

**THE ROLE OF SPACE IN LEARNING:  
SPATIO-EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE  
STUDENTS WITHIN EMIRATI HIGHER EDUCATION**

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**Ph.D.**

**2015**

**THE ROLE OF SPACE IN LEARNING:  
SPATIO-EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE  
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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the  
University of East London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**April 2015**

## Abstract

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This interdisciplinary research examines the intersectional relationship between the domains of space, gender and education. It aims, first, to understand the spatio-educational experience of Emirati female learners; and second, to make it possible to enhance their learning experience by exploring the role of space in learning in a single gender context. This thesis addresses the lack of literature on women's spatiality and space in learning, specifically in relation to Arab women's learning in the Gulf region.

The research is based on social theories of space including the social construction of space and Lefebvre's triad of "perceived", "conceived" and "lived" space, which offers a structure to organise and understand the female students' spaces, with a focus on how spaces shape and construct the educational milieu while being constructed and appropriated by its users. Methodologically, it follows an interpretivist/constructivist-postmodernist paradigm, applying a unique ethnographic (instrumental case study) qualitative inquiry that incorporates multiple data collection techniques and a 'multi-zones' approach to explore in depth the spatial experiences across a network of zones. It also acknowledges the unique positioning of the researcher as both an insider and outsider.

Applying thematic analysis with some analysis of spatial positioning led to the emergence of four mega themes and several subthemes that constitute students' spatiality. Spatiality here is manifested through the combination of: the unique ways Emirati females engaged with and appropriated space, constructing their own private spaces (cocoon) within the public campus space; the ways they perceive and experience the university 'gendered' space, including their agency in contesting and negotiating such space; and their rhythms, revealing the types of spaces that emerged under Lefebvre's triad with specific focus on the emergence of 'hot' and 'cold' spaces. Such spatial themes were strongly influenced by the Emirati females' unique identity and grounded in their cultural formations.

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## Abbreviations

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**ABP:** Academic Bridge Program (pre-baccalaureate English support)

**CPDO:** Campus Physical Development Office

**PALs:** Peers Assistance Leaders

**ZU:** Zayed University

**DXB:** Zayed University Dubai Campus

**SNA:** Social Network Analysis

## Acknowledgments

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There is a long list of people whose intellectual and personal support made my PhD journey possible. First, I would like to acknowledge my director of studies and mentor Professor Maria Tamboukou. Without her valuable and generous guidance I would not have made it this far. Even before being my supervisor she frequently offered support and resources. I learned from her how to be a meticulous researcher and a better writer while establishing a solid academic and research foundation. Most importantly, she helped me emerge as a strong and capable academician. Thank you for inspiring me and being there every step of the way on a personal and academic level, always putting my wellbeing first. I am blessed to have been your apprentice.

I also thank my supervisors starting with Dr. Law, with whom I started my PhD journey. Next, Dr. Jo Finch's motivational words always came in the right moment; and Professor Corinne Squire frequently challenged me while supporting my academic and personal needs.

I am grateful to my close friends and colleagues at Zayed University, whose generosity, support, encouragement and intellectual expertise proved invaluable for my work. Every one of you allowed me to move one step forward. I learned and thoroughly enjoyed our conversations during lunch, over a cup of coffee or while passing by in the hallways. These conversations helped me realize many of my research ideas. My dean Dr. Jyoti Grewal supported me in many ways and when I most needed it; for that I thank you. My dear friend Rania was always present with her wisdom and intellect. Mira, Saeed and Dina encouraged me to maintain a taste of my lost social life. Annick's words "Be obstinate" echoed in my head throughout this journey. Mary Jane's insightful comments and meticulous editing of my work in the final stages allowed for finalizing my work. Amir, Maher, Lisa, David, James, Mohammad, Riham, Sara, Nadia, Omnia and many others, I loved and grew through our intellectual exchange of ideas and friendship. Dear Rima and Yunsun, your kindness, professionalism and friendship inspired me; thank you for allowing me to be part of your classes, an experience I will never forget. A special thank you to all the

security staff and cleaners who patiently answered my questions with a smile. To you all and many others, I am grateful.

Above all I am grateful to the beautiful Emirati students who opened their hearts and minds, letting me in and generously sharing their spatial experiences without reservations. I loved being part of your world.

On a personal level, this has been the most difficult and amazing journey I have ventured. I owe it all to my family. My dear Mom and Dad were always present full-heartedly. Sameer and Diana, I love you for understanding and always being present in my life even though it was mostly over Skype☺. This journey made me realize the value of time with loved ones. I became more aware of every precious moment I missed out on with my family, cherishing every moment I could get, to play, connect, be there and live. In fact, I have spent more quality time with my kids while doing the PhD than before. My life and soul Adam and Maya, you gave me strength, made me proud, and filled me with love and joy.

Lastly, this would not have been possible without Ahmad's love and support throughout the days and nights. I was not easy to deal with but you stood by me, taking on so much more than your responsibilities. I remember it all, including my smile in the morning when I found my car filled with gas. You are my home.

Thank you all for being part of my life. To you I am grateful and full of love, be well.

What a journey it was...

To a new beginning...

*To my beloved family whose love and support gave me the strength to continue*

# Chapter 1. Where space, gender and learning intersect

---

## **Research genesis: my inspirations**

While working at Zayed University (ZU), a state university in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), I have often observed how Emirati female students have their unique way of appropriating and utilizing space, in and outside the classroom. For example, I would often come to class to find students sitting in the dark waiting for the class to begin. To my surprise, the majority did not enjoy a semi-circular class arrangement during class discussions as it left them exposed while sitting on chairs and facing each other; rather, they enjoyed sitting in groups on the floor at the back of the class, especially in carpeted classrooms and other areas (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). I also noticed that students chose the most obscure and unusual spaces on campus - at least from my perspective - to appropriate, individually or in groups. They would find and occupy these little niches (which I call 'cocoon'), such as the spaces for water coolers (Figures 1.3 and 1.4), behind lockers and doors (Figures 1.5 and 1.6), or under the library staircase, often sitting on cold floors despite the availability of chairs and couches around campus (Figure 1.6). As an educator in social sciences and trained architect, such observations have ignited my intellectual curiosity, inspiring me to plan and conduct a systematic study to further explore the spatial experience of Emirati female learners. In this dissertation, I share, explain and reflect on my interdisciplinary PhD journey, demonstrating how I moved from curiously 'noticing' to systematic research into this topic.

Studying architecture has given me a heightened awareness and appreciation of the role of space in our everyday life; its design, formations, construction, causality and influence; and the relationships between people, places and spaces. Mahnke (1996, p. 47) pointed out that "it must be our goal to create places and spaces that will not unnecessarily burden the mental and physical well-being of their inhabitants, we will have to look further into the subject of emotions and how they are important in psychosomatics." The way spaces influence societies, how they are constructed and shaped by space, and the other way round, constitutes a particular interest of this research.



**Figure 1.1:** Class discussions on the floor at the back of the class (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 1.2:** Students sitting in a niche (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



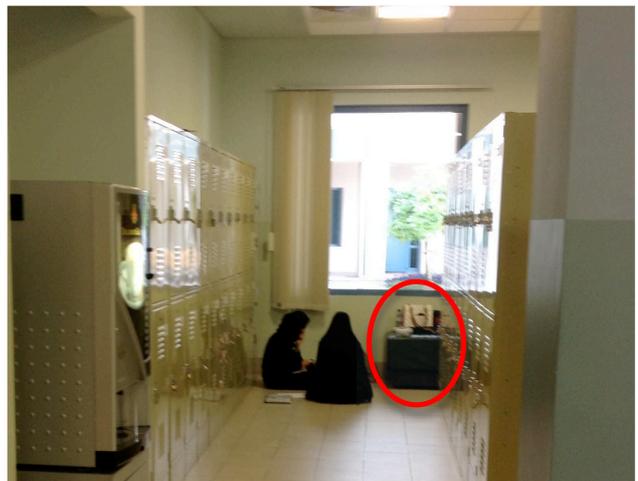
**Figure 1.3:** Student in alcove (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 1.4:** Students sitting on the floor next to a water cooler place (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



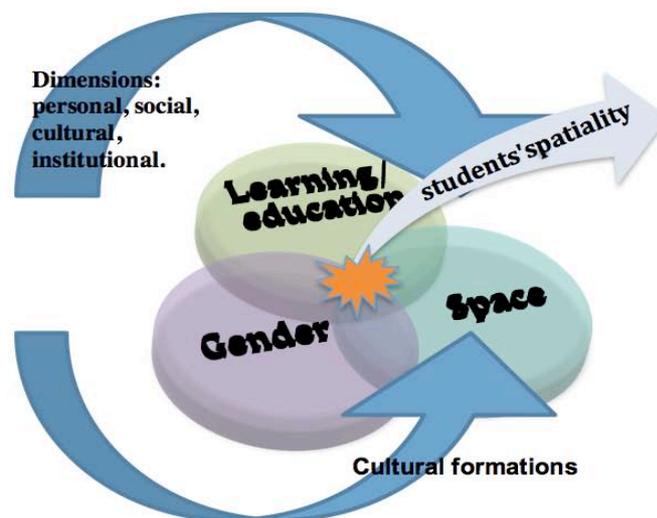
**Figure 1.5:** Cocooning behind a hallway door (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 1.6:** Sitting on the cold floor despite the availability of chairs (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

As an educator, I am interested to understand how spaces shape and construct the educational milieu, and the possible role of space in learning. In particular, I aspire to enhance the learning experience of my students, who are uniquely challenged by the constant change and development of a young, emerging state like the UAE (Bristol-Rhys, 2011, Khelifa, 2010; Alsharekh and Springborg, 2008; Davison, 2005).

Therefore, this interdisciplinary study of students' spatiality offers a unique exploration of the 'intersectional'<sup>1</sup> relation between the domains of space, gender and learning, in terms of female higher education students' experiences (Figure 1.7).



**Figure 1.7:** Interdisciplinarity and intersectionality.

### **Positioning my research**

While this study responds to my curiosity and life-long interest in space and learning, it also seriously addresses the lack of scholarship on female spatiality in higher education, especially for Emirati females. To position my research within the existing scholarly work and establish its contribution to knowledge, I reviewed the relevant literature on education and space, gender and spatiality, and women's education, specifically concerning Emirati females, as discussed in the following sections. It is important to note that I also included a major

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<sup>1</sup> See discussion on intersectionality in Chapter Four.

section of my literature review on space in Chapter Two alongside my theoretical framework, including social theories of space, its meaning and historical development, and discussion on Lefebvre's work and his triad. Additionally, I reviewed selected literature throughout my analysis (Chapters 4 and 5) as this organisation allowed me to contextualise my findings throughout the discussion.

From both my initial and on-going review there seems to be a body of literature on education and space that is recent and growing. Until recently, education and space (physical environment) were considered two separate domains that were mostly addressed separately. In exploring education's connection to space (what I call the 'spatio-learning environment'), space seemed to be rather neglected or marginalized in most of the available literature on education compared to the focus on educational theory in terms of pedagogical, cognitive and student development theories. With the exception of a few educational approaches interested in educational context and the value of space in learning, like 'place-based education' (which can be connected to experiential learning, contextual learning and problem-based learning) (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 3), spatial analysis was quite absent until its recent 'turn' (ibid), as I discuss in the following sections.

It is important to note that while the majority of literature on education and pedagogies seems to ignore space and spatial analysis or even assert the lack of emphasis on space in education,<sup>2</sup> historically, space had been employed in educational pedagogies. However, this occurred at least half a century ago before falling into neglect and later being resurrected at the beginning of the 21st century (Ferrare and Apple, 2010). This perhaps explains the conflicting statements from different sources, with many referring to the lack of interest in space and a few others stating the opposite. Ferrare and Apple (2010, p. 215), for example, claim that there is actually a long history of including environmental design in curriculum development, with a focus on aesthetics

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<sup>2</sup> Many scholars emphasize how space has been neglected in education, like Larsen and Beech (2014), Ferrare and Apple (2010), Taylor (2009), Thomson (2007), Gulson and Symes (2007), Gruenewald (2003), Quinn (2003b).

and the politics of space. Why the earlier interest in the spatial dimension of education and pedagogies was lost or marginalized is an interesting question but falls outside the goals and focus of this research.

This rift in the relationship between education and space is also reflected in the design of educational spaces, of how much space design really reflects or links to the teaching and learning process. There have sometimes been more attempts to address this issue in schools than in higher education<sup>3</sup> (Temple, 2008; Banning and strange, 2001). As its title suggests, Temple's (2008) paper, *Learning spaces in higher education: an under-researched topic*, discusses how spatial design in its relation to the process of teaching and learning as a part of teaching pedagogy has not been properly utilized. Neither has there been much scholarly work or interest in educational space when it comes to the design of the physical environment or even its arrangements as an integral part of the teaching and learning pedagogy. Even in strategic planning, it seems the focus is on efficient utilization of space and the financial benefits of maximizing space use. To illustrate his point, Temple discusses several educational buildings and higher education campuses in the US and the UK through a review of the available literature on this issue. He notes that, even within the spirit of change — for example, the case of building a state-of-the-art education facility in Michigan, which involved a new desire for design change by breaking from the traditional and classical way of building educational institutions in terms of forms, materials and physical appearance in the interiors and exteriors — there was no in-depth consideration of teaching and learning pedagogies in the facility's spatial design. In fact, none of the reviewed design models of university campuses and buildings emphasized teaching and learning as a philosophy at its core. This is also confirmed by Strange and Banning in their comment that “among the many methods employed to foster student learning and development, the use of the physical environment is perhaps the least understood and the most neglected” (2001, pp. 30-31).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A lot of the discussion on education and space design seemed to focus mainly on schools' design and architecture. See OWP/P Architects et al. (2010) and Gulson and Symes (2007b, p. 8).

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed review on the role of space design of the learning environment and its influence on teaching and learning, see Strange and Banning (2001).

In his review, Temple presents the concept of viewing the university as a “community space”, rather than just a space of teaching (Committee on Higher Education 1963, cited in Temple, 2008, p. 231). He also discusses form and function design of learning spaces by exploring the library space in higher education, including its role and significance, recognising and highlighting the social dimension of such spaces alongside their academic function. These social and academic dimensions resonated with the various student spaces, such as ‘us’ and ‘academic’ spaces, emerging from my research (Chapter 5). Under “the need for new design approaches” (ipid. p. 234), that emphasize how learning and teaching pedagogies should drive the design of the educational buildings and not the other way round, Temple discusses new and promising design initiatives that emphasize open and flexible space design of studio-like classrooms, rather than traditional classroom settings, to fulfil the eminent and growing pedagogical trend towards active learning. Temple also acknowledges the role of technology among other factors in changing the nature of learning spaces.

Although space design is not my research main focus, the ZU campus physical environment, determined by its design and material characteristics, constitutes an important aspect of the students’ spatio-learning experience, which also correlates with the ‘affordances’<sup>5</sup> of the space. Since much existing research on environmental determinism is anecdotal and, according to Temple (2008), limited evidence exists on the influence of campus design on learning, I believe my research sheds new light on the relationship between space and learning, and offers spatial (material) recommendations that could enhance students’ learning on campus, as discussed in Chapter Six.

Although the link between physical environment and pedagogy is still ambiguous and embryonic,<sup>6</sup> a recent shift has led to educational theory following in the footsteps of social theory of what is termed the ‘spatial turn’

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<sup>5</sup> Refer to the theory of affordances introduced and discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>6</sup> Larsen and Beech (2014), Ferrare and Apple (2010), Taylor (2009), Temple (2008), Gulson and Symes (2007a, 2007b), and Gruenewald (2003) among other scholars acknowledge and criticize the weak link between education and space.

(Taylor, 2009; Guslon and Symes, 2007a), with “an increasing interest in the notion that ‘space matters’ among sociologists, psychologists, historians and educationists” (Ferrare and Apple, 2010, p. 209). Having until recently been the almost exclusive specialty of geographers, space has become once again an open intellectual terrain for many social scientists, including educationists, who believe space can actually contribute to education and educational theories.<sup>7</sup> This has allowed an increasing number of scholars to ride the spatial wave by utilizing and exploring the role of space in education across a wide range of scales and educational theories.<sup>8</sup>

The benefits of applying spatial analysis/theory to the field of education is that it adds new ways to approach current problems in educational theory or taken-for-granted social relations in education (Ferrare and Apple, 2010; Guslon and Symes, 2007b); it also offers new tools for understanding change within education (Quinn, 2003b). More importantly, it expands the field by introducing a different perspective of neo Marxists and post-modernist geographers, such as Doreen Massey, David Harvey and Edward Soja, and social scientists/philosophers like Henri Lefebvre (1991) (Guslon and Symes, 2007a, p. 98). Lefebvre’s work, specifically his book, *The Production of Space*, has been increasingly cited by educationists and in education studies (Middleton, 2014, p. 2); even historians of education, who are increasingly starting to engage with the spatial, are finding his work useful for focusing on both the spatial and temporal (ibid. p. 4). I paid particular attention to Middleton’s work, which provides a Lefebvrian perspective on spatializing education (2014, 2011, 2010) as it links to my chosen theoretical framework of Lefebvre’s triad (1991) (see Chapter 2 on theory).

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<sup>7</sup> Larsen and Beech (2014) Middleton (2014, 2011, 2010), Gulson and Symes (2007a; 2007b), Gruenewald, (2003), McGregor (2002, cited in Quinn, 2003b, p. 449), Edwards and Usher (2000, cited in Quinn, 2003b, p. 449), Nespor (1997, cited in Quinn, 2003b, p. 449) and others discuss how space can contribute to education.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of such studies that explore the role of space in learning, see Larsen and Beech (2014), Middleton (2014, 2011, 2010), Gulson and Symes (2007a, 2007b), Ferrare and Apple (2010), Taylor (2009), and Gruenewald (2003).

In her recent book, *Henri Lefebvre and Education: Space, history, theory*,<sup>9</sup> Middleton (2014) extensively discusses Lefebvre and education, and his influence in education studies, reflected through his passionate interest in education, analytical concepts in studying education, and his methods (pedagogy). She presents his life, works and place in education theory, establishing a stronger link/synthesis between space and education, thereby contributing to what can be considered new directions in education studies. Middleton argues for Lefebvre's interest in pedagogy, the educationist core and common object of inquiry, as "an object of inquiry and an ethical practice — how best to facilitate human 'becoming'" (ibid. p. 2). By disentangling and utilizing *key concepts* from Lefebvre's work (my italics), including space and time, rhythms and "rhythmanalysis", everyday life, production, social relations and alienation, Middleton attempts to explain and "decode" Lefebvre's notion of "pedagogies of appropriation" (ibid. p. 10). In linking a pedagogy of appropriation to Lefebvre's interest in spatial histories of education, pedagogy and space become central in education studies, emphasizing not only the temporal "when" (as histories of education) but also the spatial "where" (ibid. p. 23). With a focus on the rhythms of everyday life, Lefebvre calls for linking theory to practice, in order to critique it, by locating it in the everyday setting in which it was produced and can be read (ibid. p. 177). In line with this, Middleton believes that rhythmanalysis of everyday spatial practice can possibly "bring researchers 'closer to a pedagogy of appropriation'" (Lefebvre, 1991, cited in Middleton, 2014, p. 43).

The above mentioned key concepts of Lefebvre also constituted the theoretical framework that Middleton (2014) applied to education cases (spatial histories) in Chapters 2–6 of her book, demonstrating how Lefebvre's theoretical ideas can be put to work in education research. For example, in the case of *Labouring families in new colonies* discussed in Chapter Two, Middleton adapts Lefebvre's approach in the production of space to historical research on the colonial

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<sup>9</sup> Middleton's book contributes to the series "New directions in the philosophy of education" by introducing Henri Lefebvre and key concepts from his works to an education audience, demonstrating through five exemplars how his theories can be applied to education inquires, and emphasizing how an educational reading of Lefebvre's work can add to those from other disciplines like geography and sociology.

context of Wellington, New Zealand, during its early years (1839–1845) of establishment as a British settlement.<sup>10</sup> By analysing nine letters<sup>11</sup> written by a small group of immigrant labourers (four families and three single men) recruited by the New Zealand Company, and sent from Wellington to their former village in Surrey in England, she revealed the rhythms of the everyday practices of these labourers in the production of colonial space, which also allowed for a study of the conceived, perceived and lived aspects of daily life in Wellington at that time.

By describing the New Zealand Company's efforts of appropriation in producing the "ideal 'immigrant of the labouring classes'" (ibid. p. 37), she reveals how the company assumed a pedagogical function. Thus, it can be conceptualized as what Bernstein calls a "pedagogical device" in producing "immigrants of the right type" (2000, cited in Middleton, 2014, p. 37). Applying Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis of the company's pedagogies of appropriation, Middleton showed how the conceived (the company's abstract image and future plan of Wellington) dominated and was imposed on the lived (native Māoris' land, with all its symbolic, religious and historical significance linking it to their identity), by dividing, enclosing, confiscating and selling native land. Tracing the spatio-temporal rhythms of the perceived, conceived and lived of the pedagogical process involving the labourers and their families' lives in their appropriation of the new colonial space reveals the contradictory intersection of archaic English rural relations with the capital-labour relations of their new space. It also shows how the labourers conceptualized colonial Wellington and Surrey as "relational spaces"; that is, Wellington was not 'isolated' but conceived in relation to its connection to Surrey and the global network of the British Empire.

What I found most interesting is the way Middleton applied each moment of the theoretical triad (conceived, perceived and lived) to colonial Wellington's context, including the way she traced the rhythms of the daily lives of labourers,

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<sup>10</sup> The historical case of Wellington and the nine labourers' letters have also been discussed in Middleton's (2010) earlier paper, *Labourers' letters from Wellington to Surrey, 1840-1845: Lefebvre, Bernstein and pedagogies of appropriation*.

<sup>11</sup> For more details of the letters see Middleton, S. (2010) 'The Seven servants of ham: labourers letters from Wellington, in the New Zealand Journal, 1840-1845', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 44 (10), pp. 54-75.

providing rhythm analysis of Wellington's everyday life and a clear application of the triad spaces, with their intersectional relations in producing Wellington's space. To illustrate, the conceived was represented in the company owners' conceived image of the new colony (its spatial and social organisation, the respective roles of workers and native Māori), and the labourers' mental maps of the company's scheme. The perceived represented the perceived image of the physical landscape as it existed on the arrival of the immigrant labourers. The lived included the landscape of the Māori natives with its symbolic, imaginary and spiritual dimensions, which added real life experience and meaning to space.

Middleton (2014, 2011, 2010) provides theoretical interpretations and case study applications of Lefebvre's triad. Her interpretations for each moment of the spatial triad were close to my own understanding of the triad, and although her engagement with Lefebvre follows a spatio-historical approach to educational theories compared to my spatio-learning approach applied to a non-historical educational context, her case applications of Lefebvre spatial concepts on historical documents<sup>12</sup> (2011, 2010) alongside the five spatial histories discussed in her book (Chapter 2–6) provide theoretical demonstration and insights into a way to apply Lefebvre's work in spatial analysis.

Within such approaches that call for spatializing education, I situate my research as contributing to a better understanding of the relationship between space and learning and emphasizing the learners' spatial in relation to their pedagogical needs. By engaging with Lefebvre's spatial concepts across disciplinary boundaries of gender and education, my research also introduces a practical application of Lefebvre's abstract triad into an existing educational context, where the material, imagined and lived aspects of space manifest.

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<sup>12</sup> The two types of historical documents that were also discussed with a different focus in her book under chapters 2 and 4, include the New Zealander teacher Sylvia Ashton-Warner's non-fiction educational texts and writing, and official documents of the time she taught in rural Māori schools during the 1940s-1950s; and the nine surviving letters written by agricultural labourers of the New Zealand Company in Wellington and sent to Surrey between 1841-1844.

As for work on gender and spatiality, it rarely addresses the learning environment, with space being treated as socially determined rather than in its materiality. There are only a very few studies exploring the issue of spatiality and education for women, such as Tamboukou (2003) and Quinn (2003). In her book, *Women, Education and the Self: A Foucauldian perspective*, Maria Tamboukou (2003) explores the female subject in education. She starts historically, by following the traces of Foucauldian genealogy to see how the past informed the women's present. By applying a Foucauldian genealogical approach as an analysis tool, investigating the auto/biographical text of women teachers in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, she looks into the technologies of the female self in education.

I specifically focus on Tamboukou's Chapter Two, which "explores spatial dimensions in the formation of the female self" (ibid. p. 4), discussing concepts of women, gender and spatiality in higher education. She explores women's spatial experiences by mapping female teachers' personal and social spaces as evident in their self-writings, providing "a genealogy of their being[s] inscribed in space" (ibid. p. 53). To that end, she utilizes theories of feminism and Foucault's discourse in tracing the genealogy of women teachers in space, revealing their 'technologies of space' as used to negotiate their own spaces and cope with the multiple interrelated contradictory spaces of their lives. 'Different spaces', described by Foucault (1998) as 'heterotopias', are projected onto a women's college and teachers' experiences within the college, revealing the different contradictory social spaces that exist within and beyond these women's societies, and the 'technologies of resistance' women applied to map their existence.

