable insight into the condition of cultural and geographical displacement that characterizes the present globalized world.

Conclusion

When Eakin introduced the view of the autobiography as a construction of life, it seems unlikely to not regard the mental journey back as a vital part of this construction, because as Said writes: “Since almost by definition exile and memory go together, it is what one remembers of the past and how one remembers it that determine how one sees the future” (“Introduction” xxxv). It is essential that the present is understood in relation to the past, because life is lived going forward but understood by going back. Due to this, it is important to consider the function of memory in life-writing, as it serves as the means by which it is produced. A person can, of course, never go back to what used to be, and may “revisit” the past, as it were, only by relying on mental pictures and reminiscence, and in this sense memory becomes so important to individuals who have been uprooted from their familiar surroundings. Considering how Said, Hoffman and Hassan have “lost” their homes, only memories can recreate them. The autobiography is often seen as representing the struggle between the past and the present, and memory is a vital constituent in this respect. By writing an autobiography the author brings the past to the present, and by solely relying on his or her own memory, the invisible (memory) becomes visible through narration. Eva Hoffman points to this in *Lost in Translation* when she declares that, “Those who don’t understand the past may be condemned to repeat it, but those who never repeat it are condemned not to understand it” (278). The autobiography may be viewed as a dialogue with the voice of memory, in which the expected outcome may be an understanding of the present.

As mentioned earlier the exiled person often has a problematic relationship to the past, and many remain possessed or haunted by the past for the rest of their lives. The traumas often associated with the exilic experience entail being uprooted and dislocated from the familiar and intimate. Tracking down memories from the past may cause nostalgia or even the realization that one does not long for the past. There is clearly a need to remember for all writers of autobiography, but the motivation they have for remembering may be of different kinds. The selected texts also illustrate how self-writing can be used as therapy, as a way in which one may “write off” the past or write “through” the past. The autobiographical journey can be used as a tool to look back, to dwell on the past, or it can serve as a device to close off the past and look forward. Hassan writes: “The journey proceeds in several symbolic dimensions; horizontal (from Kathmandu to the Crystal Mountain), vertical (from valleys through mountain passes to unassailable peaks), temporal (present to past and back), cultural

(West to East), generic (alternating between the forms of autobiography and didactic essay), and spiritual, a ‘journey of the heart,’ toward enlightenment” (*Rumors of Change* 206). The memories make up the journey, but what is the destination: the future or the past? As these three autobiographies show, you can never really return to the past, but you can never really escape the past either. In much immigrant literature there is an almost obsessive relationship to the past which motivates a literal or figurative return to the place of origin. Even though home can be a geographical place, it is not necessarily the only way to conceive of the concept.

In her conceptualization of space and place, Doreen Massey, although she acknowledges how perhaps the most common image of place is that of “a place called home” (*Space* 1), also proposes a wider understanding beyond this interpretation. Massey is intent on exploring and contesting such reputed beliefs by suggesting that the mobility and flexibility of the concepts of place and home may also be “used in the context of discussions of positionality” (*Space* 1). There are different ways of conceiving of the concept of place, as it can be understood both as a social and a geographical term, two understandings that may be inseparable. This understanding opens up for a reading of place as referring not only to a geographical location, the *where*, but also to a social position, *how* you position yourself in relation to the world. The idea that home can be understood both as a place of origin and as a place of destination, is interesting in respect to the texts considered in this thesis. If home is taken to represent a geographical place, then might it not be possible to lose it forever? And what if home is interpreted in more abstract terms; could it then be considered a feeling possible to revive or re-create anywhere? Due to historical changes the place or country of origin may no longer be retrievable. Thus, in leaving a place for a period of time, a person is unable to partake in or witness the changing qualities of a place.

A place undergoes constant development; hence going back to the exact same place will be virtually impossible. “You can't go back,” Massey asserts, and explains: “That you can trace backwards on a page/map does not mean you can in space-time” (*For Space* 125). This realization is captured in Hassan’s narrative, when he states: “Writing so many years later, I realize how much of ‘my Egypt’ has vanished, available neither to history nor legend, only to dubious, private recall” (12). When or if a person chooses to return to the once familiar landscapes of childhood, the chance is that the place captured in memories has been transformed, just like the person who left. In that sense history is irreversible as time always will intervene. I find that Hoffman has captured the essence of this notion very well when she writes:

There is nothing but this moment, in which I am walking towards my home, walking in time. But suddenly, time pierces me with its sadness. This moment will not last. With every step I take, a sliver of time vanishes. Soon, I'll be home, and then this, this nowness will be the past, I think, and time seems to escape behind me, like an invisible current being sucked into an invisible vortex. (*Lost in Translation* 16)

The complexity of the relationship between individuals and places is thematized in much literature, but the relevance of geographical location is perhaps given extra attention in much ethnic or immigrant literature. Writers within this genre are often preoccupied with the experience of location, or rather dislocation, as they have first-hand knowledge of leaving certain places behind. As Ferraro suggests with his notion of “ethnic passage,” our identity is under constant development and formation, and the factors contributing to this process are numerous. Just like Ferraro sees the immigrant’s identity as something exposed to drastic change, the development from “the person I used to be” to “the person I have become,” the same can be said about the geographical places of the past, as they also seem to undergo severe changes in time. These inevitable facts, that time does not stand still and that places change in character in the course of time, are certainties which complicate matters for immigrants who are set on returning. The mental map of a place called home will perhaps always exist, while the actual place might not, since there is no way of holding time still. As migrants, Hoffman, Said and Hassan find themselves in new places and may strive to turn their new, unfamiliar territory into somewhere they can call home, but there is always the possibility that they will continue to view home as a place that exists elsewhere, belonging to the past. As Massey observes, “Migrants imagine ‘home’, the place they used to be, *as it used to be*” (*For Space* 123).

The (Im)possibility of Returning Home

The memories of the places from the past come to have different significance in *Out of Place*, *Out of Egypt* and *Lost in Translation*. The latter autobiography portrays the author’s notion that memories cannot replace reality and reality can never substitute memories. For the uprooted and displaced immigrant home is very often equated with the past, synonymous with the country of origin, and can thus easily become remembered as and associated with something static and fixed. Hoffman has an ongoing relationship with the past through her

constant mental wanderings that keep bringing her back to the certainties of Cracow, and her perceptions of Cracow have thus remained remarkably unchanged:

memory can perform retrospective maneuvers to compensate for fate. Loss is a magical preservative. Time stops at the point of severance, and no subsequent impressions muddy the picture you have in mind. The house, the garden, the country you have lost remain forever as you remember them. Nostalgia – that most lyrical of feelings – crystallizes around these images like amber. (115).

This is a realization Hoffman comes to see and one she writes of, and in *Lost in Translation* Hoffman acknowledges the difference between knowing the past and living in the present. Hoffman, like many other exiles seems to have developed a sort of obsession with an idealized homeland. Home for them often seems to be remembered in utopian terms, and when revisited it might not always live up to the memories and expectations of an idyllic past. Hoffman's nostalgia is not so much based on her longing to return, as it is on her longing for an irretrievable past that can never be found again. Supposedly stuck in the past, the journey back seems to be one important aspect of Hoffman's way out of exile. However, Massey accentuates the importance of seeing and understanding geographical places as something more than "sites of nostalgia" (*Place* 5), because time intervenes, and childhood memories do not necessarily translate

The conflict between the past and the present is tangible throughout *Lost in Translation*. Although Hoffman succeeded in creating a home for herself in the United States and in the English language, and although she captured her life story both in her diary and later in her autobiography, she still was curious to go back in person to see "how the story might have turned out" (232). The voyage back had to be undertaken in a more explicit and physical manner in order so that Hoffman could actually "see Cracow in the dimensions it has to my adult eye" (242). The return to Poland would be somewhat disappointing for Hoffman when she realized how rural Cracow had lost the old qualities she remembered, and was now represented by an illusionary quality instead. Hoffman returned to Poland only to discover that the divide between Cracow and herself went beyond the mere distance on a map. It was a result not only of a physical divide, but also of a mental growth that had penetrated the very essence of her inner being. The physical distance between Cracow and herself had perhaps had deeper impact on her relationship to the place than Hoffman could have imagined. She knew that she had moved away, but perhaps had she not fully comprehended how she had,

simultaneously, moved on. The two decisive facts had influenced each other, the physical and mental distance, both creating the unbridgeable gap between herself and Cracow. Thus, *Lost in Translation* epitomizes the exile's fate of never being able to return and the inevitable truth that you cannot go back in time even to the physical place called home, for it will no longer be your "home." The Cracow that existed prior to her departure is forever lost in time and is obtainable only in her own mind as "an elusive homing place just beyond the edge of sleep" (231). This passage captures Hoffman's revelation grounded in her understanding of Cracow as both a real place and a dream place. The memories of the Cracow she knew are captured inside her present images of Cracow, the real images, which she cannot relate to because they do not represent her home anymore.