Through the intersection of knowledge, power and space in constituting technologies of the female self, Tamboukou presents two spatial themes emerging from the autobiographies of women teachers. These revolve around their need and quest for a space of their own for privacy and confinement, and their desire to travel and inscribe their existence in different spaces and new dimensions (ibid, p. 58). Their feelings of attachment, oppression, liberation and freedom, among others specifically their desire to "get out" and "fly away" from

the confinement of home, and their need for privacy and “a room of their own” (ibid, p. 62), strikingly resonate with those of ZU female students. Tamboukou’s attempts in linking space to feminist concepts or themes of female agency, the gendering of space and the realisation of the female self, presenting the university as a space of transformation, as well as the rich discussion of the binaries of public-private, space-place and space-time inspired me, and allowed for crystallization of the spatial themes that emerged in my own research.

Jocey Quinn (2003a) on the other hand, in her book *Powerful Subjects: are women really taking over the university?* explores feminist questions concerning transformations of the female self and academic institutions, their practices and curriculum following women’s mass participation in higher education and the growth of feminist knowledge. “Universities have traditionally been spaces where men are constituted as powerful subjects, defining what, and who, is worth knowing” (ibid. p.1), which has led to women’s material and intellectual exclusion. To address the shift in power enacted by the women’s mass entry into higher education, Quinn probes and presents the university as a contested space that is not a male domain any longer. As a participant observer in multi-sited and multi-case ethnographic research at two UK based universities, she provides an in-depth analysis of “the status of women students as powerful subjects in HE” (ibid. p. 20).

Quinn concludes that, despite the increase in the numbers of women participating in higher education, they are still marginalised in many ways. Although feminist pedagogy exists within the mainstream, feminism did not manage to transform it in terms of curriculum and pedagogy (ibid. p. 60); of what is being learnt and how. However, women are constituted as powerful in exercising their power to think about, reject or challenge other discourses, in resisting their position within institutions and other places like home, and in crafting the university as their own protected space on an individual or collective level. Therefore emerging as “ambiguous but powerful subjects” (ibid. p. 149).

To the benefit of my research, Quinn discusses and presents the university space as non-transparent, paradoxical and gendered (2003a, 2003b)<sup>13</sup>. She challenges the way other feminist scholars portray the university as a “dangerous space” for women, considering it, despite being dangerous, still safer than the outside world. The university is constructed by higher education female students in the UK as a “protected space”, a “haven”, albeit still imbued with masculinist notions of the outside world, thus, making it “a temporary refuge rather than a permanent liberation” (2003b, p. 449). I found this constructed image of the university as partially resonating with the Emirati spatial practice of ‘cocooning’, whereby they create their own safe spaces within the larger campus (see Chapter 4). Although Quinn focused on the university space as a social and imagined construction created by her female student participants, she also marginally engaged with the material aspect of space, represented in her discussion of the university’s physical borders and gates in relation to women’s imagined constructed space, which is an aspect neglected by most feminists and social scientists. My work engages with the material as well as the imagined and lived interrelated aspects of space that constitute the spatio-learning experience of female learners, taking more of an interdisciplinary approach than a feminist one.

Recently both feminist and gender studies, as well as environmental psychology, have increasingly focused on the gendering of the space. In addition to the studies by Tamboukou (2003) and Quinn (2003 a, 2003b), I also selectively incorporated in my discussion and analysis Rose’s work (1993) on gendering of space, Massey’s in *Space, Place and Gender* (1994), and Kopec’s discussion of gender influences on environmental response (2010). In drawing on these approaches, my work extends the literature and substantially contributes to work on gendered spaces and female spatiality in higher education.

Regarding women’s education, there is a lack of studies on Arab women’s learning in the Gulf region, particularly in higher education. Even in the western

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<sup>13</sup> The same research discussed in Quinn’s (2003a) paper, with similar ideas but a slightly different focus, was also discussed in chapter six of her book.

world, education has traditionally been perceived through the lens of learning for men, with many universities being initially created as male domains (Quinn, 2003a, 2003b), as discussed earlier. However, with the current mass participation of women in higher education, a rapidly growing literature has been directed towards understanding and filling the void on adult education for women in the West (Flannery and Hayes, 2002; Harrigan, 2002). Yet, very few studies have seriously investigated higher education for women in the Gulf region, particularly for Emirati women, apart from Khelifa (2010), Khine and Hayes (2010) and a few others.<sup>14</sup>

Khelifa (2010) conducted an exploratory descriptive study of undergraduate ZU female students looking into the cultural changes these students experienced from being highly exposed to western culture in majority expatriate community while also being educated in a western modelled university and taught by western or western-educated faculty. While Emirati female students seem increasingly attracted to westernization and modernity in terms of life style and the use of English, they still remain “anchored” to their Arab-Islamic culture. The study revealed their shift towards westernization and an increased western value orientation that seemed accompanied by several changes to their local and traditional behaviours, attitudes and value system. This in turn relates to and actually explains the emergence of my theme ‘Modern children of the desert’, which emphasises the Emirati students’ unique identity, comprising both modern and traditional influences, discussed in Chapter Four. Khelifa’s study also provides a valuable overview of the historical and educational context of the UAE as well as the ZU female student population.

Khine and Hayes (2010), on the other hand, focus more on exploring women’s ways of knowing or what is referred to as personal epistemological beliefs. They apply western models of personal epistemology, which built on Perry’s (1970s, cited in Khine and Hayes, 2010, p. 105) influential work, to an Arab-Islamic and

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<sup>14</sup> There is a growing interest in women’s education in the Gulf with a focus on mobile learning, language learning, and culture and identity. For a review of a variety of studies on education in the Gulf, including a few on Emirati women, see *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives Journal*. <http://the.zu.ac.ae/>

gender segregated educational context of undergraduate Emirati females entering a bachelor of education program after the foundation program. The findings indicate that Emirati females, like other women around the world, prefer connected ways of knowing in learning that involve connecting with others, knowing what they think and feel rather than separated ways of knowing. This parallels and links to my findings about ZU students' need to be part of the collective and their strong connection with their '*rbee'at*' (friends), which emerged as a spatial characteristic in my observations (see Chapter 4). Although this study did not investigate social and religious influences on their ways of knowing, it emphasised that the students' personal epistemological beliefs need to be examined and understood through a local cultural filter. This in turn supports my finding that emerging spatial themes are strongly inspired by and grounded in the students' cultural context and identity as modern children of the desert.

As there are no studies on Emirati female spatiality or the role of space in learning for Emirati women in a single gender context, this is where my thesis makes its greatest academic impact. Since we seem to be riding the beginning of a new wave of intellectual spatial eruptions, I believe that my interdisciplinary work can address the lack of studies on female spatiality in higher education by offering valuable new insights into the role of space in higher education, and contribute to our understanding of the spatio-learning experiences of Emirati females while also responding to the rising number of calls for more in-depth explorations across disciplinary boundaries (Taylor, 2009; Gruenewald, 2003), as clearly articulated by Massey:

It seems to me that some of the most stimulating intellectual developments of recent years have come either from new, hybrid places (cultural studies might be an example) or from places where boundaries between disciplines have been constructively breached and new conversations have taken place. (1999, p. 5)

Thus, I contribute my unique interdisciplinary approach not only by exploring the intersection of space, gender and learning but also by engaging with and incorporating concepts of feminist studies, social sciences, architectural design

and environmental psychology into the discussion and analysis of the emerging themes while addressing the three interrelated aspects of space: material, mental and social.

### **Space in this research**

As space constitutes the backbone of this research, It is important at this stage to clarify its meaning and intended role in this study. Space in this research focuses on the external material space. It is the outer physical space; the one Foucault (1984, p. 3) calls the “external space”, which he was primarily concerned with and defined as “[t]he space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space”. It is that heterogeneous space that is inclusive of different emplacements (including the learning one) that are interconnected and irreducible (indispensable) to each other, and it is within this outer space that we live and experience the physical world that also encompasses the learning environment.

My understanding of space in this research has been predominantly inspired by Lefebvre’s triad (1991), which forms a point of departure for my own definition of “the perceived, conceived and the lived space” (ibid. p. 39) (see Chapter 2 on theory). Space in my study links the outside (physical environment) to the inside (inner perception of the outside space), incorporating both. The outside focuses on the outer physical space; it is the perceived physical space (an aggregate of sensory data) and social space (embodying social relations and lived experience). Those represent the perceived and the lived spaces that Lefebvre initially separated in his discussion from the old epistemological (theoretical) space of the philosophers, known as the “mental space”, to be then integrated into his double triad (1991). Space has always been connected to its material reality; it did not exist before the discovery of matter and it “cannot be understood therefore independently from the qualities of [its] material processes” (Harvey, 1990, p. 203). In fact mental space is just an image or a mental map we create through our own subjective experiences to represent the ‘real’ thing (ibid. p. 203); the inside is a mental projection to the outside, just a

mirage image of the outside and always connected to it. Every human needs space to live, flourish and die within; and every society needs space to exist (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 45). "Social space 'incorporates' social actions, the actions of subjects both individual and collective who are born and who die" (ibid. p. 33). Space supports our existence as well as provides the environment for our socio-spatial practices, including learning. Thus, what I plan to do in this study is to analyse and move through Lefebvre's three fields of space, from the perceived to the conceived and then to the lived, connecting the abstract inside to the material outside. I will specifically focus on the lived as it produces the spatio-learning experience, influenced by the way perceived space is conceived.

In this research, the term 'spatio-educational experience' (or simply 'experience') is a fundamental concept. Experience is critical to transforming 'mere space' into a 'human place' with meaning and significance through people's emotional responses to those spaces/places (Rose, 1993, p. 40; Tuan, 2008). Experience here is most influentially theorized by Joan Scott (1991), and refers to the students' own account of what they are living through within the learning space, what they are feeling, sensing and accumulating knowledge about, and how they are utilising and appropriating the spatial element of their environment to enhance their learning. After all, learning is about accumulating knowledge, and experience constructs knowledge, "When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built" (ibid. p. 777). Therefore it is important to conduct research that is based on the participants' own accounts of their lived experiences: "what could be truer, after all, than a subject's own account of what he or she has lived through?" (ibid). Experience, for me, is taken through its discursive conceptualization because language and experience cannot be separated (ibid. p. 793); that is, experience is discursively understood and interpreted, and it is mediated through language. And since the space/place that allows for the experience's visibility is fundamental to the living experience (Lefebvre, 1991, Watkins, 2005, Tuan, 1977), looking at the mental, physical and social space adopted from Lefebvre without focusing on an individual

aspect will provide an integrated insightful view of the spatio-learning experience. In addition, space and place will be used interchangeably in this study despite the various discussions on the meaning of each and the relationship between them (see 'Dialectic on the meaning of space', Chapter 2).

### **Research aims and questions**

The spatial experiences of Emirati female learners are at the core of my interdisciplinary research, which aims to understand and, if possible, to enhance those experiences by exploring the role of space in a single-gender learning context. In exploring the relationship (intersectionality) between space, gender and learning, I want to unravel all the complex cultural formations that inform and contest the spatial realities of these learners. Utilizing my borrowed theoretical framework, in part inspired by Lefebvre's triad (1991) (see Chapter 2), I want to examine the type of spaces that exist for these female learners in relation to their spatial needs, as informed by their daily practices and spatial appropriations of the university campus.

Main research question:

What are the spatio-educational experiences of Emirati higher education female students?

This question raises the following interrelated questions:

- What is the role of space in learning for Emirati female students?
- How can space support and enhance students' learning experiences?
- What is the learning context of Emirati students in relation to its spatial (including physical facilities), cultural and gender dimensions?
- What are the interactions between space, gender and learning?
- What are the kinds of spaces experienced by Emirati female learners?
- What elements or dimensions constitute the spatial experiences of Emirati female learners (and how are they constituted)?
- How can the context and structure of space be re-designed to enhance learning?

## **Research Context: historical, socio-cultural and educational**

To understand the female students' spatiality with all its socio-cultural formations and emerging themes (Chapters 4 and 5), it is imperative to be familiar with the historical and cultural context of the UAE as a nation and its current educational system. What we recognise today as the United Arab Emirates was established in 1971 following the British withdrawal from the Gulf and the unification of the Trucial Oman Sheikdoms (Heard-Bay, 2011; Khelifa, 2010; Al Abed, Vine, and Hellyer, 2007; Talhami, 2004). The federation of the UAE consists of seven Emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ras Alkhaimah, Fujairah, Umm Al-Qaiwain, Sharjah and Ajman. Currently, the UAE is known worldwide for and spatially represented by its desert safaris, skyscrapers including the world's tallest building, luxurious shopping malls, man-made islands and exotic restaurants and cafes, which all accompanied its booming economy.

Prior to the discovery of oil in the 1950s, which led to increased, and according to some, easy wealth coupled with rapid development, modernization and a complete change in Emirati lifestyles, this region was characterized by extreme poverty and hardship. People were constantly thirsty, with many suffering from kidney diseases due to lack of or tainted water; sometimes even the rulers suffered from food and water shortages (Bristol-Rhyes, 2010, pp. 35-36). In those days, people depended on pearl diving, trading, fishing, camel herding and agriculture for their livelihood (Heard-Bey, 2011; Bristol-Rhyes, 2010; Alsharekh and Springborg, 2008; Talhami, 2004). Their spaces were of the desert, oases, the coast, the sea, and sand dunes with camels, falcons and palm trees. Currently, as a young nation, the UAE is known for pushing traditional boundaries while trying to secure its global position among the most advanced and economically developed nations. Today, it is considered a normal scene at national universities to have local female students wearing mostly designer bags and shoes, and driving their own cars or having a personal driver. Yet culturally, despite the development, modernization, increased wealth and changes in the life style, Emirati society keeps its conservative, patriarchal and male dominant nature, rooted in the Islamic, societal and tribal traditions of this region.

Demographically, UAE nationals constitute only 10-15% of the country's eight million population (Khoury, as cited in Sabban, 2013), while the rest are expatriates from around the world who have settled in the UAE since the oil revolution (Alsharekh and Springborg, 2008; Bristol-Rhys, 2010; Khelifa, 2010). This unique demographic composition has contributed greatly to cultural formations that have become a mixture of the local Arabian Gulf culture and a myriad of others introduced by expatriates. Alsharekh and Springborg (2008, pp. 9-10) discuss the existence of two negative and limited views of the Gulf and its cultural formations:

1. An existing culture characterized by backwardness due to male dominance, tribalism, easy wealth and inadequate education.
2. A non-existing culture, lost to rapid modernization and globalization, with cosmopolitanism replacing cultural traditions and women assuming leading roles in the country.

While these contrasting views seem limited, I believe they intertwine to explain a lot of what is described by some as "cultural schizophrenia" of a society concurrently both globalised and localized (ibid. p. 13). I believe its unique demographic composition, as well as its struggle to define its identity in finding that balance, is clearly seen in its young generation, who seemed trapped between the local and the global (Bristol-Rhys, 2010; Khelifa, 2010).

While under British protection, the Trucial states did not experience substantial external cultural or educational influences due to the British lack of visibility, intervention and the unusual freedom they allowed local Arabs to run all their internal affairs, including education (Talhami, 2004, pp.1-2). On the one hand, this has contributed to preserving their culture and traditional ways of living; on the other hand, this cultural isolation has also maintained the traditional immobility of women and their exclusion from public life (ibid. p. 2). Nevertheless, Islam encourages literacy so that both men and women can read and understand the Qura'n; thus, even before the oil revolution, education was important in the Gulf countries although mostly available in the form of private instruction or religious education, known as '*kuttab*'<sup>15</sup> (Talhami, 2004, p. 11;

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<sup>15</sup> *Kuttab* (plural '*katatib*') was a form of religious school that taught Arabic, Qura'an reading and some mathematics (Talhami, 2004, p. 5). Students were taught in the

khelifa, 2010, p. 20, Heard-Bey, 2011, p. 156), which initially, mostly targeted males before later being established for females (Talhami, 2004).

Since independence, the UAE, like other Gulf countries, has recognized education as an important development strategy, as is evident from its policies and continuous investment in national education (Khelifa, 2010). In 1972, free primary education was made compulsory for all nationals (Khelifa, 2010, Talhami, 2004). Between 1971 and 1978, the second-largest portion of the state budget was dedicated to education (Talhami, 2004, p. 23). With a population that had been 90% illiterate prior to the discovery of oil (ibid. p. 11), the rulers of UAE created a revolution of their own, in that the UAE government currently offers free elementary, secondary and tertiary education to all nationals.

Although discrimination between males and females is socially and culturally practiced, education is now provided for all nationals, whether male or female. The late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, the founder of the nation and first UAE president, placed special emphasis on women's education and encouraged them to become active members in building this young nation. This vision has been well supported by the current UAE government, allowing Emirati females to embrace education, with many entering the workforce after graduation. In fact, 95% of Emirati females studying in secondary schools apply for colleges and universities (Al Abed et al., cited in Madsen, 2009, p. 21).

Education in the UAE has been completely transformed and is still evolving. Currently, education is hugely influenced by western models, especially in private schools and higher education institutions to meet the needs of the nation and build its human capital in a time of globalization and constant change (Khelifa, 2010). That change has had social, cultural and academic impacts on the UAE's youth, who are exposed to western expatriate teachers and workers while studying in western-style schools and universities (Ibid). Female students thus feel caught between their attraction to modernity and westernization while

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teacher's house, inside a room, the courtyard or even outside under a tree (Heard-Bey, 2011, p. 156; khelifa, 2010, p. 20).

trying to remain anchored to their Arab-Islamic culture (Bristol-Rhys, 2010; Khelifa, 2010; Rahman, 2008, p. 38).

Zayed University, established in 1998, is one of three federally-funded public tertiary institutions in the UAE, offering free education for female and, more recently, male students. It operates two campuses, in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, with a mission of leading innovation in UAE higher education in a “culturally diverse, humane, technologically advanced, and increasingly global environment” (Zayed University, 2014, Para. 1). Education at ZU also follows western educational models, employing mostly westerners or western-educated faculty members. However, ZU, like all federally-funded educational institutions, applies strict gender segregation in keeping with the traditional and cultural values of the UAE’s conservative society (Bristol-Rhys, 2008).

In such a context, where national, cultural, demographic and educational demands intertwine, young Emirati women are challenged by the constant change and development of their emerging state, where higher education is relatively new for females (Alsharekh and Springborg, 2008; Bristol-Rhys, 2011, Davidson, 2005; Khelifa, 2010). Furthermore, while education is provided for all, spatial mobility is limited, and gender segregation is institutionally and culturally practiced. As such, space plays a major role in the educational experiences of Emirati female learners. To understand the role of space in such a learning context, cultural formations and local values need to be unravelled and understood. This in turn encourages the application of ethnographic techniques within the local context of ZU Dubai campus, as detailed in Chapter Three on methodology.

### **The field: Dubai campus**

Zayed University Dubai campus (DXB) represented the field of my research. Although as an architect and ethnographer, I have a strong urge to provide a detailed description of every space on the DXB, I will familiarize the reader through only a brief, general description of the whole campus (see appendix 1.1 for an expanded description of the DXB). The reason is to emphasize my multi

zones ethnographic approach (see methods, Chapter 3), which does not focus on one specific space but explores spatial experiences across spaces, transcending the locality and specificity of one place within the totality of all campus spaces and across the network of spaces. I provide here a spatial and temporal tour of the DXB, which I joined in 2006, the same year that it opened in Dubai's Academic City area. Although my fieldwork officially started in 2012, my knowledge, information, views, observations and journey at ZU took root long before that, unconsciously influencing and deeply enriching my research and understanding of the field.

When the new Dubai campus was opened in 2006, it looked, to me, like a giant high-tech ship in the middle of the desert, especially with its bright curved metallic facade and the cone rising above like a funnel (Figure 1.8). The Academic City area of DXB was not developed yet, with only desert surrounding the campus. Since then, many other academic institutions, private companies, green roundabouts and residential areas have emerged. This rapid transformation of the area is a true reflection of Dubai as a city of change and rapid modernization, where new areas are constantly being built and quickly populated. It reminds me of a statement I read in a magazine when I first came to Dubai, that "the only constant thing about Dubai is change".

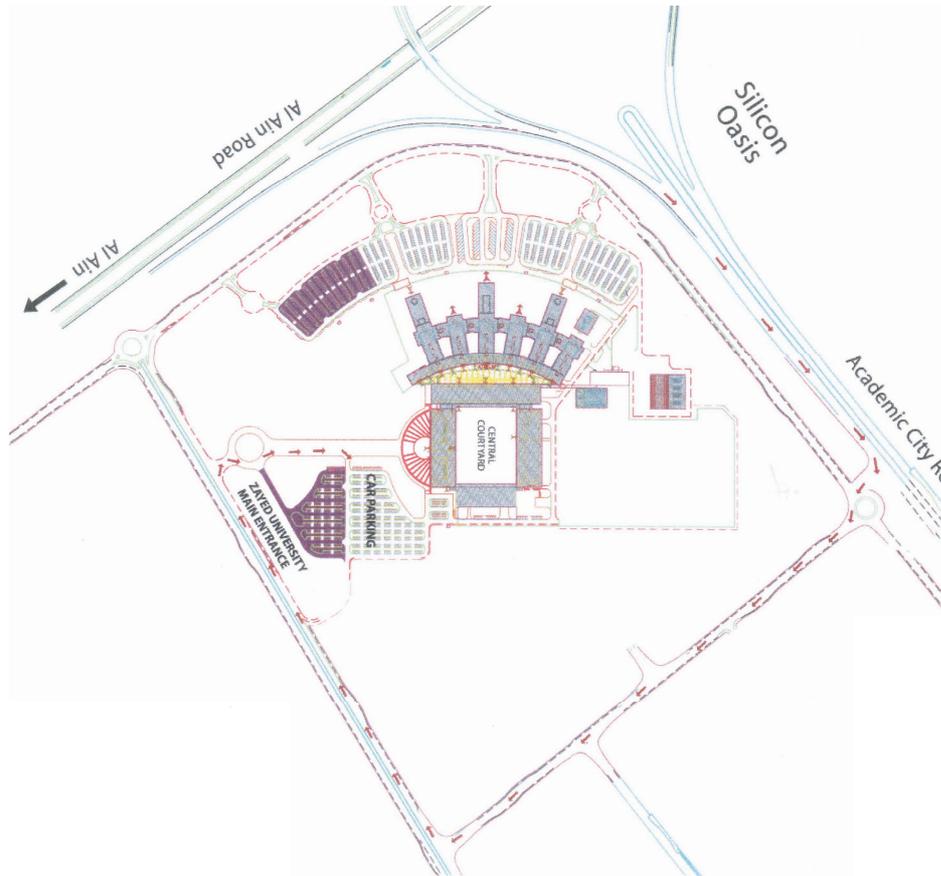


**Figure 1.8:** Zayed University-Dubai campus (ZU photographer 2009).

The new modern campus, designed by a well-known western company<sup>16</sup>, is centred on an open, spacious, beautifully landscaped rectangular courtyard, in the middle, around which four rectangular buildings (1, 2, 3 and 4) are arranged (Figures 1.9 and 1.10). The courtyard includes water channels leading to a waterfall, a small amphitheatre, large green and paved areas with tables and chairs, and palm trees (Figures 1.11 and 1.12). As highlighted in Figure 1.10, the four buildings around the courtyard include the administration (building 1), a convention centre and conferences area (building 2), the cafeterias (building 3), and a library (building 4) on the first floor, while the ground level provides open access to the rest of the campus through the atrium space. The atrium is a large open indoor public space that connects the four buildings and the open courtyard to five academic buildings (wings A–F) that project away from the atrium like fingers extending from the palm of a hand (Figures 1.9, 1.10). These wings include classrooms and faculty offices (Figure 1.13); they end with access to the campus parking lots. There is also a separate rectangular gym building beyond the side of A-wing (Figure 1.10).

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<sup>16</sup> DXB was designed by the award-winning international design firm of Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum, Inc., in coordination with the local architects of Shankland Cox.