"These are things I know" Hoffman declares so as to explain how she has a clear view of the physical aspects of Cracow appearing before her eyes, "but I do not longer know how it is to live within them" (240). This statement encapsulates an issue dealt with in the second chapter, namely that insiderness can be turned to outsiderness, and regardless of Hoffman's ability of firmly grasping what appears in front of her, she can no longer relate to this place in an intimate, personal manner. At some level Hoffman managed to retain the essential core of her Polish identity, however, and it was not sufficient enough to avoid the gap created by time and distance. *Lost in Translation* reveals how, even though the myth of return always remains, the actual journey back to the paradise of childhood may prove to be an impossible agenda: "we cannot, after all, get further than the vividness of our remembering, cannot beat our way back through the wall of accumulated time" (229). Hoffman dwells on the past, but at the same time acknowledges how real life is in the present moment. She has experienced the world beyond Cracow, and she has grown from those experiences. Thus she concludes that there is no turning back: "No, there's no returning to the point of origin, no regaining of childhood unity. Experience creates style, and style, in turn, creates a new woman" (273). Nevertheless, by stepping back into the past, both figuratively and literally, Hoffman comes one step closer to being released from the haunting presence of the past as she learns how she is finally able "to go into the present" (241).

In one of his most recognized essays, Said reflects upon the triad constellation between exile, home and loss: "what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both" ("Reflections on Exile" 185). Embedded in this statement lies much of Said's own experiences and thoughts of life's transience and the inevitability of loss, aspects he would further investigate in a more personal manner in his own life narrative. Said's autobiographical journey is very much caught up with

the past and his loss of home. Nevertheless the autobiographer avoids becoming blinded by the historical circumstances of his time. *Out of Place* is in many respects proof of the focus of the archetypical autobiography of exile or immigration, wherein the autobiographer's problematic relationship with the past and the exile or immigrant's obsession with the lost home of origin are two key components. Said's persistent return to past memories reveals the impossibility of living without history and the unavoidable desire to trace everything back to the beginning. However, as it turns out, the idea of a place's authenticity as existing unaffected by time's interference, proves to be anything but realistic. The exile lives in "a story in which one's past becomes radically different from the present" writes Eva Hoffman in "The New Nomads" (52), and thus captures a very descriptive aspect of Said's life story. *Out of Place* is a life story wherein the author says he tries to "bridge the sheer distance in time and place between my life today and my life then" (xvi). Said seems never to deny the fact that the present inevitably differs from the past, and acknowledging how there was no possible way of returning to that point of origin, he concludes that, "what used to be my native environments in Cairo and Lebanon were no longer available to me" (273).

"Many of the places and people I recall here no longer exist" (xiii), Said declares at the outset of his autobiography, confirming what defines much of Said's childhood world, which has literally been destroyed by war and "lost" in time. The power of time is one thing Said never tries to refute through the writing of his narrative, and, as Said learns by re-visiting the past, the journey back comes with the knowledge that history has put its mark on him and that not all things can be retrieved. This fact was definitely confirmed by the actual return, which more than anything manifested how the mental pictures that constituted the past had been shattered in the deepest sense of the word. As he goes back to Dhour where his family used to spend their summer holidays, Said finds that the "house is still there" and although it is the same house, it is not the identical version of what as he has kept in his memory, as now it is "uninhabited, dotted with bullet scars and gaping holes in the walls" (270). The inevitably difference between present and former experience of landscapes only confirms that after a separation between an individual and a place, the new landscape is characterized not by its profound meanings and its symbols, but by rationality and absurdity. Although it is the physical changes, the devastating facts of war, that have altered his childhood world, Said also acknowledges the changes in himself, much due to his years spent in the United States: "my speaking and thinking were undergoing a radical change that took me far beyond the comfortable certainties of Cairo life" (273). The world has changed, and so has Said's conception of it. The past is assimilated into the present, just as Said himself also assimilates

into the present, and just as Said himself has been made over, so have the geographical places where everything began.