**Figure 1.9:** Zayed University, Dubai campus site plan (Campus Physical Development Office (CPDO) 2013).



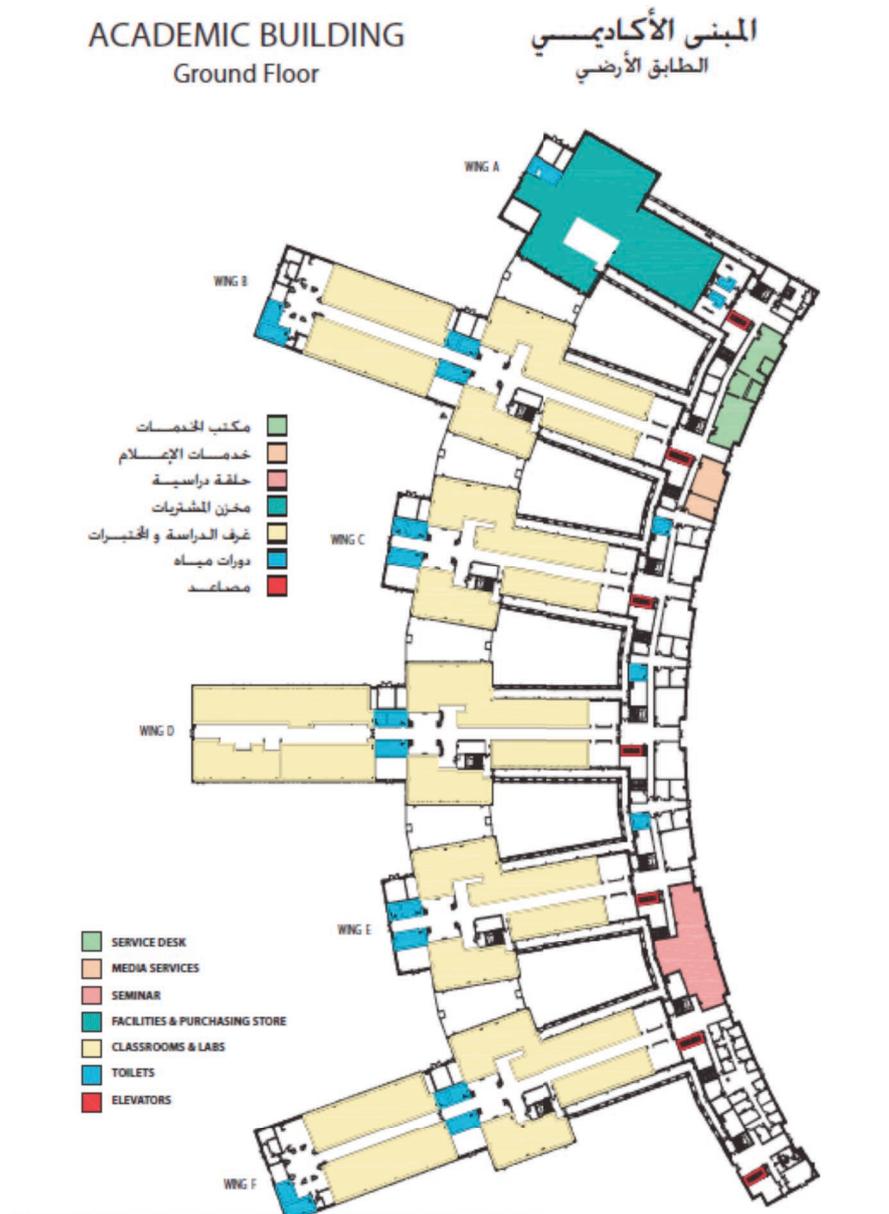
**Figure 1.10:** An aerial view showing the campus buildings, the atrium and the open courtyard in the middle (CPDO 2009).



**Figure 1.11:** Aerial view of the central courtyard (CPDO 2009).



**Figure 1.12:** Central courtyard view (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 1.13:** Site plan of Dubai campus academic wings (CPDO 2013).

Initially, there were four access points to the campus as highlighted on Figure 1.10: gate 1 from B-wing (G1), gate 2 from F-wing (G2), the ceremonial gate offering direct access to the convention centre, and administration (G3) and service gate close to the gym and A-wing (G4). However, female students can only access campus through gates 1 and 2 as these have a scanning system for students entering or leaving campus. In 2010, with the arrival of male students, a new and separate gate was created on the side of wing F, and a new parking lot was constructed for the male students only. The whole campus is surrounded by a two-meter-high wall that allows access only through the designated access points (gates) to ensure security and control as well as complete gender segregation (see discussion on gendered spaces, Chapter 5).

Functionally, Dubai campus is similar to any other academic institution. It includes classrooms, labs, studios, faculty offices, lounges, hallways, stairs, elevators, washrooms, prayer rooms, cafeterias, a library, indoor and outdoor public spaces, spaces for the administration, a gym, and services like a book store, beauty salon and convenience store, as well as service spaces like kitchens, maintenance rooms, storage rooms and so on. What distinguishes the campus though are its location, unique architectural design and arrangement of its spaces, and most importantly, the way its unique users utilize and appropriate such spaces, which constitutes the major focus of my research.

### **Outline of the thesis**

After this introductory chapter, in Chapter Two, I present the theoretical framework for this study and a major part of my literature review on space. I discuss the work of key thinkers on space, providing a chronological overview of how our understanding of space has changed and developed since the spatial turn in the social sciences. I focus on social theories of space, specifically the social construction of space and Lefebvre's double triad. These provided me with an organisational and epistemological structure.

In Chapter Three, I explain and justify the methodological map that guided my choice and application of research paradigms and design frames. Following an

interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, I took a qualitative approach that included a unique ethnography (instrumental case study), to study the spatial experiences of Emirati female students in a gender-segregated educational context. In such a research approach, my reflexivity and unique positionality as both insider and outsider played a significant role.

In Chapters Four and Five, I present my findings of students' spatiality as emerging from the field study, and discuss my analysis, highlighting my contributions while linking them to the relevant literature. I start Chapter Four by introducing the four emerging mega themes and their sub-themes to provide a holistic overview of all complex and intertwined themes. I then focus on just one of those mega themes, 'Engaging with and appropriating spaces', to show how students' engagement and appropriation of the university space and their learning experiences are closely linked and highly influenced by their cultural formations and unique identity as 'modern children of the desert'. This is explained based on how their spatial rhythms and daily practices are closely linked, either to their ancestors and traditional habits of life in the desert, or infused with concepts of modernity and development, or are a combination of both.

In Chapter Five I discuss 'Students' spaces within and beyond the triad'. Within this mega theme and its rich sub-themes, I present the different spaces that exist for the Emirati female learners, organised under Lefebvre's triad. However, I have moved beyond Lefebvre's definition and conceptualization of the lived to include my own sub-categorization by creating two new types of the lived that emerged from observing the various rhythms of the lived spaces in the field. These I named 'cold' and 'hot' spaces, with their own emerging sub-spaces and categorizations.

Finally, Chapter Six presents my concluding remarks, in which I tie all the preceding chapters together, highlighting my contributions to knowledge and demonstrating the uniqueness of my thesis. I also reiterate my findings concerning the students' spatiality. From analysing the students' spaces mega

theme, I discovered how the students construct and re-invent the university campus to create their own unique hybrid spaces while working together as an informal architectural collective re-designing and re-inventing the campus space. From this experience, I make several recommendations to enhance the students' spatiality and their learning experience, both at ZU, where my research took place, and other locations.

### **Some notes about the use of language**

Before ending this chapter, I would like to clarify various writing conventions I have followed that fall outside the defined Harvard style. I italicized all the Arabic words used in the thesis; the first time a specific Arabic word appears in my text, I used single quotation marks and defined it or provided my own translation in parenthesis. I also included all foreign words in a glossary of terms at the end of the thesis. Additionally, I italicized the translation of phrases or sentences spoken in Arabic in my excerpts, adding at the end “[translation author’s own]”. I also used ellipses between brackets “[...]” for the omitted words in quotes and transcriptions.

## Chapter 2. Theoretical spatial exploration

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As space constitutes the backbone of this research into spatio-learning experiences, understanding its meaning, definitions, characteristics, and historical development as a field of study, including trans-disciplinary discourses about it, is imperative. Therefore, in this chapter, I review the relevant literature on space and present the study's theoretical framework, focusing on social theories of space. In doing so, first I engage chronologically in a conceptual dialectic with several scholars and key thinkers on space whose work has strongly influenced and guided the development of spatial thought. Next, I discuss explaining the meaning and multiple definitions for the entity of space. The chapter concludes with my chosen framework, based on the social construction of space and the spatial trilogy of the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre in his influential work *The production of Space* (1991)<sup>17</sup>. Further theoretical perspectives and discussions are also embedded in the analysis and discussion of findings (Chapters 4 and 5) as they link to specific topics within the emerging themes and the overarching theoretical framework.

### **Spatial Histories**

This section traces the historical development of the study of space in social sciences to pave the way for our understanding of it by providing the diachronic context for its development while also linking it to its specific utilization in this research.

Historically, interest in space has been characterized by a cycle of intense activity and intellectual eruptions followed by hibernation. Since there are many such cycles of spatial exploration and de-exploration across civilizations, I can only highlight the work of a few of the key thinkers whose work and ideas have transformed the way we currently think about and conceptualize space. Nevertheless, we should note that spatial thought has not developed in a vacuum; rather, it is a cumulative construction, based on a dialectic between

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<sup>17</sup> The first edition was published in French in 1974 by Editions Anthropos.

the varied and, in many cases, contradictory positions across disciplines, and epistemologies (whether spatial or temporal diachronic) of key thinkers, mostly within the academic and institutional structures (Hubbard et al., 2004, quoted in Gulson and Symmes, 2007b, p. 7). Furthermore, although these developments might appear linear, they are far from it because consensus has never been achieved; rather, the issue of space has been continuously debated as ideas have emerged and, in many cases, contradicted each other.

Thinking about space started thousands of years ago with ancient scholars and philosophers theorizing about the universe and its entity. At that time, space was conceived as an abstract and passive milieu of mathematicians and scientists, such as Descartes's mathematical space, which Lefebvre called the "mental" space (1991). For many centuries, space continued to be viewed by many as a realm of stasis, lacking movement, dynamism and dislocation; for example, Laclau (1990) viewed space as a static system where either nothing happens or any change happens only within the spatial system without any change in the system itself. Even in the 1950s and 1960s, space was still seen from a positivist perspective; and geographical theory, considered as space's traditional domain, was being associated with statistical analysis, which applied quantitative approaches to space (Gulson and Symes, 2007a, p. 100).

This abstract conceptualization of space as a passive milieu, a setting for all living and nonliving things, has continued despite its increased utilization and inclusion in many different disciplines (Lefebvre, 1991). This perspective has also always considered space as monodisciplinary, viewed and analyzed within each discipline in relation to that single discipline only (Gulson and Symes, 2007a, p. 101). Space continued to provide the milieu for each specific discipline and follow its rules, whether in literature, language, architecture, urbanism, or mathematics; it was never categorized as an independent field, as 'spatiology', for instance (Lefebvre, 1991). Thus, until the late Nineteenth Century, space seemed to remain the exclusive domain of geographers. Only in the 1970s was its transdisciplinary nature (being viewed and analyzed across disciplines and in relation to more than one discipline) revealed (Ferrare and Apple, 2010; Gulson and Symes, 2007a).

Even after space was finally emancipated from earlier monodisciplinary approaches and became transdisciplinary, for decades it was still subordinated to time, with primacy being given to socio-temporal relations.<sup>18</sup> This primacy of time over space explains the concept of ‘historicism’ unveiled and conceptually unpacked in Soja’s work (1989). Historicism refers to the notion of how history associated with time, that is often described as organic, alive, dialectical and more amenable to change and dislocation (specifically political change), became more important than geography, which is associated with static, passive and incorrigible space (ibid).<sup>19</sup> The same concept was reflected in Marx’s choice of words: “the annihilation of space by time” as a representation of the vast waves of time-space compression during the industrial revolution (Warf, 2006, cited in Graham, Warf and Soja, 2006, p. 815). This view also strongly resonates with contemporary references such as “the ‘death of distance’ and the ‘end of geography’ in light of global telecommunications” (ibid. p. 215). In short, time has been privileged intellectually over space in the humanities and social sciences.

In western thought, this view of space was also gendered, with time coded as masculine and associated with history, politics and civilization, and space coded as feminine and associated with depoliticization, stasis and inflexibility (Massey, 1994, p. 6). This foregrounding of the diachronic (temporal) over the spatial occurred also in education, the research context for the spatial experiences explored in this study. That is, the historical dimension of education studies has dominated and still dominates the geographical (spatial) dimension (Middleton, 2014, p. 3), as clearly pointed out by Gulson and Symmes:

While educational history is a long established field, which has chronicled the way educational systems have developed (e.g., Barcan, 1980), educational geography—its spatial equivalent—

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<sup>18</sup> Middleton (2014), Ferrare and Apple (2010), Gulson and Symes (2007a), Massey (1994), Harvey (1990) and Soja (1989) among others, including Lefebvre (1991, 2004) stated, discussed and often criticized the primacy of time over space prior to the spatial turn.

<sup>19</sup> Many scholars confirmed Soja’s (1989) concept of historicism, see the scholars above in footnote 18.

remains relatively underdeveloped and 'unnamed' though a few have identified themselves as practitioners. (2007a, p. 100)

By the 1970s, however, a shift in the conceptualization of space had begun, in which space was no longer viewed as static; instead, the assertion was that all spatial processes are constituted through social relations (Massey, 1994), with space now considered as socially constructed and constituted. Yet, this new perspective was itself criticized for presenting space as the outcome of social relations, being reduced to just an end product (ibid. p. 254). In the 1980s, space conceptualization evolved into one that asserted how social relations are spatially constituted as well, so that spatial organization matters and influences the way society works, a concept supported and developed by Lefebvre (1991) years before others adopted it.

In his last work, *Elements of Rhythmanalysis*, Lefebvre asserted that space and time "need to be thought together rather than separately" (2004, cited in Elden, 2004c, p. vii).<sup>20</sup> This new perspective empowers space, seeing it a contributor to the production of history. With the emergence of such spatial determinism, it becomes clear that spatial organization makes a difference in the way society functions. That is, space, alongside time, becomes an important factor in the production of history so it "must be conceptualized integrally with time; indeed that the aim should be to think always in terms of space-time" (Massey, 1994, p. 2).

As a result of these intellectual revolutions in spatial thought, there has been a 'spatial turn' towards the end of the Twentieth Century, with space being resurrected in the discourse of scholars and 'key thinkers'<sup>21</sup>, whose ideas have dominated thinking about space and place and transformed the way we analyse

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<sup>20</sup> *Elements of Rhythmanalysis* was the last book Lefebvre wrote, although it only appeared after his death. The first edition was published in French in 1992 (Elden, 2004c).

<sup>21</sup> These key thinkers and scholars on space include but are not limited to Lefebvre (1991), Foucault (1984), Soja (1996, 1989), Tuan (1977), Harvey (1990) and Massey (1994, 2004, 2005). For a concise and holistic review of their work, among many others, on space refer to (Hubbard and Kitchin, 2011).

and conceptualize space (Hubbard and Kitchin, 2011). Henri Lefebvre's work on the production of space is considered particularly ground-breaking. Within his overarching Marxist theoretical framework, he views space as more than just a static milieu or a mental space; but as a triad of spaces (1991, Stanek, 2011). He considers space as a social construct shaped by societies (modes of production in Marx's terms) while transforming them (1991). Space becomes both the constructor and the construct (Milieu) of our existence, thereby taking a more active role in the development of social theory.

This proposition of space as social construction was reasserted later by Massey (2004, p. 5), who pointed out that, in considering the "relational" construction of the identity of place, space, like identities, is relational, meaning that spaces are constructed and constituted through relationships and social engagements on different levels, from local to global. Space is thus not a passive milieu; instead, "space is conceived as the product of cultural, social, political, and economic interactions, imaginings, desires and relations" (Singh et al., 2007, p. 197). Deleuze also advocates a dynamic space with infinite spatial possibilities that fold and unfold in an evolving continuum (1993).

Another important intellectual development comes from Soja's (1989) brilliant yet highly criticized work, which reasserts the importance of spatiality in social theory. He offers an emancipation of space, equating it with time by opposing the concept of historicism. Partly coinciding with Soja's ideas, scholars like Thrift (2006) and Massey (1993) caution against separating the idea of space from time, as one of the reasons for some scholars' focus on space is to move beyond the hegemonic concepts of developmentalism and historicism, however "the fact remains that space without time is as improbable as time without space" (Crang and Thrift, 2000, quoted in Guslon and Symes, 2007b, p. 100). Later, in another brilliant work, Soja (1996) moved even beyond the modern and postmodern polarization of conceptualizing space, liberating it by offering a new way of thinking about our spatiality, in what he named the "Thirdspace".

One other spatial development in social theory is the new mobility paradigm discussed by Sheller and Urry (2006, p. 209). Their paradigm represents a new 'mobility turn' in social science, whereby spaces and places stretch beyond their geographical borders through the flow of people, products, technology, risks, dreams, and so on. According to Sheller (2011), mobilities research investigates the meaning, ideologies and complex relational dynamics associated with such mobilities including its relations to im-mobilities, thus connecting both "social and spatial theory in new ways" (ibid. p. 1). Such concepts of mobilities, flows, connections and relational networks lie in the centre of the social network analysis (SNA) methodological approach recently proposed by Larsen and Beech (2014) for spatial analysis in comparative and international education research. This approach argues for the use of new spatial theorizing for the study of comparative education. It tries to overcome what they see as limited and conflicting conceptualizing about the binaries of space and place by focusing mainly on the relational aspect and productive capacity of space, through analyzing mobilities, flows and networks. SNA as a methodological approach "focuses on mobilities and movement to demonstrate how spaces are enacted in relation to one another (ibid. p. 205). This development once again demonstrates how spaces have transcended their earlier conceptualization as fixed geographical terrains or isolated containers of social processes.

The work of the thinkers of space outlined here along with others, has set the foundation for the new shift known as the spatial turn, in which an increased interest in space is being shown by many social scientists, educationists, geographers and others, asserting that 'space matters' (Ferrare and Apple, 2010, Thrift, 2006). Although the notion of homogenous spaces, or of "one space in which one God created the world remains deeply rooted in the consciousness of western societies" (Lefebvre, 1991, cited in Löw, 2006, p. 120), it is currently being contested, with space being reconceived as relational, heterogeneous and socially constructed and reconstructed. Thus, 'space', according to Massey, is the best suited term to "express the spheres of juxtaposition and coexistence" (1999, cited in Löw, 2006, p. 120) because it allows for the simultaneous existence of multiple, heterogeneous, interlaced spaces:

In this sense spaces are, first, an expression of the possibility of pluralities; second, they point to the possibility of overlapping and reciprocal relations; and third, and for this very reason, they are always open and indefinite with respect to future formations. This applies no less to national territorial spaces than it does to the microspaces of everyday life. (Löw, 2006, p. 120)

In sum, the new late Twentieth Century spatial turn has taken a postmodernist approach to space, treating it as transdisciplinary. Space is moving beyond its traditional domain of geography across increasingly fading disciplinary borders. Space is also being treated as a social construct rather than a given abstraction, with social relations spatially constituted as well, emphasizing its relational, dynamic, non-absolute nature.

### **Dialectic on the meaning of space**

Space has long evolved beyond its strictly geometrical meaning of an empty area (Lefebvre, 1991). There have been many definitions and interpretations of space, and in relation to place and environment, there seems to be a lack of consensus among scholars and social scientists on its meaning. Massey believes that “[b]uried in these unacknowledged disagreements is a debate which never surfaces” (1994, p. 250) on the meaning of space. In fact, many established scholars and thinkers have failed to define its meaning clearly, despite the prominence of space in their arguments (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1994). Foucault (1984) for example, categorized spaces into ‘utopias’ (imaginary and unreal places) and ‘heterotopias’ (real places, but with a function different from what they imply); however, he did not unpack the entity of space. “Foucault never explains what space it is that he is referring to”, or even how it is produced (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 4).

Since space, historically, has remained attached to separate disciplines, as discussed in the previous section, the emergence of its different meanings can be explained through the distinct disciplinary perspectives that influence the ways we perceive and define space. This is simply and clearly manifested in the

various definitions of space in general or discipline-specific dictionaries. In Collins English Dictionary, for example, there are different definitions of space that follow its general limited definition of being “the unlimited three-dimensional expanse in which all material objects are located” (Space, no date). These further definitions are associated with particular disciplines, defining space in psychology, mathematics, astrology, music, telecommunication and others. From an architectural perspective, for example, space has always been perceived and understood through the design process as physical (material) space, embodying “the physical manifestations of architecture [that] accommodate human activity” (Ching, 1979, p. 10). Thus, in his book *Architecture: Form, Space and Order*, read by almost every architecture and design student, Ching discusses space through a vocabulary of architectural design that includes the primary elements of physical form (point, line, plane, and volume) (ibid. p. 18), which define space, mark its borders, envelope and shape it, and therefore produce it.

In other disciplines, however, many refer to nonphysical space, like psychologists, who focus on inner space, or linguists, who refer to the abstract notion of space in language and literature. Currently, many disciplines link inside and outside space, as through Durkheim’s anthropological lens, through which space is viewed “as an external projection of social and mental processes” (Hanson and Hillier, 2001, p. 5).

In the social sciences, many definitions of space refer to its relation to place. For example, according to Tuan (1977), space and place are very much intertwined, as the former is more abstract; we get attached to a place that is security, and we long for space because it represents freedom (ibid. p. 3). Many argue that, due to the complexities of the current era of time-space compression (globalization), people long for security, which might be partially fulfilled through a strong sense of locality, a place of their own to help them feel rooted. Therefore, while time is equated with progress, movement and unavoidable dynamism, “‘space’/‘place’ is equated with stasis and reaction”, and “romanticised escapism” from progress and history (Massey, 1994, p. 151). Human geographers have also focused on place as a central theme, looking at

emotional responses and how an ordinary place becomes significant through being experienced by people (Rose, 1993). Although this partly coincides with my research focus on the experience of learners, this view is limited as it focuses only on place, excluding space and the intertwined relationship between them. This notion of space as abstract and place as more meaningful, which is partially adapted by Tuan and fully by many others, has been opposed by Massey. In her paper, "Geographies of responsibility" (2004), she argues for the meaningfulness of both space and place: space is not abstract but a node in the global geometry, which in turn is anchored to local place. Space and place are thus intertwined: the global cannot exist without the local, and vice versa. The question of where local place stops and becomes global space is still very much debated, which resonates with the question posed by Bruno Latour, of whether the railway should be considered "local or global" (1993, cited in Massey, 2004, p. 8).

Lefebvre (1991) presents a powerful definition and unpacking of the entity and meaning of space in *The Production of Space*. He assumes a theoretical double triad of "the perceived, the conceived and the lived" (ibid. p. 39) that can be translated into a spatial triad of "spatial practice" (What do people do in those spaces?), "representations of space" (How are the spaces presented and represented?), and "representational spaces" or "spaces of representation" (What is the actual experience of those spaces?) (1991, p. 33). This well-known triad has been discussed, analysed and utilized by many<sup>22</sup>. In Lefebvre's theorization, space becomes a social construct (product), constructed socially through the movements of our bodies and the social relationship that both appropriate space and emerge from the link between the perceived and conceived space. As space is a temporal intersectionality of social relations (Lefebvre, 1991; Ferrare and Apple, 2010; Soja, 1996), the elements of spatial causality, time and the social construction of space, which were included in the earlier interpretations of space, all seem too important and intrinsically profound to be excluded from this process of exploration of the spatio-educational experiences.

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<sup>22</sup> Many scholars discussed or engaged with Lefebvre's triad including Middleton (2013, 2011, 2010), Ferrare and Apple (2010), Harvey (1990), Stanek (2011), Singh et al. (2007), Zhang (2006), Watkins (2005), and Elden (2004).

Since Lefebvre's work coincides with my own understanding of space and resonates with many aspects of my field findings and observations, the social construction of space and his spatial triad will be adopted as the theoretical framework for my study and for analysis of the spatio-educational experiences at DXB (see Chapters 4 and 5). To prepare for this, in the following section I present a more in-depth exploration of the Lefebvrian triad.

### **Lefebvre's Triad and this research**

Lefebvre (1991) managed to ascend space above monodisciplinary perspectives when he posited that space is a social construct; that is, it is socially produced, constructed and engineered; and social relations are always constituted relative to space (ibid). Despite this, I believe he (as a sociologist, Marxist intellectual and philosopher) still confined it to the social sciences to some extent. He also offered a very abstract, non-specific representation of space. On the one hand, this has allowed many interpretations and utilizations of his concepts by other scholars in a range of disciplines. On the other hand, it has, in some cases, made it difficult to connect his abstract ideas to practical work experiences from the field.

According to Lefebvre (ibid. p. 11), there are three separately apprehended fields of space: The "physical" (the world of nature and the cosmos that can be defined by practical sensory activity and the perception of physical reality around us); the "mental" ("including logical and formal abstractions" as defined by philosophers and mathematicians); and the "social" (defined by social engagements). Of the three fields, Lefebvre regarded the mental space as the most dominant historically because of the historical western tradition of considering space as the abstract space of the mathematicians and scientists (ibid. pp. 38-39). Since abstract science has contributed to the explanation of many unknown phenomena across the line of history, the study of space tended to be viewed from that mathematical-scientific (positivist) perspective (ibid). Consequently, space has been viewed as an absolute, passive locus — the abstract space of scientists. Lefebvre realized that this reductionist view of space offered a very limited, hence problematic, understanding of space.

Additionally, the dominance of the mental space tends to envelop the physical and the social, leading to the marginalization of the socially-constructed nature of space (ibid. pp. 5-6); therefore, space was perceived as just the passive setting (the envelope) for our existence, rather than the structure that we help to construct (ibid). In response to this, Watkins (2005, p. 220), among others, calls for balance among the three fields of space in his paper, which introduces Lefebvre's triad into the field of organizational analysis.

In Lefebvre's (1991, p. 11-39) quest for a "unitary theory" of the three fields (physical, mental and social space), a "spatial code" that would offer some order to the interpretation of the three fields and would also allow space to be read and constructed, he assumes his conceptual double triad of perceived, conceived and lived and "its 'translation into spatial terms': spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation" (Stanek, 2011, p. 128) as explained below:

1. Spatial practice, which views space as perceived, represents the physical aspect of social practice that "secretes the society's space [...] propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interconnection; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). Thus, it represents "the material manifestation of social practices" (Thompson, 2007, p. 113), which produces the perceived aspect of space. In other words, it is the space of everyday habitual practices, including the use of our senses and hands, our body movements and our interaction with the sensory world around us (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 40). Spatial practice can also be defined as certain social practices that produce and give meaning to a space through activities that involve production and reproduction, appropriation, control, movement and utilization of space (Stanek, 2011, p. 84). Spatial practice ensures cohesion and continuity in terms of the competence and performance of each member of a society in relation to that space to allow for production and reproduction (Lefebvre, 1991, p.33). As such, spatial practice joins with the other two elements of the triad to provide the cohesion and continuity required for the everyday functions of a society (Watkins, 2005, p. 210). In the context of my research, the perceived space will

include the physical aspects of campus space and its users, delineated through the students' spatial practices.

2. Representations of space, which view space as conceived, are the mental constructions and abstract conceptualizations of space, “the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). This field produces theoretical knowledge, for example in the way space is represented in fields like mathematics, architecture, literature or philosophy. “It is the space constructed through the discourse by city planners and bureaucrats” (Chen, 2006, p. 64), who conceptualize and represent space according to their distinct disciplinary structures (Shields, 1999, p. 161). It is the space produced through epistemological and theoretical means, rather than an ontological representation of the lived experience, which also makes it the dominant space in any society (Lefebvre, 1991) as discussed earlier. This space is tied to the relations of production and constructed out of symbols, codes and signs that “allow such material practices to be talked about and understood” (Harvey, 1990, p. 218). As the conceived space represents the manifestation of mental constructions based on our rational and abstract understanding of space, this can, in the context of my research, be translated into abstract signs, codes and mental images, as well as the discursive language used by campus users and professionals to describe the campus space in my field site. It also includes spatial representations that may appear in the form of signs, maps or any sort of linguistic landscape<sup>23</sup> that links to how the Emirati female students mentally conceive and construct their learning spaces and how those spaces are represented for them.
  
3. Representational spaces or spaces of representation,<sup>24</sup> which view space as “directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the

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<sup>23</sup> The linguistic landscape includes the various uses and formation of language spatially in a public space like signs, graffiti, displayed names or advertisements.

<sup>24</sup> Some scholars like Watkins (2005) use ‘spaces of representation’ to refer to Lefebvre’s third spatial element of ‘lived space’ instead of the original translation offered by Nicholson-Smith, which used the term ‘representational spaces’.

space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39, italics in original). These refer to the social field of our mental projections and products of desire, symbols and imagination. They are considered "mental inventions [...] that imagine new meanings or possibilities for spatial practices" in our daily life (Harvey, 1991, p. 219). In other words, they are about the production of meaning; as our mental creations and imagined spaces manifest through daily spatial practices, representational spaces produce the lived space. Thus, we 'live' spaces by attributing historical, emotional, symbolic or genealogical meaning to them (Middleton, 2011, p. 7). In my research, the lived space plays a prominent role, representing the social space as the outcome of spatial practice and the representation of space, involving forms of metaphor or other tropes, and the site of spatial experiences.

Although Lefebvre's initial theorizations about space seemed to equate physical and social space with reality as opposed to the mental and theoretical space of philosophers, where space is treated as an abstract monodisciplinary concept, he later, in his triad, offered a broader definition that integrates the three through a dependent and dynamic process (1991). In this latter definition, social spaces are the lived experiences that emerge as a result of the dialectical relation between spatial practice (perceived) and representations of space (conceived) (Lefebvre, 1991; Stanek, 2011, p. 129). Lived space thus stands between the two poles of the perceived and conceived, while incorporating both (Zhang, 2005), which establishes space as more than just a passive locus of social relations. Lefebvre (1991) points out that space is fundamental to our existence; in his triad, space takes a more active role that integrates all spatial aspects rather than focusing on a particular element of space (Watkins, 2005). Lefebvre thereby transforms space from being a mental, passive locus into an active process that embodies our engagement with the world.

There has been a lot of discussion, interpretation and utilization of Lefebvre's double triad<sup>25</sup>. Despite these scholars' different focuses in applying Lefebvre's triad, they agree on the meaning of each moment (perceived, conceived and lived) and the relationship between the two triads (Stanek, 2011). I have developed my own interpretation of the triad, based on the many on-going discussions of the double triad, specifically Schmid's<sup>26</sup> (2005, cited in Stanek, 2011, p. 129) and Elden's (2004, cited in Stanek, 2011, p. 129), which integrate Lefebvre's spatial concepts of perceived, conceived and lived with the physical, mental and social fields.

At this point, it is important to note that Lefebvre developed his theories during critical historical moments and that they evolved in association with events around those moments (Middleton, 2014, p. 14). The development of his work and theories therefore needs to be understood within the context of his whole intellectual journey. This assertion about the need to contextualize his work to understand it is shared by many of the scholars who have discussed, interpreted and applied Lefebvre's double triad, notably Middleton (2014), Elden (2004a; 2004b), Shields (1999), Soja (1996) and others. For example, Stanek believes that Lefebvre's formulations of the three moments of spaces was very much influenced by his engagement with the work of the Institute de Sociologie Urbaine (ISU) in the 1960s and 1970s on the practices of dwelling (habitation) (2011, p. 81). Therefore, Lefebvre's reading on the triad, if taken per se, is not self-evident as it needs to be understood within the whole context of his life and the development of his research and published work; that is, a panoramic understanding is required of the whole intellectual terrain of Lefebvre's work (Shields, 2011; Stanek, 2011; Zhang, 2006). Soja, similarly describes Lefebvre in his life journey as a "restless intellectual nomad" who "chose space' as his primary interpretive thread and, beginning in the 1960s, insistently wove space into all his major writings" (1996, p. 7). These views, especially Soja's,

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<sup>25</sup> E.g. Middleton (2014, 2011, 2010), Stanek (2011), Zhang (2006), Chen (2006), Schmid (2005, cited in Stanek, 2011, p. 129), Watkins (2005), Shields (1999) and Harvey (1990).

<sup>26</sup> Christian Schmid discussion about the triads of space is considered the most advanced and can be found in the book *Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft: Henri Lefebvre und die Theorie der Produktion des Raumes* (2005, cited in Stanek, 2011, p. 129).

confirmed my own feelings and mirrored my initial frustrations in reading Lefebvre's work, in that his introduction to *The Production of Space* was well-organized, "solid and convincing" while the rest seemed contradictory, scattered and inconsistent with earlier arguments (ibid. p. 8). At a later stage, it occurred to Soja that Lefebvre had possibly treated his text as a "polyphonic fugue", spatializing and freeing it from the linear temporal order of introduction, body and conclusion; rather, key concepts were introduced, then changed and manipulated throughout the text (ibid. pp. 8-9). This knowledge was comforting for me in accounting for the difficulty I had encountered while trying to understand and interpret Lefebvre's work, specifically, the body of *The Production of Space*, as stated above.

Lefebvre's humanistic approach to space was also very appealing to me in terms of its role in reinstating the "individuals' and communities' 'right to space'" (Smith, 1984, cited in Shields, 2011, p. 282), the social construction and production of space, and the dialectical relation between space, society and culture. Even more appealing was Lefebvre's refusal to finalize his thesis and offer specificity, as his way of opposing and resisting the controlling forces of capitalism that dehumanise individuals and communities and flatten differences (Shield, 2011). Lefebvre's open-ended, abstract theorization has allowed many scholars to apply his theories and offer their own interpretations of them. Applying his abstract framework to a specific context like ZU Dubai Campus seemed both challenging and emancipating at the same time. On the one hand, his spatial triad did not offer a clear defined map for the study of space in its specificity for my research as its physical attributes of shape, area, colour, interior and furniture arrangements, or even the concept of gendering of spaces was discussed; in fact, Lefebvre has been criticized by Shields for failing "to understand the importance of gender roles" (1999, p. 134, cited in Middleton, 2014, p. 24). On the other hand, his abstract open-ended work allowed me the freedom to generate my own theory in the analysis to fit my unique context. Thus, although his work has been criticized as 'Eurocentric' (Middleton, 2014, p. 24), I side with Middleton among others who believe that Lefebvre's work can

be applied across contexts and disciplines as indicated by the increasing number of studies drawing on his theories and conceptualization of space<sup>27</sup>.

Lefebvre's work has provided me with a point of departure, a spatial push represented in his triad and the overarching understanding of space as a social construction, and a means to utilize space as a relational, dynamic and active product and producer of social relations. This liberating concept of space gives a new sense to the relation between the space, individuals and society that produces spatial experiences. Space influences our lived experience of the world, with every experience consisting of Lefebvre's spatial triad. The triad generates many questions and offers directions for my research into the spatial experience of learning, while also providing a more concrete definition to discuss space and understand ZU female students' spatiality, with all its codes, significations and cultural formations. However, an important point to clarify is that Lefebvre's triad only offers a point of departure for my study of space, a tentative, flexible and overarching framework to guide my methodological and analytical choices, and emerging ideas. My research findings will not be bound by any limitations or impositions created by the triad. It is intended as an inspirational and heuristic choice that offers a beginning and not an end, as will be demonstrated in my analysis (Chapters 4 and 5).

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<sup>27</sup> For a review of these studies, please see Middleton (2013, 2011, 2010), Stanek (2011), Ferrare and Apple (2010), Singh et al. (2007), Zhang (2006), Watkins (2005), and Harvey (1990).

## Chapter 3. Walking through the Methodological map: Towards a better understanding of spatial experiences

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In this chapter, I discuss my choice, development and deployment of the research methods used to explore the spatio-educational experiences of Emirati female students. This chapter consists of three sections: the beginning, the actual journey experience, and the destination. In 'The beginning', I discuss and justify my choice of a methodological route that represents the philosophical theories underpinning my choice of research methods and design frames. 'The journey' reports on the data collection techniques and the field application of the research methods. 'The destination' marks the end of data collection and the beginning of the organized analysis of findings, and includes a reflexive account. Although the three sections imply a linear organization and sequencing, the process was more of a three-dimensional cycle. In practice, throughout my journey, I moved back and forth between applied procedures, assumed theories and findings. The findings solidified my initial theories and in some cases challenged them; new ideas emerged and my route was re-adjusted several times.

Before walking through the methodological map, I want to clarify my unique positionality as an interdisciplinary educator with an architectural background carrying out social research on space. Architects are trained to imagine the physical existence of their abstract designs. I saw abstract social theories of space and research methods through my own architectural lens, which enabled me to visualize the physical existence of nonphysical concepts. The abstract is always connected to, and can be transformed into the non-abstract; therefore, I used spatial terminologies and analogies for the section titles of this chapter. I imagined myself as an explorer wandering spatially through a methodological map, trying to find the best route to follow to reach my destination. In line with this position, I also used several visual diagrams and postmodern mapping to visually materialize some of the abstract ideas.

## **The beginning: choosing a methodological route**

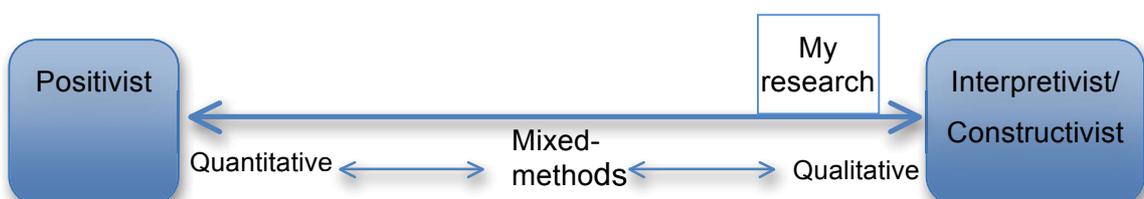
The spatial experiences of Emirati female learners are at the core of my interdisciplinary research, which aims to understand and, if possible, to enhance those experiences by exploring the role of space in a single-gender learning context. In exploring the relationship (intersectionality) between space, gender and learning, I wanted to unravel all the complex cultural formations that inform and contest the learners' spatial realities. In utilizing my borrowed theoretical framework, in part inspired by Lefebvre's triad (1991) of perceived, conceived and lived spaces, I wanted to examine the types of spaces that exist for these female learners, and their spatial needs as informed by their daily practices and spatial appropriation of the university campus.

In mapping the methodological route, I considered both interpretivist/constructivist and positivist paradigms. Although both seemed to offer ways to answer some of my research questions, each offered different methodological routes for conducting research. On an ontological level, I see the spatial experience as fluid, organic and socially constructed by individuals in myriad ways; I do not see it as determined or measurable by breaking into quantifiable elements and changing variables that I could manipulate. Researching the spatio-learning experience is more about exploring, describing and interpreting that experience within the culture and understanding the meaning that people invest in their spatial encounters. This in turn requires analysis in context, as human experience is unique and very much grounded in its particular culture (Scott, 1991). Thus, this kind of experience cannot be reduced to numbers or articulated by charts. As understanding human experience is central to interpretivism with its hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition (Mackenzi and Knipe, 2006, p. 196; Bryman, 2004, p. 14; Cohen and Manion, 1996, p. 36), I immediately felt an affinity with the interpretivist/constructivist approach.

The interpretivist/constructivist approach is both inductive and exploratory, recognizing the impact of the researcher's background on the interpretation of findings (Creswell, 2009, pp. 8-9), and recognizing the participants' view of the world. Researching my work place while working in it has offered me a unique

positionality that denied an objective dis-attachment and emphasized an active and reflexive role within my research. My own positionality as a woman, researcher, teacher, expatriate, and architect by training as well as those of the participants played a major role in my understanding and interpretation of the ‘truth’ about the female students’ spatial experiences. Creswell explains how participants’ views and reflexive accounts form an integral part of the constructivist approach (2009, p. 8); likewise, my view and interpretation were influenced and based on the “participants’ view of the situation being studied” (ibid). Therefore, I depended on both my own voice and the participants’ in creating and recreating stories; that is, we co-constructed our version of the ‘truth’ about their spatial experiences.

Within the interpretivist/constructivist approach, reality and meaning are socially constructed (Thomas, 2009, p. 75; Mertens, 2005, cited in Mackenzi and Knipe, 2006, p. 196). This assertion resonates with my theoretical framework based on postmodern social theories of space, including the social construction of space and Lefebvre’s<sup>28</sup> triad. I am also fully aware that my approach and findings, although dependent on the situation of their emergence and grounded in their cultural context, represent only one possible valid route among many other trajectories for understanding the spatio-learning experience. This assertion of multiple realities aligns with what postmodernists and, to some extent, constructivists believe: "what might be the truth for one person or cultural group may not be the ‘truth’ for another" (O’Leary, 2004, p. 6; cited in Mackenzi and Knipe, 2006, p. 3). Thus I situate myself within the postmodernist-interpretivist/constructivist approach (Figure 3.1).



**Figure 3.1:** Visual representation of my epistemological position: My research positionality within paradigms and design frames.

<sup>28</sup> Although Lefebvre comes from the Marxist tradition and is not really ‘post-modern’, his work on the production of space provides an introduction to spatial post-modern critical discourse.

Traditionally, the interpretivist/ constructivist approach is commonly aligned with qualitative methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009, p. 8; Mackenzi and Kinpe, 2006, p. 196; Thomas, 2009, p. 83) and the positivist with quantitative. My research was predominantly descriptive and interpretive in nature as the reality of the UAE culture unfolded; I had no specific hypothesis to start with, and the interpretive and inductive attributes of qualitative research were definitely appropriate to the exploratory nature of unravelling the spatio-learning experience. Therefore, in line with the above, and to address my research questions within the local context, I applied a qualitative methodological approach.

I chose ethnography as the design frame for my qualitative inquiry because the use of ethnography in this research is congruent with the characteristics of ethnographic research discussed by Creswell (2008) and Flick (2009) in their considerations of the conditions in which to conduct it. Ethnographic techniques with a focus on human observation are one of most frequently employed tools in spatial analysis (Ferrare and Apple, 2010) and in educational research. They offer multiple levels of data gathering and analysis, and are supported by the call for creativity in addressing intersectionality<sup>29</sup> (Jordan-Zachary, 2007). Ethnographic techniques also address the multidimensionality<sup>30</sup> of this research, which calls for a multi-layered research methodology that requires the researcher to simultaneously perform multiple roles in different and/or the same spaces and places over a period of time.

The type of ethnographic research I conducted was “an instrumental case study” (Creswell, 2008, p. 476). It involved studying ZU as a case study in relation to a specific issue, which was the spatial learning experience of women. An instrumental case study is usually used to illuminate an issue, which in the

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<sup>29</sup> Intersectionality in this research refers to the mutually constitutive relations among the emerging dimensions/ formations from the synthesis of space, learning and gender and how they all intersect to construct the learning experience. For a detailed account on intersectionality in relation to this research, see the discussion on intersectionality under ‘Discussion and conclusions’ in Chapter Four.

<sup>30</sup> The multidimensionality of the research is represented in the various levels and dimensions of interaction that emerge to construct the spatial experience of learners, including personal, social, cultural, academic and possibly others.

zu context is the students' experience of space and its role in enhancing or constraining their learning. To that end, my ethnographic case study involved observing and interviewing Emirati female students in higher education at ZU about their spatio-educational experiences.

In line with the characteristics of ethnographic research, the group being researched (undergraduate female Emirati students) was considered a "culture-sharing group"<sup>31</sup> (Creswell, 2008, p. 480), meaning a group of people sharing the same cultural identity of behaviour, beliefs and language. This explains the centrality of culture to this research. Since culture is "everything having to do with human behaviour and belief" (ibid. p. 428), cultural factors strongly influence the way we understand experience and interpret the world around us, including the way these students experience space. Lewis (2002) merges architecture, urban studies and geographies with cultural studies to explain spatial experiences. Although culture is one of the most complex concepts to define due to its interdisciplinary implementations (Bennett, Grossberg and Morris, 2005, p. 63; Williams, 1985, p. 83), culture is ordinary (Williams, 2000) and subjective as well as learned; the ability to experience and interpret is based on the foundations acquired by each ordinary individual to represent the vocabulary of their particular culture (ibid). As a result, the same spatial experience can be quite different if interpreted by various cultures. Therefore, the students' spatial experiences needed to be analysed in the context of the local culture for its formations to be properly determined and understood. This consideration lies at the core of the chosen interpretive approach.

However, it must also be acknowledged that, whilst on the surface all UAE female students belong to the same cultural group being explored, differences among them are acknowledged and observed. In the finding and analysis chapters (4 and 5), while exploring these women's spatio-learning experience, I offer nuanced understandings of the diversity among them and refrain from

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31 A culture-sharing group in ethnographic research "is two or more individuals who have shared behaviours, beliefs, and language" (Creswell, 2008, p. 480). It is a cultural group that the researcher describes in order to interpret its shared and learned patterns of values, behaviours, beliefs and language over prolonged periods through observation and interviews (Creswell, 2008; Creswell, 1998).

presenting a crude universal perspective. Instead, I aim at finding similarities and common patterns to support a more universal and cross-cultural understanding of the spatial experience while acknowledging diversity and individuality.

The empirical aspect of the ethnography was based on my practice at ZU teaching and exploring the spatial realities of the UAE female students. The Dubai campus (DXB) constituted what Katz (1994) calls “the field”, which is marked off in space (campus physical boundaries) and time (research duration) for my engagement with the students to happen (Geertz, 1979, cited in Katz, 1994, p. 72). Having my workplace as the research site offered me a unique positionality as both insider and outsider, and encouraged the application of ethnographic techniques as a reflexive and situated response to the research. To that end, the research involved investigating the multiple roles occupied by me as well as those by the research participants (refer to reflexive account).

In the applied part of ethnography, I moved beyond the traditional vision in anthropology of an ethnographer as the lonely researcher immersed in the culture (Fetterman, 2009; Spradly, 1980). Instead, I adopted a more contemporary approach based on the concept of multi-sitedness (Horst, 2009), which I termed ‘multi-zones’ (different places and spaces) within the site. I explored where and how students experience learning across campus within different zones. My ethnographic investigation did not include a detailed and in-depth account of each and every zone. Instead, it explored in depth the network of zones, movement across those zones, and the shared dimensions emerging from the experience of learners within and across them. The borders of the DXB are porous: like space, they extend beyond the campus gates to include the outside macro-global scale space of the desert, homes, streets, city and the world. While acknowledging that “a place is a product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny” (Massey, 2005, p. 9), practical limitations and my research questions situated my research within the physical borders of the DXB.

## The Journey: walking the methodological route

In Spring 2013, following the pilot phase, I started my fieldwork journey by pursuing the methodological route outlined in the previous section. I used multiple data collection techniques, including both static and mobile formal interviews, casual conversations, observations, class audits, explorations of local literature, and photo elicitation (Table 3.1). The following sections provide a detailed account of each data-gathering technique, including those employed in the pilot phase.

**Table 3.1:** Summary of data sources and data-gathering techniques.

Data sources	Data gathering – Type of data
Female students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observations (notes + photographs)</li> <li>- 8 static interviews (audio + notes)</li> <li>- 4 mobile interviews (audio + mapped route)</li> <li>- informal conversations (notes)</li> <li>- photographs</li> </ul>
Female graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 mobile interview (audio + mapped route)</li> <li>- photographs</li> </ul>
Male students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observations (notes + photographs)</li> <li>- 2 static interviews (audio + notes)</li> <li>- 1 mobile interview (audio + mapped route)</li> <li>- informal conversations (notes)</li> <li>- photographs</li> </ul>
Faculty / Professors (3 males and 6 females)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observations (notes + photographs)</li> <li>- 8 static interviews (audio + notes)</li> <li>- informal conversations (notes)</li> <li>- photographs</li> </ul>
Security personnel (1 male and 1 female)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observations (notes + photographs)</li> <li>- 2 static interviews (audio + notes)</li> <li>- informal conversations (notes)</li> <li>- photographs</li> </ul>

<p>Staff / Administrators (2 females)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observations (notes + photographs)</li> <li>- 2 static interviews (audio + notes)</li> <li>- informal conversations</li> <li>- photographs (notes)</li> </ul>
<p>Campus spaces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observations (notes + photographs)</li> <li>- photographs</li> <li>- sketches</li> <li>- maps</li> </ul>
<p>Others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ZU publications (e.g. catalogue, student handbook, accreditation self-study report)</li> <li>- ZU website</li> <li>- ZU events (e.g. national day, ZU clubs, health fair, career fair)</li> <li>- conference on the “UAE through its expats’ eyes”</li> <li>- literature (space and the UAE) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Emiratia: voices of Emirati women — a collection of short stories</li> <li>o The Sand Fish – a locally-written novel</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Conducting pilot Interviews and observations**

In fall 2012, after obtaining full ethical clearance from the institutional review boards (Appendix 3.1), I piloted two interviews (static and walking), and some focused observations of two zones on campus. From the piloting experience, I was able to test and further develop my interviewing and observation techniques, make better selections of observed spaces and observation posts, practice initial transcription and analysis of data, and select the most suitable audio and visual recorders. I also experienced some of the challenges and demands involved in ethnographic fieldwork, such as the amount of time and physical effort required, and how important it is to clarify my role as a researcher to certain stationed informants in some of the chosen observation posts. For example, the attitudes and cooperativeness of security personnel transformed the moment I explained my research and why I was observing the university entrance gate, in contrast to the suspicious, uncomfortable attitude I encountered from them before my explanation.

Following the piloting phase, I was better equipped to face these challenges and conduct my work more efficiently and effectively. Some of the challenges of this approach are explored in the last section of this chapter ('The destination: towards a better understanding of the self and others in the field').

### **Exploring local literature and publications**

I read local literature for any ideas about the relationship between women, culture, spatiality and education. Spradley (1980) encourages exploring the fiction of the local culture by local writers as a way of discovering cultural themes. An example of local literature includes *The Sand Fish* by Maha Gargash (2009), an Emirati writer. This novel contributed to my understanding of Emirati women's spatiality. For example, I became interested in the main character's (Noora's) relationship with her spatial environment and its link to the local culture. Her movement and changes of living place, and her confinement to specific spaces determine her spatial experiences throughout the novel. I was also interested in the way local Emirati female writers perceive, understand and thereby construct their living spaces. In this respect, Gargash offers a particularly vivid description of spaces in her novel, with strong reference to the local culture and the conceived space of the past.

I also read numerous documents and publications about the DXB and the UAE, and other publications produced by ZU's Media and Publication Department or faculty and students. These publications helped crystalize my initial ideas, enabling me to better understand the local culture and its female students. Additionally, I used some documents, for example *Emiratia: world English voices of Emirati women* (Hassall, 2010), as secondary sources for my analysis as they echoed various themes emerging from the field.

### **Auditing classes**

In spring 2013, as a major part of the fieldwork, I audited two courses across two different colleges, academic levels and classroom spaces at DXB. By 'auditing' I mean attending those classes as a regular student, partially participating in class activities while observing the learning environment and the

students' experiences within each class. It was a very rich experience in terms of data collection and personal growth but also raised some ethical issues that I will explore later in 'The space of ethics' section. To choose the audited courses, I initially targeted several courses assigned to different classroom spaces (classes with or without windows, labs, studios and so on), and with subjects of interest to me to experience learning as a student while observing as an ethnographer. In practice, however, the decisive factor for choosing the classes was finding an instructor who would allow me to audit their class. To avoid awkwardness with my colleagues, I therefore only chose from classes taught by my network of close friends and colleagues, which, although limited, was still very satisfying and valuable for the research.