The beginning never appears to be the same as the end. Thus going back to the place where everything started remains only as a utopian idea, founded upon an individual's idealized memory. Those loved places of Said's childhood world represent an aspect of the ideal life that he could never again gain admission to, and Said confirms the reality of his loss: "So many returns, attempt to go back to bits of life, or people who were no longer there" (215). When he does return to his former home, Said once again faces familiar feelings of homelessness. The places where he was born, had grown up and could call home, where he formerly had "belonged," were now "taken over by Polish, German and American immigrants," leaving no room "for Palestinian life," and no place for Said (111). As a writer Said seeks his return both literally and figuratively, only to learn how time has altered the way in which the past is re-presented. Both Said's and Hoffman's narratives seem to be suggesting that the exile's fate seems to be grounded in the difficulty of returning home, a truth validated by Said who writes: "To this day I still feel that I am away from home" (222). For someone like Said, there was no possibility of returning home in the conventional sense. Due to overriding political circumstances the marked spaces of his childhood had ceased to exist. In many respects, the impossibility of returning home makes Hoffman and Said eternal exiles, but despite their unsuccessful attempts of going back physically, they achieve another sort of homecoming, created by and in their own writing. *Out of Place* manages to capture the distress of both the young and adult Said, equal victims of eternal exile, never at home "here" nor "there," in the past and in the present. Thus, home always comes to indicate where he is not, the place to which Said longs to return. However, home seems to always be somewhere unattainable, whether it refers to somewhere back across the border or someplace inside himself, a more spiritual and symbolic place. When you cannot "go home," memory becomes the only resort to reclaim fractions of an idyllic past and a lost home. Although exile might have severed the interaction with, although not the memory of, the place that he longs for, Said may find some solace in writing as a way of "being at home." Writing by memory becomes Said's resistance towards his fear of not returning, of forgetting the place of origin and by extension, the most "authentic" part of his identity.

For authors who have left their home, one of the most important functions of the autobiographical writing process may be to facilitate some kind of return to the point of origin. In its traditional sense, a journey implies leaving a familiar place to experience the unknown and then to return back home, but this does not apply for everyone who leaves.

Hassan's story, rather than embodying a desire to return to the lost origin, represents an eagerness to reject the past and keep moving forward. However, although he never returned physically to Egypt, Hassan does go back to his beginnings through his memories. Thus, the writing process itself becomes a symbolic representation of the actual journey back for Hassan, and moreover his own quest for self-understanding. In the foreword to *Out of Egypt*, Jerome Klinkowitz asserts this aspect of Hassan's purpose with the autobiography by writing: "Whoever undertakes to create . . . soon finds himself engaged in creating himself," and it is in the proper transitive reading of this latter phrase – of self-creation – that Ihab Hassan's *Out of Egypt* is understood" (viii). In this respect, Hassan's autobiographical journey is not so much going back to his roots, as it is a voyage of self-creation and self-recreation. Thus, the quest for Hassan becomes the constant re-discovery of himself, but of course in the light of his twenty-one years in Egypt.

When Relph writes that, "There is not merely a fusion between person and place, but also a tension" (42), he points to a reason why the highly charged memories from Hassan's past kept him from returning to Egypt. For Hassan the proper homecoming, the actual return, becomes an impossibility, as it was within the borders of Egypt he felt his most prevailing dislocation. It comes as no surprise that certain individuals cannot and will not become integrated in the new world and never wish to return to where they came from. In "The New Nomads," Hoffman touches on this difference between the uprooted and exiled by writing: "Some people decide to abandon the past, never to look back. For others, the great lure is nostalgia – an excess of memory" (52). The autobiographies of Said and Hoffman can be read as testimonies to the deep-rooted relevance of home that people carry within themselves, and which seems to surface in its most acute sense when they are removed from their homes of origin. Hoffman and Said literally went back to their beginnings, while Hassan never returned. In a passage in his autobiography, Hassan tells about a recurrent dream that haunted him for a long time after his departure, namely one where he "was compelled to go back" (108). Even though Hassan realizes the banality of the dream, the frequency of it fills him with terror. This passage shows how even the idea of going back to Egypt evokes feelings of fear in Hassan, just the thought of returning makes him shiver. Homelessness and placelessness are both grounded in a shared experience of dislocation and exile, an experience that in turn may generate a multitude of conflicting feelings, such as the feeling of being somewhere you don't wish to be, or the desire to be somewhere you cannot be. Hassan felt the prison walls of Egypt closing in on him, as he "desperately waited for all the pieces of my life

to fit” (110), and he would be provided with the academic skills that would take him far away from his home.