The chosen classes were *Senior Project* for fourth-year Graphic Design students, and *Social and Economic Trends in the Gulf* for second-year Humanities and Social Sciences students. This allowed me to cover two different age groups in different colleges, taught in completely different spaces: one in a graphic design studio and the other in a regular classroom. After being introduced on the first day of classes by the teacher as a researcher interested in auditing and learning about the class, I attended every session throughout the semester. My role in these classes was different from the usual one (teacher/instructor); I assumed the role of a student, observer and researcher (see 'reflexive account' at the end of this chapter).

While representing an important opportunity to gain open access to the students' spaces to learn and observe, the class audits also allowed me to find volunteers for my interviews. First, I was able to observe the students' reactions and experiences within the classroom spaces as a participant observer. Second, I could experience the classroom space and learning environment myself as a student through learning in class and participating in discussions (Emerson et al., 2011). Third, I could invite students to participate in my interviews without any pressure or conflict of interest since they were not my own students.

I also attended two English Language class sessions for second-semester male students to observe their spatial behaviour and see if there were differences in how they utilized the class space compared to their female counterparts. Observing men offered an important comparative perspective that enabled me to gain better insight into how females use space.

### **Interviewing the participants**

I conducted interviews with 29 participants from the DXB (Table 3.2). It was easy to recruit volunteers for my interviews from the audited classes and through my network of ex-students and colleagues, so the number of interviews increased from a planned 21 to 29. Interestingly, I managed to recruit all the participants through verbal personal invitations only; none responded to a general email request for participation. The participants were drawn from the following groups:

- a. Undergraduate Emirati females across all colleges and specializations, including the University College (General Education Program), Education, Social Sciences, Information Technology, Communication and Media Sciences, Arts and Design, and Business. They included first, second, third and fourth year students, including a fresh female graduate, aged 18-24. They were mainly residents of Dubai with a few from the nearby emirates of Sharjah, Ajman and Al-Ain.
- b. Undergraduate Emirati males from the General Education Program. They were all second-semester students from the English Language class sessions that I observed, aged 22-23 and residents of Dubai.
- c. Male and female faculty members teaching at different levels from different colleges, including the teachers of the audited classes. Like the majority of ZU faculty, they were western-educated from different nationalities, including New Zealand, Canada, UK, US, Korea and the UAE, who had worked for ZU 2–11 years.
- d. Other campus users, including male and female security guards and administrators, who had worked at ZU 2–11 years. The administrators

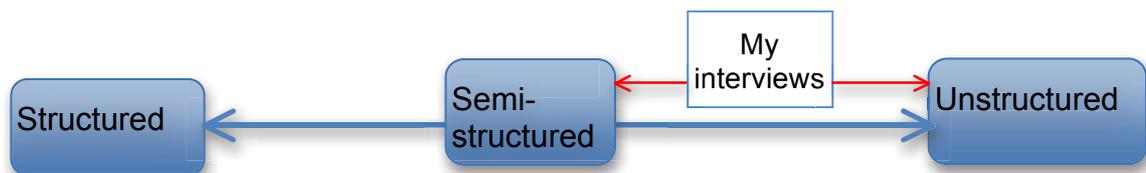
included an American female from the human resources and a Jordanian from the CPDO. The security guards included a male from Cameroon and a female from the Philippines.

**Table 3.2:** Number and type of formal interviews and interviewees.

Interviewees	Female students	Male students	Faculty / Professors	Other users (staff, security and cleaners)	Total
Number of interviewees	13 8 S 5 W	3 2 S 1 W	9 9 S 3 males 6 females	4 4 S 1 male 3 females	29

W: Walking, S: Static

All my interviews were semi-structured. I generated a list of themes and created a pool of questions structured around those themes. From the pool, I created a separate list of questions, slightly modified for each interviewee category (female students, male students, security, instructors and staff). Using questions from the pool kept me focused on my main themes and provided a degree of uniformity across interviewees. However, I also allowed myself the freedom to follow newly emerging themes and modify my questions depending on issues arising during each interview. In some cases, such as in the mobile interviews explained later in this section, the interview became completely unstructured, which is very common in ethnographic participant observations (Thomas, 2009, p. 164). This flexibility of the semi-structured approach allowed me the best of both worlds, structured and unstructured (ibid) (Figure 3.2).



**Figure 3.2:** My Interview positionality in terms of research questions.

I used in-depth, open-ended questions that were a combination of descriptive, structural and contrast types (Atkinson, 1998) (see Appendix 3.2 for the pool of questions). The entry questions I used centred on learning without directly asking about space. However, they were anchored to the spatial experience. As the interview progressed, probing questions became progressively more space-relevant, with the learning experience being explored in relation to the physical setting according to the following themes/dimensions:

- Spatio-temporal experience of the past, present and future (exploring their past starting from day one on campus, their present, and view of the future)
- Spatial boundaries in terms of access points (gates and exits)
- Spatial awareness of the users
- Types of spaces (the triad of perceived, conceived and lived, and other spaces)
- Learning spaces and pedagogies
- The role of space in learning
- Space appropriation and utilization
- Gendered spaces
- Space and cultural formations

Throughout the process, I adopted participant-centred explorations. I constantly refined and developed the questions after each interview and during observations starting from the pilot phase, keeping the focus on the spatio-learning experience to allow for the participants' personal voices to emerge. In a few of these interviews, I used visual material (pictures) of the campus spaces to trigger memories and start the conversation (Harrison, 2002).

In line with my postmodernist-interpretivist/constructivist approach, I aimed to conduct more cooperative, interactional interviews, as advocated by Rapley (2004). My responses to the participants were presented with some self-disclosure; I did not worry about my objectivity or influencing the participant. Instead, I shared stories, commented and laughed with the participants. This acknowledges the reality that "interview interactions are inherently spaces in

which both speakers are constantly doing analysis” (ibid. p. 27); they are both creating knowledge.

I conducted three types of interviews in terms of location. The first type was static interviews, which are interviews conducted in one fixed private or reflective space to allow different issues and personal stories to emerge. Participants felt comfortable and reflective in spaces like my office, and less distracted by noise and disturbances than in public areas on campus. I recorded all the static interviews, which lasted 29–140 minutes, using a high-sensitivity Sony voice recorder, and then transcribed all of them for coding and analysis. All the interviews were conducted on the Dubai campus, either at my office space if students or that of the interviewee if staff or faculty as preferred by them, except for one faculty member who preferred the university coffee shop. The audio recording of that specific interview was very difficult to transcribe due to the noise from the coffee shop environment.

The second type was mobile interviews (also known as walking interviews), which are conducted on the move while walking with the participants as a form of deep involvement in their world experience (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p. 217). In congruence with the ‘mobility turn’ in social sciences, this approach of walking and talking interviews has recently increased (Clark and Emmel, 2010, p.1; Sheller and Urry, 2006, p. 217). For example, in ‘The new motilities paradigm’, Sheller and Urry call for new research methods that are on the move to include mobile ethnography that involves itinerant movement with the participants (Sheller, 2011). Walking with the participants offered me a unique opportunity to shadow them so as to observe, experience and spatially contextualize their learning experience on campus. I managed to discover unfamiliar spots, and new ideas emerged as we passed through various places. This kind of interview lends itself to less structured interview questions that allow personal speech and memory to be evoked by the spatial positionality of the walking participant at that moment. Interestingly, the average time spent during these interviews was substantially less than that for static interviews, with one exception in the pilot phase. I learned that ZU female students are not walkers and wanderers; they prefer to sit and talk, which is a gender spatial

practice that I will further discuss in Chapter Four. I recorded all walking interviews using two high-sensitivity audio recorders, with microphones placed on both myself and the participant to ensure adequate quality of recording and eliminate background noise. The recording ensured documentation of data, as I could not take notes while on the move. However, it was still more difficult to interpret and transcribe the mobile interviews due to echo and background noises. I also mapped the route taken and took photos of spaces highlighted by the participants during the interviews.

There are many benefits for utilizing such a mobile approach to interviewing, as outlined by Clark and Emmel (2010, p. 2). It gives more power and freedom to participants, who can decide where to go and what to talk about. While on the move, we could see and experience each space in detail rather than just discuss it from memory. The participants could better articulate their thoughts because communicated events and experiences were in their spatial context, which served as visual and spatial trigger to refresh the participant's memory and trigger personal stories or discussions that might not have happened in a static interview at private space. For example, in one interview, as we passed through the library, my informant immediately recalled her dark secret place in that area, and changed her route to show me. This approach also elicited more natural discussions of contradictory or sensitive issues that spontaneously emerge while walking, instead of uncomfortably asking such questions in private. For example, passing by a particular bathroom, I could ask whether smokers and local lesbians (*'Boyat'*)<sup>32</sup> use that particular space or other hidden spots on campus. This approach also had the unique advantage of adapting to the particular participant's personal and academic life on campus to allow for more understanding of the students' perceived, conceived and lived space.

The third type, referred to as "casual conversations" by Creswell (2008, p. 483) and Thomas (2009, p. 164), includes those completely spontaneous and unstructured interviews that emerge from daily conversations and interactions between ethnographer and participants. As a participant observer on campus, I

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<sup>32</sup> See also glossary.

informally interviewed many people through my daily observations and interactions in the field. I talked to cleaners and security staff on duty, chatted with friends and colleagues, stopped and asked students occupying specific spaces, and even engaged in conversations with visitors to the campus. In fact, every conversation I had on campus, whether as a researcher, woman, teacher, observer or just member of the ZU community, represented an opportunity to better understand the students, their culture, their learning and ultimately their spatio-learning experiences. In many random and social conversations, in my official role on campus as a teacher/instructor, somebody would mention by accident an issue that was very relevant to my spatial exploration. I recorded most of those encounters as notes on my iPad and reflections following the conversation; I could not audio record them, both to allow freedom of speech, and avoid interrupting the conversation.

To collect my formal interviews (static and mobile) and casual conversations data, I used a combination of field notes taken on iPad including photos, sketches, comments and reflections before and after interviews; and audio recordings to enhance the quality of data management, as recommended by Tessier (2012).

There is no universal method of transcription; instead, researchers decide on the type of transcription and level of detail depending on several factors, including the research type and questions, analysis approach and nature of the interview (Poland, 2002, p. 640, Riessman, 2008, p. 28). Several scholars, including Poland (2002) and Riessman (2008), provide detailed accounts of the different types of transcriptions and their significance. In transcribing all of my recorded interviews, I used verbatim transcription following Poland's abbreviated set of instructions for transcribers (2002, p. 641) (Appendix 3.3). Although this method did not provide as detailed an account in some areas as those used in conversation analysis, it provided a sufficiently accurate verbatim account of the interviews, which aligned well with my research approach and the nature of the interviews. For example, I used ellipsis ('.', '..', '...') for small pauses and the word '(pause)' in parentheses for longer pauses, rather than timing each pause to a tenth of a second as in conversation analysis. In

transcribing my interviews, I also acknowledged the process of co-construction, in that both the participants and I helped create the data, as discussed by Riessman (2008, pp. 29-31). This also reflects the cooperative and interactional nature of the interviews in line with my postmodernist constructivist approach.

I made transcriptions as accurate and detailed as possible to allow for the supposedly authentic, personal voice of the participants. The interviews were conducted in English as it was the medium of instruction in classrooms and the university's official language at that time. However, since all of the interviewed students spoke English as a second language at different levels of proficiency, I told them that they were free to use Arabic whenever needed. Several considered the interview an opportunity to practice English outside the classroom in addition to engaging in a conversation about space and learning. However, they often used Arabic words from the local dialect as fillers, when they could not express themselves in English, or when they felt strongly about an issue. My proficiency in both Arabic and English therefore served me well as I was able to communicate better with participants and transcribe the interviews incorporating both languages. I also trained a bilingual (English–Arabic) student assistant to help me transcribe some of the interviews; in this I followed Poland's model while emphasizing accuracy and the cooperative nature of the interviews. When quoting from the transcribed interviews in the analysis and discussion (Chapters 5 and 6), I have kept the excerpts in their original form without tidying them or removing any fillers, interruptions or language mistakes. Although this means that some excerpts appear incoherent and hard to read, they reflect the participants' way of communication as second language speakers and their way of constructing their spatial experience. I believe this approach offers a better understanding of the participants and therefore of their spatio-learning experience, allowing readers to construct their view and understanding of the participants' spatial experiences.

### **Observing the field**

As an integral part of the ethnographic research, I conducted over 200 hours of observations of different spaces and associated artefacts around Dubai campus, including classrooms and public and semi-public areas, to see how

students learn, utilize, interact and communicate within those spaces. I conducted both participant observations of other people and reflexive 'self-observation', according to Gold's definition of the different roles of participation (1958, cited in Flick, 2009, p. 223). My research role/s included 'complete participant' when auditing classes and 'participant as observer' when teaching and observing around campus. However, the boundaries between these roles were never rigid, but fluid, trespassing into each other's terrains. While observing, it was ideal to be able to adopt these different roles whenever needed. As a participant observer conducting ethnographic research, I observed with a critical and exploratory eye the unconscious patterns of behaviour (usual daily practices) and reactions to different learning spaces to which I was already exposed as a teacher. An example of that unconscious behaviour was observing the students' habit of sitting on the floor even when chairs were available, and their constant quest for spaces of their own to mark and appropriate.

Following Spradley's (1989, pp. 33-34) recommendations, I started with greater spatial breadth by including general descriptive observations of the whole campus, before ending with more selective and focused ones of different classrooms and zones (Table 3.3). While I formally allocated 15-20 hours per week for observations (see 'Work and observation schedule', Appendix 3.4), in reality I observed for 30-35 hours as every moment working on campus offered an opportunity to observe. Initially, I sat daily for 15 minute periods in as many spaces as possible. However, I noticed that it was almost impossible for me to cover all the spaces that I wanted in one day, so I divided the campus to zones (A, B and C) and covered them over a week. Then, from these zones, I selected 3-5 spaces that I observed almost daily at more length and at different times each day for more focused observations.

**Table 3.3:** Observed spaces on campus.

<b>Space type (Zone)</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
<b>Description</b>	Characterised by intensive student use and interaction, and safety	Characterised by less use and interaction	Characterised by little use and interaction and some security issues
<b>Examples</b>	Atrium, cafeteria, coffee shops, under the library staircase prior to 2012, entrances, hallways, classrooms, PALs centre	Bookstore, gym, courtyard, gardens, small lockers area, neglected spots ('cocoon')	Bathrooms, elevators, empty spaces, parking lots and the administrative building

My choice of spaces to observe and length of stay in those spaces varied depending on the types of activities and the possibilities offered in them at the time of the observations. I would stay longer in specific spaces when an interesting interaction occurred and on an as-needed basis. I remember spending at least 90 minutes a day at the university gates, where I became fascinated by the different scenes and interactions that I had never noticed before beginning my field observations. For more focused observations, I would dedicate the full day to a particular space to cover all possible situations, or during specific events like the ZU carnival day. Some of the spaces in the zones, which I termed 'hot spaces', seemed to offer particularly interesting patterns of interaction and spatial appropriation. For example, students seemed to favour some places more than others, and they would reconstruct their functions once they started using them for a purpose different than the one initially designed for. For example, the area under the library staircase seemed to be favoured by many female students for relaxing, social gathering and individual naps. It seemed more like a private sanctuary ('cocoon') than a public staircase; even the casual passers felt as if they were invaders of that space, and preferred using other library entrances, as I discuss further in Chapter Four under 'Cocooning'.

I structured all my observations and record-taking in the field around the nine elements recommended by Spradely (1980, p. 78; Flick, 2009, p. 228) for observational purposes. These constitute the basis of what he refers to as 'grand tour' and 'mini tour' descriptive observations, which include descriptions

of the space, actors, activity, objects, acts, events, time, goals and feelings. These nine elements seemed to intertwine in a lot of the observed scenarios. Therefore, I used them only as a framework, focusing on some more than others, specifically those about space and learning activity. For example, I would describe the actors, activities, emotions, objects and events within a particular space, then consider how each one organised and influenced, or was influenced by, that space. For note-taking I depended exclusively on my iPad, using the 'Notability' application, as it allowed typing, handwriting, sketching, photography and audio recording (Alzeer, 2014).

### **Participating in campus events and activities**

Full immersion in campus activities constituted a major part of my ethnographic experience. Being part of the ZU community offered me a unique opportunity as a researcher to attend and fully participate in many campus activities and events. Examples included celebrating UAE national day, ZU clubs day, ZU carnival, health fair, career fair, and many other individual events with guest speakers. Participating allowed me to observe students' interactions, appropriation of spaces and learning experiences beyond their classrooms and daily routines on campus. For example, on the carnival days, the usual atrium space and courtyard are completely transformed into a different space to accommodate a new purpose. Students run booths with different shapes and colours installed in the atrium, from which they sell crafts or home-made food. In addition, many atrium zones are redesigned for student-centred activities, including a stage and a number of cafes and restaurants. On these days, as an architect and someone familiar with the campus, I was immediately able to spot changes in the space's usual appearance and functions. Thus, seeing the unusual spatial practices on those days has enhanced my understanding of the usual.

### **Taking and using photographs**

I took over 200 photographs of the field during my ethnography. These included the different observed campus exteriors (physical structure, landscapes, entrances, parking) and interiors (classrooms, hallways, elevators, cafeterias, library, atrium, artefacts, and so on), as well as the participants while interacting

with and within the campus space. These photographs constitute an important aspect of my analysis in helping others visualize and better understand students' spatiality and the research context. The use of photographs has always been a common method of data collection in anthropology and sociology, even preceding the visual turn in the social sciences triggered by postmodernism (Riessman, 2008, p. 142). When Suzan Bell (2008) reflected on her experience of researching women's experience with illness by attending only to words and ignoring photographs, she wondered how much their experience could have been better understood and how much she had missed, realising "how fuzzy the line is between image and word" (ibid. p. 143). As visual representations, photographs are forms of communication that can even "precede words in human development and continue to communicate meaning through the life course" (ibid. p.141). Les Back (2007) elaborates on how photographs need to be listened to with the eye as their voices are inaudible but seen, representing human and spatial presence. In such an ethnographic study that aims to understand students' spatio-learning experience, I agree with Riessman that "[v]isual representations of experience-in photographs [...] can enable others to see as a participant sees, and to feel" (2008, p. 142); and with Rich that, with photographs, we can make "statements [...] that cannot be fully made with words" (2002, cited in Bell, 2008, p. 144).

It is important to point out that I do not apply visual analysis to these photographs. My incorporation of photographs here is purely based on a realist epistemology, as images were not included in my interpretation of the students' spatial experience; instead, they illustrated it, providing evidence in the form of visual representation of emerging spatial themes and observed interactions, which is similar to what is referred to as 'documentary photography' (Riessman, 2008, pp. 142-143). This position is also in line with the "hermeneutics of restoration" approach (Josselson, 2004) in interpreting the interviews, in that the participants' views are taken as communicated by them without looking for hidden meanings. The same argument applies to photographs that only illustrate the obvious without looking for hidden meanings. Although interpreting the photos while looking for hidden meaning is an interesting analytical (or

psychoanalytical) approach, it is beyond the scope of this study, perhaps constituting an area for future analysis.

### **Photo elicitation**

Photo elicitation involves showing participants pictures or photographs relevant to what is being studied to trigger memories and elicit responses to a particular issue (Harrison, 2002). As an alternative approach to the traditional question-answer interview, it focuses on “using photographs to guide interviews and ask questions about social, cultural, and behavioural realities” (Suchar, 1997, cited in Bell, 2008, p. 144). This approach has been used by many researchers, such as Gills et al. (2000, p. 191), who used it to elicit responses from men on their views of the male body and its representation in popular culture.

In five of my interviews, I used photo elicitation by showing participants photos of campus spaces, classrooms and artefacts from the walls to trigger memories and provide a starting point for the participants’ spatial experience stories. This revealed aspects of their conceived and lived space when they communicated their feelings and perceptions of the space and its influence on their learning experiences. I primarily resorted to this technique when I felt that the interviewee needed a trigger or a reminder of a specific space, although I also used it when I felt that the pictures could visually support and complement my verbal questions about spaces.

### **Analysis**

While data analysis generally consists “of three concurrent flows of action: data reduction, data display, and conclusions and verification” (Berg, 2007, p. 47), the approach utilized in these concurrent actions differs widely. Various approaches are used in analysing qualitative data, most of which are “complex and nuanced” (Holloways and Todres, 2003, cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 78), including grand theory, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, narrative analysis, thematic analysis and more. These analytical frameworks in turn are dependent on the design frame, research questions and the type of data obtained.

In analysing my qualitative data, I mainly conducted thematic analysis of the emerging spatial themes following Braun and Clarke's approach (2006), with some analysis of spatial positioning. Thematic analysis depends on identifying patterns (themes) within data (ibid. p. 79). It involves: first, becoming familiar with the data through transcription and continuous reading and re-reading; second, generating initial codes by coding interesting ideas across the data sets; third, starting to look for themes by grouping similar codes; fourth, reviewing themes by checking for consistency and similarity among them; fifth, clearly defining and naming the main themes, sixth; producing a written report by presenting the themes supported by examples and extracts (ibid). Accordingly, I coded all my data, including interview transcriptions, observation notes, photos and other sources of data (Table 3.1), based on resonances among them across spaces and participants and along the emerging themes. I used Nvivo to code my data, creating 58 codes across my datasets. I then reduced and grouped them into fewer main themes, eventually ending with four mega-themes. I also utilized domain analysis to identify cultural domains, which is considered the first step in ethnographic analysis by Spradley (1980, pp. 85-100). "A cultural domain is a category of cultural meaning that includes other smaller categories" (ibid. p. 88). Classifying and establishing different cultural and spatial domains was crucial in crystalizing, grouping and reducing the coded data into the four main (mega) themes and the rich discussion of these findings.

Since I was applying the concept of multi-zones, partially inspired by multi-sitedness ethnography such as Horst's (2009), I tried to identify shared experiences and similar spatial patterns across the network of different zones on campus, without focusing on any one particular space. During this process, in line with my postmodernist-interepretivist/constructivist epistemological position, my own and my participants' voice and positionality played a major role; it was I who was interpreting and presenting the data, but it was the voice of the participants that I depended on to construct the spatial experience.

In interpreting the communicated interview data, I assumed what Ruthellen Josselson (2004, p. 5-12) and Ricoeur (1970, cited in Josselson, 2004, pp. 5-

12) call the “hermeneutics of restoration”. In this approach, the analyst/ethnographer restores the meaning of the message and accepts it as given by the participants without looking for any hidden or unsaid words, in contrast to the “hermeneutics of demystification”, which takes a more psychoanalytical approach by looking for disguised meaning that needs to be unearthed and decoded (Josselson, 2004, pp. 5-12). While the hermeneutics of restoration trusts that the symbols are a manifestation of the depths inside, the hermeneutics of demystification is skeptical of such symbols (ibid). Like many other researchers who favour this approach, I felt less comfortable with the psychoanalytical framework associated with demystification, particularly the authority given to the researcher to re-author the meaning of the participants’ stories (ibid. pp.15-16). My belief in the hermeneutics of restoration is also reinforced by the role of the interpreter in this approach in highlighting the meaning that is present in the participants’ communications. As an ethnographer, I saw the participants as experts on their own experience, while seeing myself trying to understand, illuminate and present this experience to the world, since “the task of the ethnographer is not to determine ‘the truth’ but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others’ lives” (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 4). Therefore, in addition to my own observations, I depended on the voice of the participants to construct their spatial experience from their stories and conversations. This approach also further emphasises the reflexive voice of the researcher. That is, the researcher’s acknowledgement and understanding of how his/her positionality influences the way data is presented and the participants are understood becomes central to the hermeneutics of restoration (Josselson, 2004, p. 11) and to my approach in interpreting and analysing the data, as explained above.

### **The Destination: towards a better understanding of the self and others in the field**

In this section I reflect on my research journey and positionality, and discuss some of the ethical challenges faced.

## **Reflexive account**

As a participant observer in ethnographic research, I kept a reflexive account (Delamont, 2004) throughout my research journey. My unique positionality as both insider and outsider researching my work place, while playing multiple roles (formal and informal) proved to be both a blessing and a curse. As an insider, I already knew the field and many of my key informants who were interested in what I was doing and willing to help. I also was a familiar face with free access to the university's secure campus. This allowed me more legitimate freedom on campus to observe without raising suspicion. Nevertheless, although I was not a stranger, occasionally, I could not avoid getting curious looks from students when sitting in a place that was not commonly accessed by faculty members. On these occasions, I would often engage in an activity to justify my presence while observing for few minutes without raising suspicion, such as using the vending machines for a drink. I could also take photographs of campus spaces using my iPad while walking to lunch or between lectures, since using it seemed completely normal in an environment where many faculty members and new students were given iPads to use as a learning tool. I was also easily able to secure volunteers to interview and classes to audit through my connections on campus. The faculty who gave me permission to audit their classes or be interviewed were willing to support me as a colleague they recognised and trusted. My insider status also saved me time and effort in the initial stages of the ethnography when I had to learn about the context and site.

On the other hand, I gradually realized the challenges and difficulties imbued in having to work in the "difficult and inherently unstable space of betweenness" (Katz, 1994, p. 67) as both insider and outsider. I faced many challenges from an ethnographic point of view due to my familiarity with the campus prior to starting my fieldwork. This had some influence on my perspective, which was therefore not being constructed at the beginning of the ethnography but existed in fragments long before starting my research. Many researchers, such as Flick (2009), Fetterman (2009), Delamont (2004), and Spradley (1980), caution ethnographers about the challenges associated with observing an already familiar site. In fact, Geertz (1979) and others advise researchers to leave the field the moment it all becomes too familiar. Being aware of that, I made great

efforts to remain prepared to deal with those anticipated problems, to start with a fresh and critical look at everything that appeared familiar at that time.