Unwilling to return to the past, Hassan is determined to pursue a path dictated by his own intelligence, thus indicating another aspect of exile. Hassan never went back, and to the extent that his story might be read as a voyage into exile, it is not “actual exile,” but as Hoffman comes to describe it, rather a “preferred psychic positioning” descriptive of “how we situate ourselves in the world” (“The New Nomads” 45). Hassan’s “preferred psychic” position defines his self-imposed psychological exile and his deliberate choice to remain homeless. *Out of Egypt* depicts not only Hassan’s escape from Egypt, but also his quest of total escape into literature. Perhaps the only way in which the exile can cope is by turning the condition into a mode of residence, and Said explains how this condition can “become not only a style of thought, but also a new, if temporary, habitation” (“Intellectual Exile” 53). The narrowing down of one specific, universal definition of home seems almost impossible, and as Hassan’s narrative also proves, home can be understood as what you flee from or what you long for, home can be a safe enclosure or just an entrapment, home can be exile and exile can be home. In *Place and Placelessness*, Relph’s main occupation becomes the explanation of the fundamental function places have in the human experience of the world, and he suggests that, “A place is not just the ‘where’ of something” (3). In *Out of Egypt* Hassan seems to be defining his view of home not as a point of departure, considering how he never described Egypt in terms of home, but more as a destination. Home can be everywhere and nowhere for Hassan. Perhaps he never was meant to be rooted in the physical world, and the only way in which he could ever be at home was in the imaginary, in the literary world: “For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live” (Adorno qtd. in Said, “Intellectual Exile” 58).

Finding Closure

I have presented Said’s, Hoffman’s and Hassan’s narratives in considerable detail because they provide comprehensive accounts of the journey called life. In one way or another their autobiographical accounts are concerned with how past personal and historical events have made them who they are. By rediscovering the past and reconstructing history, Said, Hoffman and Hassan are writing the present. The melancholy knowledge that you can never return to the past proves how, by way of writing about the past, these individuals seek an imaginary return. Since “home” for them has either been transformed beyond recognition, is unavailable

and beyond the hope of being regained, or remain as a site of inescapable disappointment, these writers choose the autobiographical journey as a passage through symbolic time, forwards and backwards towards a renewed acquisition of home and self-knowledge.

The past is always lost. Thus the life as immigrants is indeed not the coming to terms with the past, but coming to terms with the present. Because time is always out of your control, the present seems already to be the future, and the past has, by the time you realize it, turned into history and can only be grasped by memory. Hoffman is aware of this inescapable reality and thus declares: “It is possible that when we travel deep enough, we always encounter an element of sadness, for full awareness of ourselves always includes the knowledge of our own ephemerality and the passage of time” (274). The consequence of time and distance is confirmed by the realization that the country you remember no longer equals the country you may return to. No matter how we look at it, there is no way of returning to paradise, no way of going back to the same place as you remember. Said and Hoffman went back, only to discover how their homes were lost and had to be recreated elsewhere. However, as illustrated by these life stories, the feeling of home does not necessarily correspond to the individual’s geographical location, and the actual journey back may only strengthen how the notion of home may acquire a new meaning. As time goes by, the exile's relationship with home becomes less and less visual and the landscape becomes a memory, not reality. However, the journey undertaken by the act of writing may lead to a place where time has stood still and “where the past regains a plausible reality” (*Lost in Translation* 226). In this view writing may provide these individuals with a feeling of home unattainable in the physical world.

The autobiographies of Hassan, Said and Hoffman begin with uprooting and loss, and they are all familiar with exile and homelessness, but while some do their best to reach inclusion and insideness, others work to maintain their status as outsiders and intellectual exiles. Said never let go of his strong connection to his prior home, but seeing how he could never return to Palestine as a home, he decided to remain geographically homeless. Hoffman never forgot about Cracow, but nevertheless managed to create a new home in the United States. As a contrast to these two narratives, Hassan never felt any connection to his home in Egypt. Hassan’s estrangement from his home is something he shares with many other ethnic writers, and as opposed to going back physically, Hassan’s way of re-visiting the past is through the act of writing. In “The New Nomads” Hoffman contemplates on why certain individuals seem so reluctant to be at home in the physical world: “it may often be easier to live in exile with a fantasy of paradise than to suffer the inevitable ambiguities and

compromises of cultivating actual, earthly places” (“The New Nomads” 63). *Lost in Translation*, *Out of Egypt* and *Out of Place* serve as lifelines to the past, and present the authors with an opportunity of finding reconciliation between past, present and future. Identity formation is a lifelong process wherein the act of self-narration may play an important part. By writing their life stories, Hoffman, Said and Hassan not only reach a better understanding of themselves; they also construct a new home in writing.

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