Being both an insider and outsider is also reflected in my positionality as a half Arab, half Western woman, creating both privileges and limitations when dealing with female participants within the UAE's cultural context. Emirati students saw me as a close, trustworthy female faculty who spoke their language and knew a lot more about their culture than other western faculty members, which made them comfortable opening up in sharing their stories and spatial experiences. They felt less judged while revealing practices they believed westerners would usually criticize, such as explaining the importance of their national dress and covering up, often using expressions like "You know miss...", "You understand...". I could also detect which issues affected them emotionally or not; I could easily identify, understand and justify several of their spatial practices in relation to their culture. Nevertheless, I was not really a complete insider; I was partly an outsider with a different value system, education and life experience, which is a combination of Western and Middle Eastern. I was born in Europe to a liberal family with an Arab father and European mother, where I lived part of my childhood before moving to the Middle East. I completed my undergraduate studies in the Middle East and graduate studies in the West, then moved to live and work in North America before settling in the UAE with my own family. I am also, as mentioned earlier, a trained architect with a social science education doing interdisciplinary research and teaching subjects in social sciences in higher education. Thus, I was able to analyse and interpret students' spatial experiences by utilizing the intersectionality of my multiple roles and positions as well as my cultural and academic background, which constitutes who I am as an individual (scholar, academic, architect, social scientist, teacher, woman, mother, colleague, friend, Westerner, Arab, and possibly more). While not an Emirati woman, I understood a lot about them. Yet, although I could justify a lot of their spatial practices from this position, I did not associate myself with such practices or feel that they resonated with my own. Rather, I realize that my understanding of their experiences was interpreted and analysed through what I like to see as a kaleidoscope of multiple lenses and filters representing my multicultural,

academic and interdisciplinary background. It was quite a powerful experience to have both an insider view yet also be able to utilize an outsider's status, taking the best of both worlds. At the same time, I was also aware of my biases and limitations. My position carries the burden of realizing the interpretive power I held as a researcher in authoring their stories, which I further elaborate under the 'Space of ethics'. This brings me back to the point that my findings represent only one of many possible trajectories for understanding Emirati females' spatiality, in line with my postmodernist constructivist/interpretivist approach, which acknowledges the existence of multiple realities to the truth.

Prior to fieldwork, my daily spatial practices were limited to a few spaces on campus, such as my office, assigned classrooms, favourite route across campus and the cafeterias. Occasionally, I would also access the library or visit a colleague's office. I would selectively choose those places that appealed to my inner architect, avoiding others that were visually distracting or unpleasant. However, my fieldwork expanded and completely transformed these practices. Instead, I practised full immersion in campus life, being on campus daily from 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and sometimes till 7:00 pm. When I was not teaching or doing office hours, I was constantly moving around campus spaces and observing. This increased spatial exposure was both illuminating for my research and beneficial to me as a teacher, as I became more aware and involved in campus activities. However, it also had its disadvantages; I became more visible to many students and faculty members. Being an insider, I was constantly stopped by students, colleagues and staff to inquire about work or socialize, which was extremely disruptive and annoying at times when I was observing and somebody just wanted to chat with me. With time, I learned to shorten these conversations and apologize in order to go back to my observations. I also tried to better select my observation posts where I could see without being so visible. Alternatively, I just avoided eye contact by immersing myself writing on my iPad, which worked with colleagues, who would pass without engaging me, but did not succeed with students.

My most interesting reflections and challenges came from the audited classes. As a participant observer, I was often very interested and became so involved

in class discussions that I would forget to observe what was happening around me in the class. The challenge I faced from the start was that students never considered me as just another peer; they all knew and were influenced by my formal role on campus as an instructor. I was thus immediately positioned as someone who knows more about the subject but is not grading them. They definitely accepted my presence and utilized it for their advantage. For example, I became their source of information when they were not comfortable asking the teacher, and I was often emailed and asked for information or to help in their projects, like providing sources, offering my views or criticising their work. This was also the case with the teachers, who, to some extent, perceived me as their teaching assistant. On several occasions, they asked me to cover their classes when on a conference, and I was asked to offer my expertise on project ideas and discussions, even being invited to participate in grading projects. Initially, I was very concerned about the way I was perceived by the students as I did not want to assume any role of authority. However, with time, my role transformed and took on its own shape. I observed, learned, participated, and helped the students and teachers, embracing my presence in these classes.

Auditing these classes was an emotional rollercoaster as I became really attached to the students; somehow, I felt personally responsible for their successes and failures in the class, which was not a role I was happy assuming. I became too invested in their educational experience; I wanted to be there for them when presenting or being examined; I wanted them to perform well on their projects, and even shared data relevant to their work. That emotional load was very exhausting. In one of the audited classes, the teacher was sharing with me her concern and puzzlement about how her morning class was doing much better than the afternoon class I was auditing. I remember feeling immediately concerned that maybe my presence could have somehow influenced the class dynamics and led to this underperformance. I knew that both classes studied the same subject, were taught by the same teacher and had good students. I therefore started observing both classes out of curiosity and concern. After four class sessions, I developed some ideas that I shared with the teacher. There were many variables, but one of them, to my

satisfaction, was that the classes had two very different spaces that allowed for different types of spatial utilization and social dynamics. Although my emotional involvement in the classes did not subside, I learned to balance observations with participation and support for the class.

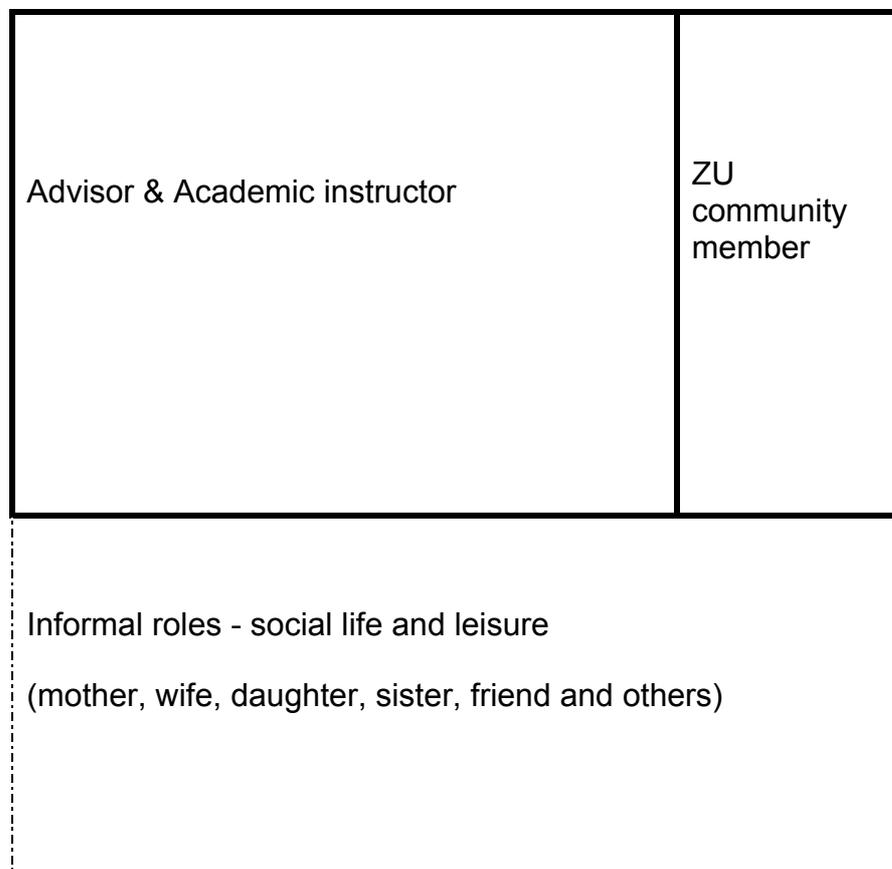
What I gradually realised during my journey were the multiple roles I assumed and their powerful influence on my research. I was an educator, with an architectural background conducting interdisciplinary research that involved social sciences, space and architecture, learning as well as culture and women. These roles were often in conflict with each trying to dominate. I often felt a strong urge to be just an architect, social scientist, educator or just student researcher. As an architect, I found it difficult at times to assume the role of social scientist because my senses have been trained to observe space in its particulars and physical characteristics rather than viewing it as abstract and socially determined. At the same time, unlike the majority of social scientists, I was not challenged by the material aspect of space and could always see beyond its abstract conceptualizations into its physical manifestation, including that of the imagined. This explains my initial struggle to grasp Lefebvre's abstract conceptualization of space as I tried to visualize the material manifestation of the triad on the ground as applied to my field. However, this struggle inspired my conceptualisations of 'hot' and 'cold' lived spaces (see Chapter 5) as I came to understand the link between architecture, social sciences and education better. This taught me that I could not ignore the power of interdisciplinarity; for instance, it was enlightening to see social interactions from an architectural or pedagogical perspective and vice versa. As my architectural, educational and social science lenses interacted, I developed my senses to observe through an interdisciplinary lens, where space (whether abstract or in its material form), learning, social interactions and culture are connected, and equally valid.

### **Rhetorical and spatial analysis of positionality in this research**

As evident from the above account, I assumed multiple roles, both formal and informal, while doing my ethnography. The following section represents a spatial and rhetorical account of these roles. To illustrate the multiple positions

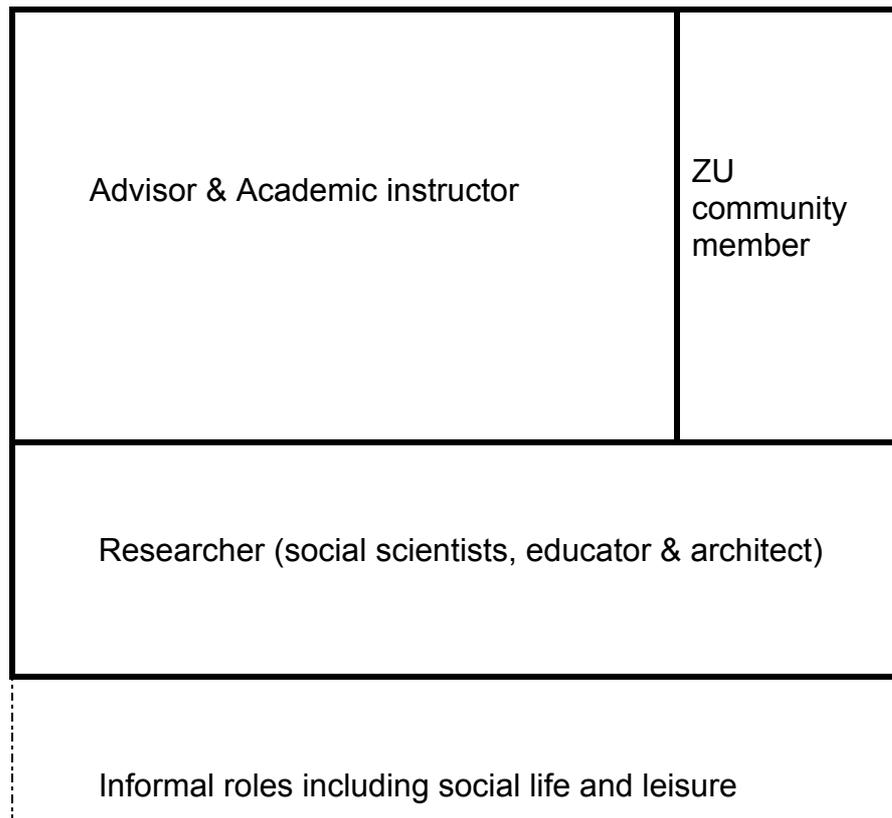
assumed within the time frame of my research I used a schematic map. This way of presenting my positionality was partially inspired by postmodern mapping (Porter et al., 2000; cited in Mumpower, 2007) and preferred by my inner architect: I like to materialize and give a physical existence (representation) to abstract concepts. The roles assumed are mentioned inside each box and the size of each box represents the amount of time and responsibilities dedicated to that role. That is, the more time-consuming the role was, the larger the box space.

The following Figure 3.3 illustrates my two professional roles prior to enrolment as a PhD student in 2011. These two formal roles involved being an advisor and academic instructor as well as an active member of the ZU community. My community membership involved serving on several committees at college, and university level. I also had informal roles in my leisure and private life outside the work place. Although I tried to balance both formal and informal, formal work consumed at least 60% of my time.



**Figure 3.3:** Researcher's position prior to 2011.

Between 2011 and 2013, following my enrolment in the PhD program, I assumed the role of researcher in addition to my two formal roles on campus. This stage preceded my fieldwork, and included the literature review and research planning. At this stage, my role as a teacher was more time-consuming than being a researcher (Figure 3.4). This new role as a researcher consumed very little formal work time but most of my informal time.



**Figure 3.4:** Researcher's position from 2011-2013.

In Spring 2013, I started the fieldwork. Apart from the duties of my formal roles, including teaching, office hours and committee work, I fully dedicated myself to data gathering (field observations, auditing classes, interviewing and photographing), which was equivalent to 15–20 hours per week. During that period, I was spending more time on research than anything else (Figure 3.5). As I intensified my research work, the informal roles in my private life and leisure almost disappeared, except for my role as mother and wife. Leisure, personal time and social life became almost non-existent for me.

Teacher	ZU community member
Researcher (field work)	Student
Informal roles — mother and wife	

**Figure 3.5:** Researcher's position in Spring 2013 — Fieldwork.

The following summarises the multiple formal roles assumed during my research period:

1. Academic advisor
2. Educator, a role that continued before and after my research
3. Committee member for the college and university community
4. Researcher – participant observer; a role inclusive of being an architect, educator and social scientist

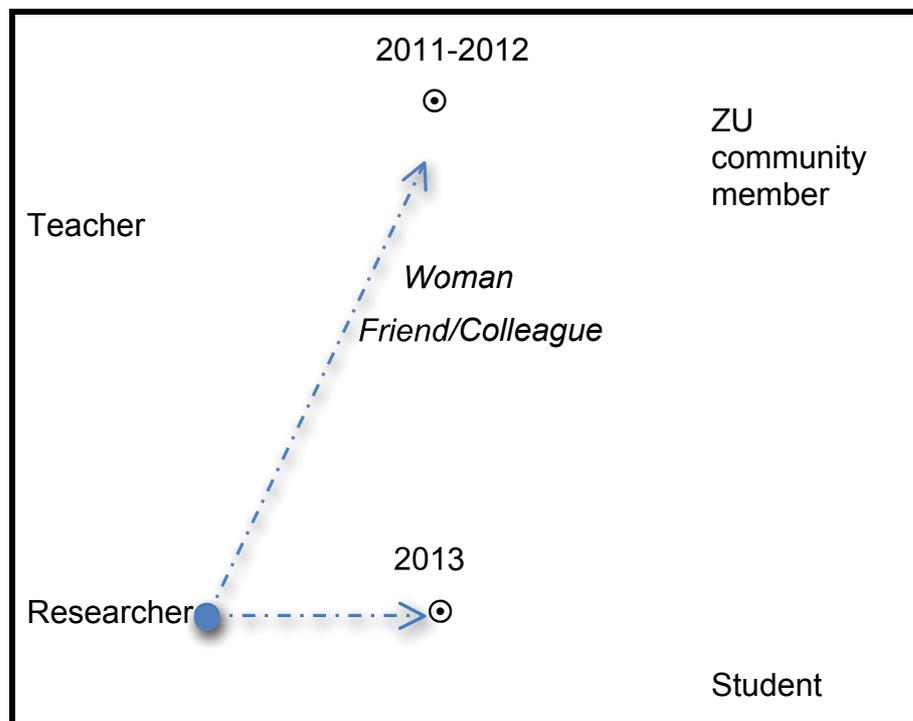
I also had other semi-formal roles that were extremely important and influential in my research:

- 1- Woman, a western-educated expatriate woman in a conservative campus environment
- 2- Friend and colleague to many faculty and staff members

In practice, there were no clear boundaries between the different roles I assumed. While interviewing a participant, I could also be giving advice as a teacher or sharing personal issues as a friend. While teaching, I could be observing the space and questioning its role in learning. As an architect, I could

be criticizing or admiring a space or selectively rearranging a class. Often, my duties as a committee member would intersect with my teaching and research activities, while my role as a woman would influence all my other roles. It felt like a three-dimensional web of connectivity and interdependence. As a researcher, I found this both extremely beneficial and exhausting, as I had to be constantly present and fully aware of those roles, even during my main rest time on campus at lunch.

Figure 3.6 represents all my formal roles in relation to time, showing by proximity the position assumed within a specific period and how it changed over time. For example, I was more of a researcher in 2013 than I was in 2012.



**Figure 3.6.** Temporal shift of roles.

The above analysis indicates that issues of my own positionality (as woman, advisor, researcher, teacher, expatriate and architect by training) as well as those of the participants have definitely played a major role in my understanding and interpretation of the female students' spatial experience, which is in line with the postmodernist approach adopted here.

## **The space of Ethics**

In this section, I provide an account of the ethical challenges and moral concerns encountered in practice while doing my fieldwork.

As an institutional condition prior to practicing my fieldwork, I obtained ethical clearance from the two institutions involved in my study: Zayed University and the University of East London (Appendix 3.1). Initially I thought that obtaining these ethical clearances would cover most major ethical concerns, However, I discovered through practice that it did not. Although the literature spoke to some of my conflicts, it did not solve them, as each field offers its unique ethical challenges. As a researcher working daily in the field, I was constantly “faced with conflicting values and a wide range of possible choices” (Spradley, 1980, p. 20).

One major challenge I faced was the complex involvement and considerations of multiple parties with different value systems. As a PhD student at UEL researching my work environment at ZU I had to adhere to, balance and operate among different guidelines and principles. First were those of UEL as a British institution with its western values and regulations. There were also those of my advisors, who mostly held western values and operated within UEL’s system. Those also guided the theoretical framework and the literature expected to be covered prior to the study, which was mostly western literature written by westerners in a western context.<sup>33</sup> Second were the guidelines and principles of ZU with its American teaching approach and western administrative framework at that time. However, the ZU system also acknowledged the local leadership and was expected to adhere to the local culture and values. Third were those of my participants and the local conservative patriarchal culture, which is currently being modernized and constantly exposed to globalization. Finally, there was my own diverse value system as a researcher, teacher, woman, friend and colleague who has

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<sup>33</sup> Although I was not limited to western literature and was advised by my supervisors to read other Islamic or relevant literature there was nevertheless implicit pressure to cover the literature that was familiar to my supervisors and the examination committees within UEL.

emerged from a western-eastern background and life experiences. This aspect of conflicting parties was acknowledged and clearly articulated in the preamble of the 'Principles of professional responsibility' adopted by the American Anthropological Association (1971; cited and quoted in Spradley, 1980, p. 20-25). As part of this challenge, I had to submit two western-oriented ethical clearance applications, initially created based on the needs and the history of research in western institutions. My concern was that both applied western ethical standards for researching in a collective, tribal, Muslim, conservative culture. In some cases, I had to adhere to specific standards required by the ethics committees, although these were meaningless in the local culture, which made such requirements appear to be a direct application of ethical universalism in exporting western ethical values into such a different context. Specifically, I had to acknowledge issues of individuality and individual privacy as required in western culture despite being aware that many local female students would not only not mind talking in the presence of their female peers, but would even prefer talking while with others. In the UAE, individuality is less valued and privacy between collective friends is not practiced as much as in western societies. I remember one casual conversation when one student, in telling me about her social and academic difficulties, was revealing sensitive private information about coalitions, social groups and cliques forming in her class, and how she thought the teacher had favourites. At that moment, she called her friend who was passing by and asked her to confirm what she was saying. This was very interesting to see as a demonstration of their collective voice and identity compared to the notion of individuality in western societies. My experience with this reinforced my support for an ethics-in-context approach (Riessman, 2005, p. 473). I had to be aware of the difference between my own value system, that of the participants, as articulated by Spradley (1990, p. 20), and the ones required by 'western' ethical committees. This led to constant re-evaluation of my decisions to weigh them against all these value systems. I had to be culturally, socially and politically correct and aware of these differences, and to put the interest of the participants above all.

I discovered that an important aspect of privacy among UAE female students involves their level of trust in the researcher. As a female researcher and

instructor at ZU, it was easier for me to bond with the students. I was really proud of the fact that students trusted me and wanted to reveal private information. Establishing trust between the researched and the ethnographer is considered “a treasure” by Fetterman (2011, p. 146) to be cherished and maintained. UAE female students did not mind speaking about very private and intimate details as long as they recognised me as a trusted female and as long as they remained unidentified to the outside male community. Their bodies are sacred in their culture and religion, so photographs of them needed to be edited to hide their faces and bodies. Whenever I asked for permission to photograph a group around campus (as required by my ethical clearance), the majority consented but veiled their faces. However, the more they came to know me, the less private they became; some of my ex-students and others from the audited classes held nothing back during their interviews, so our conversations went from space and learning to complaints about other teachers and peers and even to private affairs. I became ethically concerned at this development as I felt that they were confusing my role as a researcher with that of a trusted female teacher belonging to their collective circle of trust. Once trust was established, they did not care in the least about ethics committees or consent forms. Indeed, none of the students I interviewed knew what ethical clearance and informed consent were, and when I explained, it did not seem to matter. They were just willing to help, and some enjoyed the attention of being invited for an interview. This kind of trust, lack of interest in and ignorance of the whole meaning of consent created a significant ethical burden for me. Specifically, I wondered whether, in this case, sharing some of their private stories despite keeping their anonymity was a breach of that confidentiality. Thus, I can fully relate to Lykes’ statement that “the participant both makes her/himself vulnerable in sharing his/her story and has no real control over how the researcher reconstructs that story” (1989, p. 177; cited in Reissman, 2005, p. 475). It is very difficult for participants to realize that we researchers hold an interpretive authority in the final analysis that they might not like (Josselson, 2004, p. 20).

During my fieldwork, I often felt that I was taking advantage of my unique positionality as an existing member of the ZU community. The privileges I had

due to that positionality as an insider offered me free access to the field while creating feelings of invasiveness, as if I were prying into students' personal and private spaces. Almost all ethnographers who write about ethics, notably Spradley (1980 pp. 20-25), Fetterman (2010), Davies (2008), and Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), agree that researchers, specifically ethnographers, "often pry into people's innermost secrets, sacred rites, achievements, and failures" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 133). However, observing all kinds of spaces and places, public and private, was crucial for my research to explore the spatio-learning experience and produce a valid account of that experience. I witnessed many private moments, being present at moments of rest, when students were joking, laughing, gossiping or even fighting. Although many observations happened in open public spaces on campus, I knew students used them as their own private spaces. The majority of female students cannot leave campus until their classes end, which means a long day on campus from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 pm. This limited spatial mobility thus made them more vulnerable to observation in that they had to use those spaces as personal and private spaces of their own; no alternatives existed. Therefore, it was never clear what was or should have been considered private or public; students would use public places such as the atrium and library for private acts of sleeping or private conversation with loud voices. They would also take sanctuary inside small alcoves just off the public hallways (see 'Cocooning' and the discussion on public-private in Chapter 4). This was both exciting for me to see as a researcher and ethically concerning at the same time. At these moments, I felt that revealing those spatial experiences by making the private public was not only an invasion of privacy but could also expose them to problems with the administration of the campus physical facilities. This in turn might give the administration more power over them, thereby creating another ethical implication (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 211).

In the audited classes, I found myself in a delicate situation where I had to balance my loyalty to the students and the trust they invested in me with that of the class teacher. In these classes, I managed to establish trust and bond with many students, yet at the same time I had very close relations with the teachers. Gradually, some students started opening up to me, revealing issues

and concerns about their level of understanding, criticism of the teachers' methods and some dissatisfaction in the way they were being treated. They also talked about difficulties they encountered in their work groups, with some even sharing personal issues at home. At these moments, especially when students from the audited classes complained about teaching styles or had pedagogical concerns, I felt torn between my relation with them and the teachers. Both teachers were two of the most dedicated and competent professors I knew; they constantly adapted their teaching styles to accommodate the needs of the students and were fully invested in their role as educators. However, the students were not communicating their needs and concerns. Once, one teacher shared with me her concern about the students' underperformance and lack of commitment; I tried indirectly to advise her based on what I had heard from students while at the same time encouraging those students to directly contact her and voice their concerns. I found myself in a very awkward position, as it was a simple communication gap. Nevertheless, although I could have easily communicated their difficulties to the teacher, I could not betray their trust. Ethically, I felt both obligated to do something since I knew what the problem was, and restrained by confidentiality constraints.

Regarding all of the above ethical concerns, I adopted the position of overt researcher with what Hammersley and Atkinson call "ethical situationism" (2007, p. 219). This position involves revealing information to participants to gain their informed consent according to the situation and as a matter of judgment in context. I refrained from full disclosure at times when I felt it would be counterproductive to the research while ensuring that no harm came to the participants. For example, if I had told the students in the audited classes that I was going to observe every move they made in class in relation to space, I believe that they would have become very self-conscious and uncomfortable. Instead, I told them that I was interested in space and its relation to learning and that I would be researching the way they used and utilized space. Although I played the role of overt participant, it was not possible to avoid concealing some details and information (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 211). For example, it was impossible to inform every member of the community about my

research so informed consent was used mostly with the participants I had direct contact with for the interviews and not with every person observed on campus.

Ethically, in every ethnography, the ethnographer is responsible for offering something in return to the participants (Fetterman, 2011, p. 147). That could be any type of services offered to the community being observed, such as sharing the findings of data or even the simple action of helping an elderly person cross the street. I felt great satisfaction from my level of involvement and the support I offered to the students and teachers of the audited classes as discussed under my reflexive account. I am also planning to disseminate my findings in college seminars to my colleagues in addition to the many individual conversations and data sharing ideas I have already had with them while in the field.

Ultimately, what all ethnographers call for is to do no harm to the investigated culture and participants by respecting their rights and trying not to desecrate the culture. Respecting the social environment ensures not only the rights of the participants but also the integrity of data as “[n]oninvasive ethnography is not only good ethics but also good science” (ibid. p. 133). Despite my conviction that it is important to respect the social environment, I do not believe that absolute non-invasive ethnography is possible. Just being present in the field with the intention of studying it, asking questions and letting participants know about our role, immediately leaves a footprint on that culture. Therefore, I think the ethical dilemmas we face become a matter of how severe our footprint is and whether the benefit of what we are doing outweighs that footprint. I would like to believe that it did in my case; my presence in the field teaching while doing my research has definitely enhanced people’s awareness of space and its possible utilization for learning. Although I believe I left a minimal footprint, this will always be a question that I cannot fully answer.

After mapping the methodological route of my study in this chapter, I move in the next one to analysis by describing, interpreting and discussing the themes and dynamics of the spatial experiences I encountered.

## Chapter 4. Spatiality: engaging with and appropriating space

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In this chapter and the next, I introduce and map the female students' emerging spatial themes from their daily practices while appropriating the university campus. As space is such a complex concept, various themes and ways of grouping them emerged; indeed, the more I looked into my data, the more themes and ideas surfaced, offering new possibilities of grouping and alternative ways of analysing them. These themes also constantly intersected and intertwined, melting and trespassing into the terrains of one another, increasing the complexity of the experience. To deal with such complexity, I was first guided by my epistemological position that acknowledges the existence of multiple realities and interpretations of data while giving voice and primacy to the participants' views and acknowledging my own positionality. A second guide was my theoretical framework of Lefebvre's triad and other social theories of space that view it as a social construction. This led me to group the most influential spatial themes and subthemes into four 'mega themes'/headings: 'Understanding spaces', 'Students' spaces within and beyond the triad', 'Engaging with and appropriating space', and 'Negotiating and contesting spaces' (Figure 4.1). In 'Understanding spaces', I focus on the students' spatial awareness and perceptions of the university space/s, which in turn link to the physical attributes of space, as most of the students' comments about space were associated with their observing aspects such as colour, lighting, size, distance and proxemics, artefacts, form (shape and appearance) and functions of the space. Female students were also very aware of their spatial needs and what they would like to have as a campus space versus what is actually available; this imagined image of their preferences links to Lefebvre's 'conceived' space. In 'Students' spaces within and beyond the triad', I expand and discuss the students' emerging spaces within the campus utilizing Lefebvre's triad (1991, pp. 38-39) as a point of departure, and initial structure for understanding and organising those spaces under the headings of 'perceived', 'conceived' and 'lived'. In this section, I primarily elaborate on their lived spaces that allow for the emergence of what I called 'cold' and 'hot' spaces. In 'Engaging with and appropriating space', which includes a collection

of what seem to be the most revealing themes, I describe and analyse the different ways in which students utilize and appropriate the space to create several spatial patterns. These closely linked patterns are highly informed by aspects of the students' identity and cultural formations. In the last mega theme, 'Negotiating and contesting space' I focus on the students' spatial mobility, positionality and access. These include the spatial limitations and the institutional surveillance exercised over students' spatial mobility, which are also linked to and widely discussed in the section on 'gendered spaces' under the second Mega theme ('Students' spaces'). While these mega themes are distinct, it is their intersectionality that particularly informs and constitutes the students' spatiality (spatio-learning experience).

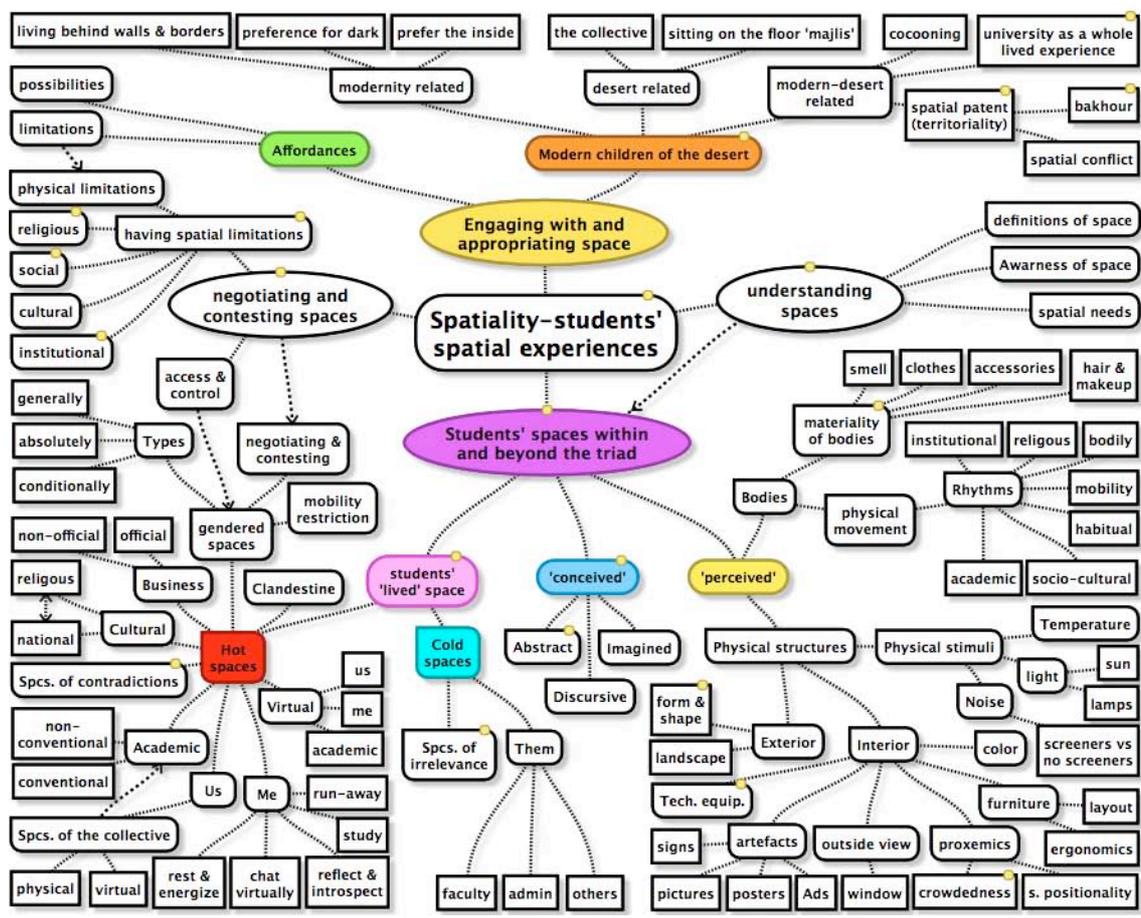
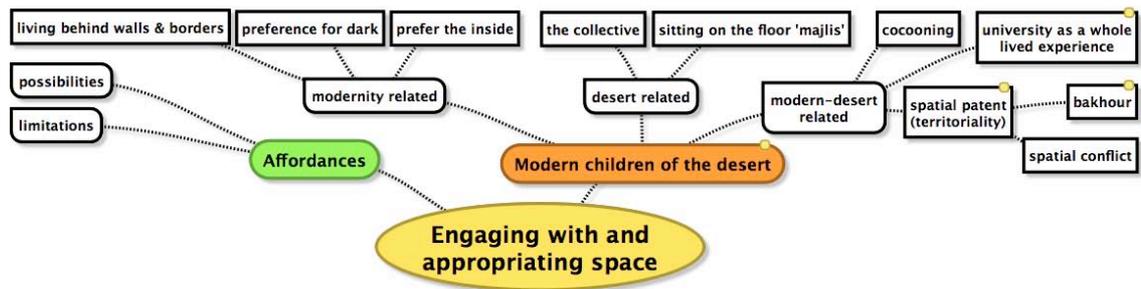


Figure 4.1: Conceptual mapping of emerging themes from the field.

I have included all the emerging themes in the conceptual diagram (Figure 4.1) to show the complexity and interconnectivity of themes, although, and due to word limitations, I discuss only two of the mega themes ('Engaging with and

appropriating space’, and ‘Students’ spaces within and beyond the triad’) in my analysis and findings sections (Chapters 4 and 5). The other mega themes may be utilized in future academic publications.

### Engaging with space — spatial appropriation



**Figure 4.2:** Engaging with space mega theme and its related subthemes

During my fieldwork, I was intrigued by the different ways female students appropriate space to construct their own spaces through socialization and appropriation. According to Lefebvre, space is constructed through the projection of the activities within it that become an integral part of shaping its existence: “the social relations of production have a social existence to the extent that they have a spatial existence; they project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing that space itself” (1991, p. 129). In line with Lefebvre’s (1991) assertion of how space is socially constructed and reconstructed by its users, as well as the spatial turn in social sciences that emphasizes the social appropriation of space, the students’ spatial practices on campus embody that social construction of space while actively engaging and appropriating, and moving beyond its abstract conceptualization as just a passive milieu. Therefore, the spatio-learning experience of female students as a social construction becomes “the medium and the outcome” simultaneously (Soja, 1989, p. 129), as evident in all the emerging spatial patterns discussed below. Furthermore, culture and its formations played a major role in shaping the students’ spatial practices and the emerging spatial themes; appropriation of space follows and complies with its participants’ ‘cultural model’ as “a system of durable, transposable dispositions

that function as principles generating and structuring practices and representations that conform to socially determined rules without being understood as consciously presupposing them” (Stanek, 2011, p. 85). For example, in studies of the ‘pavilion’<sup>34</sup> conducted by the *Institute de sociologie urbaine* (ISU), which, according to Stanek (2011), influenced Lefebvre’s formulations of the triad, the inhabitants apply their cultural model while appropriating spaces, which requires creating borders, spaces of transition and boundaries of what is considered private and public space in that particular culture. Thus, students appropriate space according to their cultural formations and practices, creating culturally distinct spaces of their own, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter. As such, the way students engage with campus space is, on one hand, unique and very much grounded in its users’ identity and culture. On the other hand, it is guided by the limitations and possibilities offered within that space, according to Gibson’s (1979) theory of affordances (Gibson, 1979; Scarantino, 2003; Pols, 2012; Maier, Fadel and Battisto, 2009).

‘Affordances’ are defined as our perceptions of the opportunities the environment offers for behaviour and action (Pols, 2012). In his theory of affordances, rooted in perceptual psychology and considered by Scarantino as the “central theoretical construct of ecological psychology” (2003, p. 949), Gibson states the following:

The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, but the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment. (Gibson 1979, 127, cited in Scarantino, 2003, p. 950).

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<sup>34</sup> The Institute de sociologie urbaine (ISU) conducted studies in the 1960s and 1970s on the practices of dwelling (habitation) and in particular the study of dwellings in a detached house, ‘pavillon’ (L’habitat pavillonnaire). This study defined the pavilion as “an individual urban or suburban house with a garden, as opposed to the collective estate and the rural house” (Haumont, 1966, cited in Stanek, 2011, p. 81), which, according to Lefebvre, shaped French sociological discussion during the 1950s and 1970s (2011, pp. 82-85).

In this, Gibson tries to capture the complimentary relation between environment and living beings, explaining how the affordances of an environment are its offerings in terms of promises (positive affordances, possibilities) or threats (negative affordances, limitations) (Scarantino, 2003, p. 950). The theory has been discussed and utilized by many, including Scarantino (2003), Maier, Fadel and Battisto (2009), and Polls (2012), especially in its application to the domains of space, design and architecture, as in the case of Maier, Fadel and Battisto (2009), and Polls (2012). Although there is much more to the theory of affordances, in this research the concept of affordances, while intersecting with cultural formations and gender, will be used only to help explain the emergence of specific spatial themes. The affordances of the space, or ‘opportunities of action’ as defined by Gibson (1979), either encourage or limit specific behaviours or actions by its users. This becomes especially true when considering the campus space affordances in terms of form and function. For example, this couch affords sitting; this class space affords group work, lecturing and individual work, and so on. In other words, the affordances of the space provide the possibilities or limitations on spatial appropriation as will become clear in all of the following emerging spatial themes.

### Modern Children of the desert

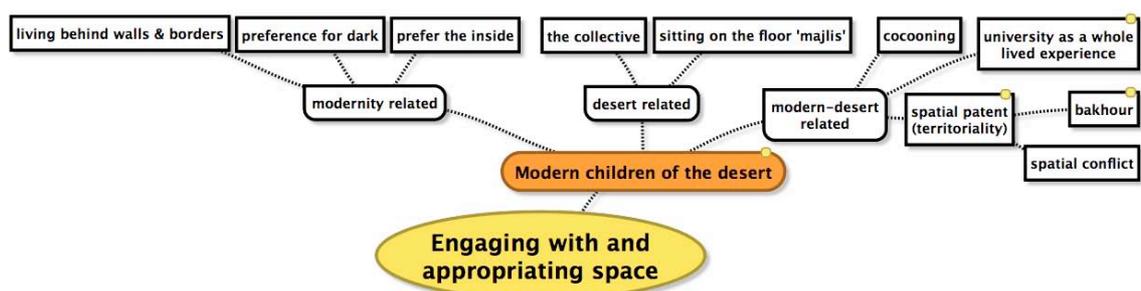


Figure 4.3: Modern children of the desert main sub-theme and its related minor themes.

In all of the emerging spatial patterns from the students’ utilization and appropriation of space, there was a strong link to a larger overarching theme that seemed to control remotely and deeply influence the way students engaged with space. It is their unique identity that I named ‘modern children of

the desert'; this hybrid identity encompasses elements, traces and spatial patterns from both the desert's related, older way of life, and their current modernised spatial practices, with all of their embedded hopes, strengths and fears.

A wise colleague and friend once told me that we are all driven by two forces in this universe: love and fear. Emirati female students also have their love and fear embedded within their unique identity. They have a strong sense of national identity accompanied by feelings of love, pride and admiration towards their country, and the revered 'Father' of the nation, Sheikh Zayed Al Nahayan. These warm feelings seemed to extend towards the university holding the name of Sheikh Zayed; thus, ZU campuses immediately transform into Lefebvre's representational space, taking on a symbolic value and meaning within the students' hearts as evident from the following excerpt:

Actually the university eh-h-h-h, if you are talking about Emirati and things, it has..all over the place, I mean for us, for us as Zayed University students, you know you are attached to that name 'Zayed'. So he is the founder of UAE; you see his pictures all over campus. For example, if you are going to enrolment place, you can see his childhood pictures and these different pictures so you feel like, it reflects you, it doesn't have for example, you know, some other person that doesn't relate to you, and it also has a lot of...sometimes flags for the national day so you do feel it's representing you.

Another student told me, "I really, really love university, '*ya'nni*' (I mean) (laughing)...I enjoy it so much [...] I am very proud to be part of this university". Sincere statements of love and pride of the university repeatedly appeared in the 13 interviews with the female students. They were most evident when referring to Sheikh Zayed and national events that instigate feelings of nationalism and pride, like celebrating National Day, as expressed in the interview with Najla:

*Gergana*: Do you think ZU campus represents you as an Emirati woman?

*Najla:* M-m-m yes.

*Gergana:* How?

*Najla:* But I don't know how, like I just feel it, it just goes with the flow.

*Gergana:* Okay, the colours maybe..the people?

*Najla:* The people actually, I like the girls around campus. You know when for example..when it comes to National Day or anything related to national or if-f-f a soccer team wins like a-a-a we do a lot for the country we love to participate in such events.

*Gergana:* That's true.

*Najla:* Even the-e-e Zayed University like for example National Day, you saw how like students interact and they lo-o-o-ve to do for their country. Because our country gave us a lot and like we are proud, yeah, I am proud of it.

Their love for Sheikh Zayed was quite evident, to the extent that led some faculty members to cleverly utilize it to achieve their goals. I know, for example, that one of the advisors keeps a picture of him in the office to calm down angry parents coming to complain about their daughter's schedule. Another faculty member used a photo of Sheikh Zayed accidentally present on the classroom wall to reconcile differences between the students by referring to it as a reminder of their identity and national commitments, as she explains below:

*Randa:* I always tell them "always look at the things that unite not divide", and I used to use the pictures of Sheikh Zayed. I tell them that "Sheikh Zayed, this is your directives...*point of reference..the one who united the country, did not divide it. When someone made a mistake, he used to say (mimicking voice) 'those are our children', they made a mistake, we correct them*". He means we don't just go and punish right and left the way. Try to..bring them and see what they did wrong, from a patriarchal sort of like *the father who gathers and protects* and not patriarchal from a hierarchal position. Yeah, to bring them not to divide; that is how I used to use Sheikh Zayed's picture to a point was so interesting.

*Gergana:* And it worked with them?

*Randa*: It worked. It worked, it worked in this class and it was like a *compass of safety*. In this type of classroom, you have really political divisions in the classroom and tensions.

[translation author's own]

Dr. Randa is an Arab married to an Emirati, who has lived in the Emirates for over 30 years. She therefore knew about the strength of the bond the students had with the nation's 'Father'. The same bond extended its power to include similar feelings towards the university space holding his name, as a space that represents national identity, including the fact that it was established to serve a national purpose advocated by sheikh Zayed, namely to educate Emirati women. Female students felt a strong sense of belonging and spatial possession of what they considered as their own space. Unsurprisingly, feelings of irritation and territoriality were expressed by some when the university decided to allow other non-national females to join ZU in 2009. A faculty colleague quoted their angry expression: "even this place they do not want to leave for us".

Their love of this space was always engulfed by their collective fear for the loss of their language and national identity. Being a minority in the UAE and barely visible in their own country, many Emiratis are concerned about the loss of their cultural identity (Abdulla, 2012; As'eed and Sorab, 2011; Bristol-Rhys, 2010; Khelifa, 2010). This has been triggered by the constant decrease in the percentage of national population compared to the expatriate community, falling to 12% in 2010 (Sabban, 2011, p. 23), and continuing to decrease with the prospect of a zero percent local population for a city like Dubai by 2025 (Abdulla, 2012, p. 119). In addition to this unique demographic composition, the constant change and rapid modernization since the discovery of oil are threatening to disconnect the UAE's younger generation from their parents, creating a critical generation gap. Female students, for example, face a constant struggle in their attraction to modernity while being anchored to the local culture and traditions (Khelifa, 2010), resulting in what we might consider cultural schizophrenia, which explains why I named them as 'modern children of the desert'. This confusion, struggle and fear about identity is manifested in the

students' spatial representations and daily practices of who they are, and how they appropriate space with their bodies and clothes, as explained by Amira:

*Gergana*: You said you like this place, do you think the space represents YOU AS an Emirati female student?

*Amira*: Uhm-m-m..which place *Ya'nni* ?

*Gergana*: Zayed University, our campus.

*Amira*: Yes, BEFORE..,but now I don't feel like this *Ya'nni*-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) Really? So when you first came, you..you felt that it represents you as an Emirati female...but not any more?

*Amira*: *Ya'nni*..miss *Ya'nni*..Okay, I will tell you something, but maybe it's not related..Or not *Ya'nni*-

[...]

*Amira*: Yeah (laughing). *Ya'nni*, we...was before when we went, when we came to the Zayed University, the student all was, *Ya'nni* local..., okay. We all the girls was LOCAL.

*Gergana*: Right.

*Amira*: But NOW, I-I-I, *Ya'nni*, I feel that it's change. Even now sometime when I see a girl, she wear 'abaya' (national dress) without 'Sheilas' (head cover). I said "If she's..If she is local or other things *Ya'nni*?"

*Gergana*: You're wondering?

*Amira*: Yeah, *Ya'nni*, and then, I sometime..I wondering when I saw a girls *Ya'nni* without *sheila* and *abaya*. They..the girls said to me (mimicking voice) "by the way, she is Emirati *Ya'nni*".

*Gergana*: So they're changing, the girls?

*Amira*: Yeah, they changing *Ya'nni*.

*Gergana*: And you feel..you don't like that?

*Amira*: *Ya'nni* not too MUCH because sometime, *Ya'nni* miss, *they overdo it* [translation author's own]. It's okay *Ya'nni* If the girls from-m-m..other countries. But *Ya'nni* our Emirati ,*Ya'nni*. Okay "WHY YOU DON'T WEAR YOUR ABAYA AND SHEILA?"

[...]

*Amira: Ya'nni* I think the families become..now free, open minded.

The same confusion and fear for identity was clearly evident in the short story competition called 'Facets of Emirati Women', which is organised by a ZU faculty member Peter Hassall and written by Emirati female students, including ZU students. Through strong spatial representations of the local culture, students communicated their quest for identity and self-realizations in the stories' titles, for example, 'I Love Black', 'In my House', 'Dubai', 'A Lady in Abaya', 'Three Generations', 'Who is She?', 'The Sea', 'Masks' or 'Zayed'. This spatial representation was also present in the stories' content, which was limited to 50 words, as 'Lost Soul' By *F. Al Mazrouei*:

In this ever-changing multicultural world, I am a lost soul. My father says I am an Arab. My mother says I am English. Most people around the world say I am an oppressed Muslim woman. Conversely, many others say I am a fundamentalist, a terrorist. Tell me, who am I. (Hassall, 2009, Story # 311)

Further evidence of confusion and fear is that 10 out of the 12 graphic design students from the class I audited chose a topic for their senior project that was directly linked to enforcing local identity and reviving such traditional, cultural elements, as preserving local dialects, reviving Emirati proverbs, retelling Arab legend stories, experiencing the Emirati culture, and even preserving wildlife in the UAE's deserts. This issue of identity and the UAE's unique demographic composition was often the focus of discussion in the other audited class (Social and Economics Trends in the Gulf). This also emerged in a conversation with a faculty member who had worked at the university for over 14 years:

*Ola*: Like the families really need to encourage women to be more out there, like not to see society as the enemy but to receive society as an extension of their home environment with reservations.

*Gergana*: Do you see that they see society as an enemy?

*Ola*: A lot of them are very worry of the other, and the foreign others, so even at Zayed university, although the majority are local students [...]. So they were looking at the other...as the foreign..because they

feel lost in this cosmopolitan nature of Dubai, where they are HARDLY 10 % really of the population.

This fear for their identity, and their need to protect who they are and what matters to them has manifested itself indirectly and subconsciously in their cultural practices, such as their need to gather in groups both in and outside class, living in a collective, and distancing themselves from the outside society as discussed later in this chapter. These practices leave a clear imprint on the female students' spatial patterns and representations. Except in one case, this fear was not directly communicated in the interviews; it emerged indirectly across all my data sets; it had a direct link to almost every spatial pattern of the emerging themes while being more visible in some cases than others. The emerging spatial patterns are closely linked and widely informed by the students' identity as modern children of the desert and their local socio-cultural formations thus giving a uniqueness and specificity to any spatial experience. The 'Modern children of the desert' theme includes several spatial subthemes that intersect and intertwine to form this identity, including 'Living indoors, in the dark and behind walls', 'Sitting on the floor', 'The collective' and 'Cocooning'. Some themes are related either to modernity or desert, or linked to both, such as cocooning, which I will discuss at the end since it encompasses all the other spatial patterns, whether desert or modernity related.

### **Modernity related spatial patterns**

Some of the emerging spatial patterns were directly linked to the female students' modernized way of living, which rapidly swept the country following the discovery of oil and the unification of the Trucial Sheikhdoms. Like any country going through modernisation, cultural patterns change and evolve; some disappear and others emerge, creating new formations and spatial practices. The only difference between the UAE, or the Gulf states in general, and other countries is the unprecedented intensity and high velocity of such change (As'eed and Shorab, 2001, Sabban, 2011; khelifa, 2010), which in turn made the spatial patterns much easier to detect. Such spatial patterns include the students' preference to inhabit the inside rather than the outside, their

preference for darker spaces, and their new life behind new walls and barriers (Figure 4.4).

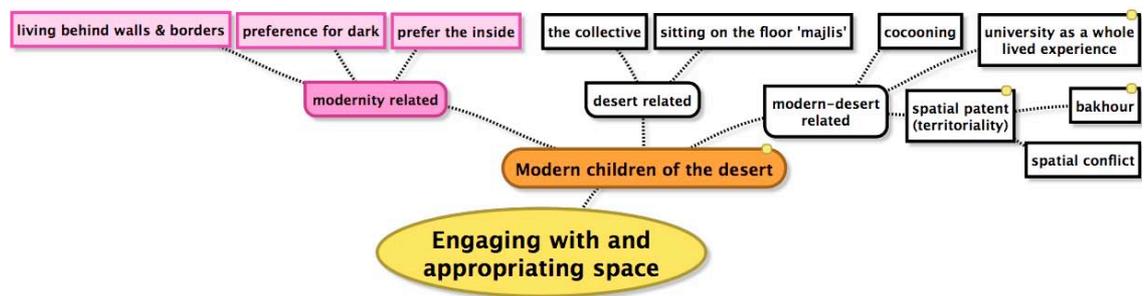


Figure 4.4: Modernity related themes and subthemes.

### ***Living indoors, in the dark and behind walls***

During my seven-year stay in the UAE, I have learned how local females are protected, covered and segregated from males. Following the discovery of oil and the generous distribution of wealth amongst the locals, the standard of living has become one of the highest in the world, with GDP per capita (PPP) of \$29,900 (2013 est.) (The World Factbook, 2014). This increased wealth has made it more important to maintain a high social status. In such a conservative patriarchal and wealthy community, women’s status directly influences their family’s reputation and honour, and is therefore taken very seriously. Women’s status reflects that of the family and tribe: the more elite the family is, the more social surveillance and spatial restrictions are exercised over its women. As the increased wealth and modernization brought greater numbers of expatriates to the country, Emiratis began to construct houses with high walls; privacy became more emphasised than in the past, leading to women’s lives becoming restricted behind those walls (Bristol-Rhys, 2010, pp. 57-82). Students often refer to how their mothers and grandmothers had more spatial freedom and less gender segregation: “in the old times...how can I say it. In the past, we were not disconnected with men. We were connecting with men; even my mom and grand mom, they grew up with their cousins”. As a state university, ZU mirrors these norms, having high walls and practicing full gender segregation of locals in line with social and cultural spatial practices that keep women invisible and protected behind such walls. High walls and barriers have thus become the spatial representations of these cultural norms.

Most students expressed approval of such cultural rules and spatial practices, which, according to them, preserve their status and chastity. In comparing western women to locals, a student told me in a casual conversation:

If you are offered two types of candy, one nicely wrapped and covered and one without its wrapping paper, which one would you choose? Of course the wrapped and well preserved, and that is why we wear our *abayas* and do not expose or exploit our bodies, keeping them for our husbands only.

However, during a follow-up conversation, a local faculty member told me that this is a clichéd story promoted mostly by patriarchal males and fed to young females. On another occasion, a first-semester student told me how her brother justified their way of living in a conversation to others by saying, “we truly value our women; they are so precious like gems, which is why we keep them safe and protected the way you keep your gems in a velvet precious box”. The student spoke with such innocence and conviction about their way of life. Most students truly believe that they are well taken care of on many levels; they do not need to work and support their families; they are not overworked but pampered and protected instead; their bodies are covered so are incapable of being exploited like western women’s are under the justification of emancipation. Honour and reputation is very important for Emirati women so the female students at the university viewed wearing their black *abayas*, hiding their hair under *sheilas*, and living behind physical or cultural walls as a normal spatial practice. Very few contest it, while the majority support it. Despite differences in their opinions on the level of freedom and spatial access they would like to have, all agree on the importance of keeping their cultural traditions and preserving their honour and chastity.

Therefore, due to wealth, modernity, social status, and the strict social order that accompanies them, almost all ZU female students wear the traditional black *abbyas* and *sheilas* with several using ‘*niqqb*’ (face veil), their car windows are always tinted for complete privacy, and they are always protected behind walls, whether in their houses or in the university (Bristol-Rhys, 2010). They have become accustomed to living indoors and rarely go outside in daylight, having become used to the comfort of air-conditioned houses, malls and university

campuses. “I noticed that our students do not like to go outside a lot”, one administrator told me, which another faculty member confirmed:

But one thing I notice with our students that there is a lot of beautiful greenery spaces outside that I never see them utilize, it just seems like..., and I don't know if it has to do with the architecture of the place or the design am-m-m.

I was well aware of this from my own observations, especially compared to the male students, who far preferred the outside courtyard.

In addition to preferring the indoors, female students prefer dark spaces as an extension and attribute of the covered, protected interior environment. I often came across students sitting in an empty classroom with the lights off, or using the small library study rooms while sitting in the dark. I remember that on one occasion when I was in the library trying to use one of the study rooms, I entered three dark rooms consecutively, thinking that if the room was dark then it was probably empty, only to discover to my surprise that there was a group of students sitting on the floor inside each of them, being almost invisible to others from the outside. From that time on, I became more aware of these dark, presumably empty rooms. In addition, with most of the classes that I taught, I would arrive to find a dark classroom full of students waiting for me. This was an observation shared by many other faculty members:

I remember like ah-h-h one of my classes, I remember, in B-36 or something, *a large class with huge windows open to the outside* [translation author's own]. And the first time I walk in it, it is like wo-o-o-w, but then what the students do, and it is so annoying to me, is always close the curtains and always..and always shut the light and I don't know why our students love dark spaces!

Similarly, another faculty member explained:

Again, this is something very new. I mean, I have been in different contexts: I was in New Zealand and I was in Iran, and now here, I notice that students here, I notice that students here I mean, one thing I notice is that, and this is something, ah-h-h, I was unable to

find an answer to, and I noticed that you talk about in your talk, is that when I enter the classroom, I noticed that they don't turn on the light, they like to sit in the dark. And when I tell them, they said "we are happy".

This preference for keeping less exposed in the dark seemed to be remotely linked to the social peer pressure associated with maintaining a proper image in line with their social status. Female students exercise such pressure on each other regarding looking at their best. I always wondered why students would care that much about their appearance. It was obvious that they spent a lot of time and effort fixing their hair under the sheilas to appear bouffant, putting on a lot of make up, carrying fashionable handbags, and wearing designer high-heeled shoes and clothes under their abbyas. Students repeatedly told me how they all tend to observe and criticise each others' appearance, as clearly expressed in the following excerpt, although all admitted that they hated being observed and scrutinized by others. To them, this mostly occurred in the atrium space, which is one of the brightest and most open and exposed areas on campus. Consequently, many students did not prefer this space while many used it, as it was a space of contradictions (see 'Spaces of contradictions', Chapter 5).

(During a mobile interview)

*Gergana*: So from where do you want to take us?

*Fouzia*: A-a-h..here better. I don't like, you know, to walk like direct in the Atrium.

*Gergana*: You don't?

*Fouzia*: Yeah, I prefer-r-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) You feel under the microscope?

*Fouzia*: Exactly (laughing). Everyone is staring at me-e; what I am wearing..what I am-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) YES-S-S-S.

*Fouzia*: Yeah. When I was in AUS (American University of Sharjah), I wear ANYTHING. I go with..with..with, you know, with flip-flops

sometimes, I swear..but here no-o-o. Ah, ah I need to..to wear like proper clothes and (laughing)-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) Do they tell you? Do they criticize you verbally or it's just by staring?

*Fouzia:* A-ah no sometimes they do-o, in class (pause). Sometimes, they're like (mimicking voice) "What're you wearing?"

*Gergana:* really, they tell you this?

*Fouzia:* Yeah..yeah.

*Gergana:* Students told me this and now I'm conscious every time I pass through the atrium. I say, "Yeah, they're looking at me."

*Fouzia:* Yeah (laughter) and even you know, some-sometimes I hear like (mimicking voice) "Oh did you see..a-a-a-ah miss I dunno who-o and miss I dunno who [...]She's wearing a very nice dress today and"...OH MY GO-O-O-D (laughing).

Avoiding bright, exposed spaces in favour of darker corners offered students' shelter and relief from such pressures. Even those who still used the atrium preferred the side darker corners under the shaded areas to hide in while sitting with their peers, avoiding the centre whenever possible. The same cultural practice appears in a conversation between Emirati women in Bristol Rhyes' book *Emirati Women* (2010). They explain that if they are seen not wearing proper *sheilas* and *abayas* with designer bags and shoes, they are criticised, with others thinking that something wrong is going on with them and their homes. They therefore prefer the dark as a disguise when they want some freedom or a time of their own while avoiding such social scrutiny. As one puts it, "why did you think we always walk at night? No one can see us in the dark!" (ibid. p. 65).

I also discovered that the students' preference for dark, shadowy areas, away from direct sunlight, is possibly connected to another cultural association with high social status. This idea emerged in a conversation with Dr. Randa. In the past, women of rich families did not need to work outside so had whiter skin colour from staying indoors in the shade. As a result, she suggested, exposure

to sun is still associated with lower social status — even to slavery. This is still perceived in postcolonial areas where the formerly occupied link whiter skin with the occupier, who is usually of higher status. This explained why female students constantly avoided the sun and favoured white skin colour, trying as much as possible to hide behind the veil when in the sun.

*Randa:* [...] they are always in close spaces in AC's (air conditions), they are afraid of the sun and they like the luxury of the inside. They think the outside is painful, is hurting. *I remember for example my Emirati friends: they are afraid of the sun; they always cover their faces with the sheila when in the sun.*

*Gergana:* Why is that?

*Randa:* *To stay fair.* For them, the sun taints you, and for them darker skin is degrading. *White skin refers to higher class. It means they are well taken care of and pampered; the whiter, the prettier and higher status you are.* Culturally, the *tanned are the black slaves.* It is culturally degrading. *If you are white, you are closer to the pretty ones.* This is culture. [Translation author's own].

I also noticed that bleach creams and knowledge of skin whitening treatments are very common among Emirati females to ensure fair skin. Their preference for staying indoors, avoiding the sun to have fair skin emerged in several interviews including the mobile interview with Najla:

*Gergana:* Do you go to sit in the outside?

*Najla:* No, I never sit outside.

*Gergana:* No?

*Najla:* No, never.

*Gergana:* Why?

*Najla:* I don't know. I don't feel comfortable sitting at the sun.

*Gergana:* O-o-h, you want to stay with the white skin.

*Najla:* Yeah, (laughing) the fair skin.

*Gergana:* Important for you?

*Najla:* I heard the Japanese and Chinese white skin is very important for them

*Gergana*: Is it?

*Najla*: Yeah, that's why if you go there or for example if you go to global village, you will see all the creams of whitening. You will see them in Thailand or those areas.

Taken together, these interviews and observations enabled me to better understand why students prefer to stay in dark classrooms. Being in the dark seemed a natural practice for them, an extension of their daily spatial practices that emerge from their cultural formations and modernised way of living. It provides them with a way to be less exposed to the outside world and therefore less vulnerable, as well as conforming to the social pressure to maintain their 'proper' appearance and social status.

Most female students felt uncomfortable when exposed, whether in an open bright space like the atrium, where they can be easily observed, or even in the classroom. Spatial exposure in class also left many students uncomfortable and unable to fully participate. As one faculty member noted, specific class arrangements that leave students feeling exposed makes them uncomfortable: "So that in the beginning here, I tried to something to...get the classroom like a big oval but they were actually uncomfortable. I think they felt exposed, because everybody was in circle face to everybody else".

I also observed how students tend to put their expensive designer handbags on the desk in front of them while in class. The majority felt annoyed and uncomfortable when asked to remove them during exams and class lectures, using them to avoid spatial exposure by hiding behind them, as expressed by a faculty member:

Ahh, the women..., I also observed that they tend to look down and sometimes have a wall with their bag; they place the bag in front of the desk so somehow it is hiding them, and I have to say "bags under your tables" so I can have a good view of them.

When I asked them about it while in class, the majority could never clearly explain why they put their bags in front of them like this; however, I got some

explanations like “it makes us feel safe”, “we can hide behind the bag when we want to use our mobiles” or “it creates our personal space”. My conviction is that they need some sort of barrier and seclusion to maintain a feeling of comfort and familiarity with what they have been accustomed to all their lives; if objects like bags can provide one layer of this, they will use them.

The use of material objects can offer great insight into the lives and experiences of their users (Bell, 2008). Through the study of objects, sociologists and anthropologists particularly have been able to trace back and retell the life stories and experiences of families and individuals. One is a study by two sisters, Bell and Bell (2012, cited in Bell, 2008, p. 149). They were able to explore and retell the story of their own lives and family history through eight family objects: “the best way to understand, convey, and appreciate our humanity is through attention to our fundamental materiality” (Miller, 2010, cited in Bell, 2008, p. 149). In my study, I paid attention to the use of bags as barriers in a spatial context, In fact, if I were to retell students’ spatial experience with the use of objects, I would choose their mobiles, handbags, *sheilas* and *abayas*, among other objects. However, this is beyond the scope of this research study. I noticed their attachments to these objects and the way they utilized their bags to appropriate the space; although I could not fully explain it, the fact remains that the majority of students continue to put their bags on the desk in front of them unlike any other students I have seen in western universities or even other parts of the Middle East.

To avoid spatial exposure, Emirati females are accustomed to using several layers of physical barriers including objects (bags, laptops, books) as a shield from the outside, for protection, privacy, and preserving social and cultural status. Their clothes, particularly the *abaya*, *sheila* and *niqab*, are the first of these spatial layers, with other layers including the cars tinted glass windows and high walls surrounding their homes and the university campus, and even their bags.

From all of the above, it is clear that female students prefer interior, secluded, cool and shadowy spaces to appropriate and occupy. I believe this has its roots in their culture, identity and religion. It is an amalgamation of spatial practices that ensure the following: first, covering their bodies to meet Islamic and cultural expectations of modesty; second, maintaining privacy and gender segregation as a way of preserving their sense of chastity, honour and family reputation as well as social status; and third, preserving their cultural identity from the threats of modernity and the fear of extinction as a minority in their own country.

### Desert related spatial patterns

The following two spatial patterns, 'The collective' and 'Sitting on the floor', have a strong link to tribal and cultural practices associated with the traditional Emirati lifestyle that emerged from the desert (Figure 4.5).

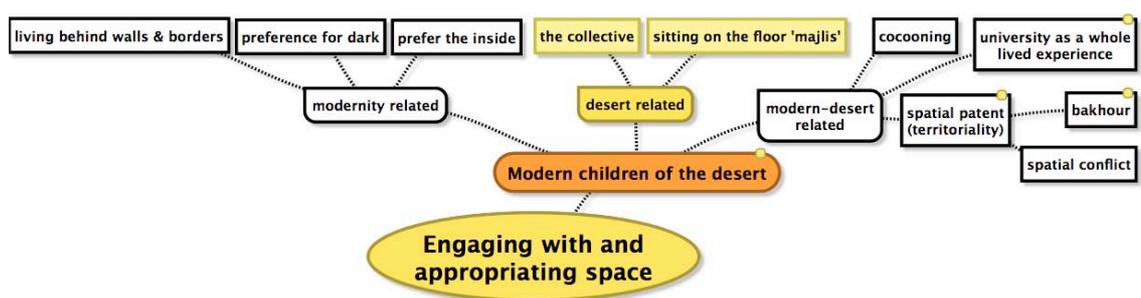


Figure 4.5: Desert related spatial patterns.

### *The collective — 'Rbeea'tship' or 'Rbeea'thood'*

Emirati female students have a strong sense of collective identity. Being part of a group, whether the extended family, tribe, the UAE community or even a university social group, has its roots in their tribal practices as a collective. With such a strong social and tribal bond, individuality is less valued and rarely practiced. On campus, this is spatially represented by the students' collective movement, experience and appropriation of space, with their 'Rbeea't' (a local word that combines the meaning of friends, sisters, companions and buddies). This strong tribal bond and social identity goes beyond the western meaning of friendship into belonging to a fraternal tribal sisterhood, which I called 'Rbeea'thood' or 'the collective'. Rbee'athood as a collective includes layers of

different groups that students subscribe to on campus. These include the collective of intimate close friends, social groups, activity clubs, academic groups working on projects, classmates, and students in the same cohort, major, college, city or family-tribe, or even all Emirati female students on campus. Students thus feel constantly connected.



**Figure 4.6:** The students' collective movement with rebee'at (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Rbeea'thood is togetherness, as clearly represented in their daily practices and spatial appropriation. Female students tend to sit, eat, study, socialize and go to class together in groups, or at least in pairs (Figure 4.6). They are more often together than alone. This spatial representation of rebeea'thood as groups of students was one of my first impressions, as well as that of the other faculty and administrators; "Am-m-m, they are in groups, I see a lot of them always talking in groups". Similar statements repeatedly appeared in my interviews: "female students like to cluster with friends, chit chat". Even in class, they usually choose a seat next to their 'Rbeea't' and stick to it. In one of the audited classes, I noted how one student repeatedly denied me access to the empty

chair next to her as she was reserving it for her friend. When I politely asked if I could sit, she said, “I am sorry but this chair is for my friend *Khadija*”. I could sense her panic when I asked, and the importance of sitting next to her friend. To confirm my observation, I repeated my request during the following two sessions, only to be denied again, which led other students around us to offer me their seat. I intentionally exercised some pressure on that student to see her level of commitment to her friend; I was surprised by how strong it was.

Whether inside or outside class, students are either in a group or in intimate pairs. And if a student is sitting alone, she is usually chatting with others through online social networking and the virtual space. During my observations, I would always ask the relatively few I encountered sitting alone about this, and all of them confirmed that they were chatting with others while sitting alone (Figures 4.7 and 4.8).



**Figure 4.7:** A female chatting while alone in the atrium (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.8:** A female chatting while sitting alone in the garden (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Thus, their connection goes beyond spatial positionality and physical proximity, to creating a new space of their own, the space of the collective. This space is inclusive of all its members, allowing connectivity and support, and organically extending its influence beyond its material borders. This organic and dynamic nature of space was emphasized by Massey (1999), who warned us about creating fixed identities of space (Massey, 1999, 1994; Quinn, 2003b, p. 460). That is, space is not static but dynamic, simultaneous and in constant flux,

which is why it is hard to establish constant boundaries of space (Quinn, 2003b). It keeps changing and evolving based on social and spatial dynamics. In this case, Lefebvre's social construction of space is executed by the collective and the social relations Emirati females forge in such space. This space becomes Lefebvre's lived space (1991, p. 39) as it obtains its value and meaning from the 'lived' through experience of its inhabitants and its symbolic association with the collective.

Rbeeahood's influence over its members extends beyond appropriating, experiencing and creating their own space into offering social and moral support, influencing their decisions, and occasionally exercising pressure to conform to its practices. To my surprise, I learned from students that many register for specific classes just to be with their peers, prioritising that bond above course and teacher selection.

What an urgency to be part of the collective! It is one of their primary concerns when they first join the campus. All of the interviewed students reported feelings of loss and alienation on the first day until they managed to make friends. Their need to be part of a group and their quest for the collective starts from the first day on campus to combat such feelings of loss and spatial alienation:

*Gergana:* What do you remember from your FIRST day on campus?

*Amira:* A-ah..it was bad day (laughter) becau..because a-a-ah..I don't know anyone.

*Gergana:* Okay.

*Amira:* My friends also-o..they a-a-ah go to-o COLLEGE..and-d a-ah I-I-I go to Zayed University. So it wa-a-s, *ya'nni*, I was shy-y; and..I didn't connect with-th the girls in the class, and I was-s SILENT.

Similar feelings were communicated by Ilham, who only managed to feel in place once she established her connection with the collective, as explained in the following excerpts:

*Gergana:* Tell me about your learning journey here at Zayed University? Like, you know, from the beginning, when you first ca-a-me [...].

*Ilham:* Like..a-ah in the first year when I came to the university?

*Gergana:* Yeah. From the beginning.

*Ilham:* Uhm-m actually..I was af-f-raid..like afraid and I don't know like..anybody in the-e-e in the university, like my..my best best friend was..she went to the-e..a-ah (pause) what you call it? like co-college..a-ah women's college?

*Gergana:* HCT (Higher Colleges of Technology).

*Ilham:* Yeah, HCT..so I was alone here. I don't know anyone, just my aunt. She was with me..and she was one year bigger than me. So She was like a guide, and she like..take me through the-e university-y. The places the..where is the dinning? Where is the-e teachers' room? Where..., like this, you know?

*Gergana:* Yeah.

*Ilham:* So in the first..like week..the couple first weeks we, as I said, it..it was..everything was new for me. Then day by day I start like-e meeting..like I, I-I-I What you call li-i-ke (pause), I MAKE NEW FRIENDS. They became my friends (laughing). Like we are..day by day we become friends. We-e, you know, we had...we are in one class, for like two three months. We are-e in one class.

In every interview, students referred either directly or indirectly to 'rbeea'thood' and its importance to them. It gives them confidence, strength and a sense of security. As one faculty member put it, "because they come from such a sheltered secluded culture [...] they tend to want to just cluster around their friends, even clutter around their possessions like their laptop, books, and their belongings as it give them a sense of home security". This sense of security can also be linked to their fear of being a minority in their own country. When I shared my observations about their collective identity with Dr. Randa, she confirmed it and shed some light on it from a local perspective:

*Randa*: They, they were, yeah, they were raised in this society, because as you said, it is a collective society, it is tribal community, it is not individualistic social structure. A-am-m-m, and though the modern division of living in their household, it is taking them each one into a room, or whatever, but still...they am-m-m, they keep that connection with their friends and...they-y-y-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) They move as a tribe, collective-

*Randa*: (overlapping) Exactly.

*Gergana*: They don't move as individuals.

*Randa*: Because I think they imitate their leaders. Their role model is their leaders, you rarely see a sheikh moving by himself. Their sheikhs move as groups. *The sheik walks and they all walk around and behind him.* [Translation author's own]

*Gergana*: *Sah* (correct).

*Randa*: When they were kids, the well-off people's kids like the merchants had the kids of the slaves playing with and keeping their company. As kids they play and one of them emerges and others are followers, they grow up like this...having followers, or they are intimate, they are either in twos or in groups. The ones that you can see more alone as, I observe and study, and that would be interesting observation, are those who are coming from mixed marriages. They tend to be by themselves.

Although I observed women more than men on campus, I noticed that this aspect of togetherness and being in a collective is also evident with the men to some extent. The UAE is a tribal society and being together is a very powerful aspect of the local culture for both males and females, as explained by Dr. Randa in the above excerpts. However, as a gendered spatial practice, this notion of togetherness was much more powerful and evident with the women than men; especially when it came to sitting in the classroom, each woman always preferred to sit next to her *'rbee'ah* (friend), while men wanted more space and were comfortable sitting alone. In fact, the majority preferred sitting alone at each desk. The same type of observation was communicated by a faculty member:

*Gergana:* Do you have any other observations in regards to space, the way they deal and interact or appropriate space?

*Ola:* Am-m, I mean I can't say that I read about it, but my personal observation because I also taught the men.

*Gergana:* Right.

*Ola:* So comparing the men to the women, ah-h, men are more independent.

*Gergana:* In the sense of-f-f?

*Ola:* In the sense of their own space, like they don't have to clutter together an-n-d and ah-h-h, although the majority of whether male or female students, they like to more or less sit in the same place, but not necessarily with the men, not necessarily with the same friend. If the space behind, beside his friend is taken, they are not bothered.

In such a conservative patriarchal society, the men were more independent and exhibited more confidence in their actions and spatial practices; they were more exposed, always in the centre, and felt less need to cluster together. This gender differentiation in their spatial practices seemed relevant to various theories from environmental psychology that explain gender-based behaviours and responses to the environment based on the evolution of gender roles. Many scholars and designers specifically in environmental psychology, like (Kopec, 2010, p. 81), interpret gender differentiation practices in terms of the primary gender roles of early humans, which still seem to influence and explain gender roles. The reason for such influence is that technology has developed much faster than the human psyche, so men and women, to some extent, respond according to their evolved primal instincts of men as hunters and women as carers and gatherers (ibid). According to this argument, men hunted mostly individually in open environments like the savannah with minimum obstruction for using weapons, they competed with each other, teaming up in groups only to catch a prey or fight a common enemy. On the other hand, women in groups gathered plants in jungles and forests, which were more complex environments with obstructed views fostering greater communication while taking care of each other as a group (ibid). Such evolutionary theories of environmental behaviour patterns can be used to explain why men require

larger personal distances than women and women cope better with high density and crowding (Aiello, Epstein and Karlin, 1975, cited in Kopec, 2010, p. 82). Although such research seems anecdotal and speculative, it resonated with my field findings on togetherness being a relatively gendered spatial practice.

Female students tend to be more confident and secure when around their peers. They felt in place and at ease to the extent that some could nap while in their cocoons (see Amira's conversation under 'Cocooning'). Spatial representations of Rbeea'thood were also evident in their physical appearance in that wearing a *sheila* and *abaya* seemed to provide them with a strong sense of unity and local identity:

*Gergana*: Do you feel this place represents you..like an Emirati female?

*Dina*: I do actually.

*Gergana*: How?

*Dina*: A-a-h (long pause) I dunno-o..how, it makes me really feel that way, but maybe having all (pause) sa-a-me, we all being Emiratis and interacting in one place...and I don't know...the dress code also helps that when you feel-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) Yeah that you all wear *sheilas* and *abayas*?

*Dina*: Yeah, so it doesn't differentiate like (long pause) a girl from another girl. When we're all wearing black. And we're all looking similar, you know? You don't feel like..IT'S LIKE A UNIFORM, code. You don't feel like you're different from the rest. You feel you BELONG with them.

Rbeea'thood can have both positive and negative influences on the students' education. While the collective offers its members moral, social and academic support, it makes them more at ease and dependent on each other. For example, Emirati female students face more difficulties in group work than any other students I have taught. I believe their lack of independence and individuality makes them always rely on other members from the collective without necessarily taking responsibility for it. Although this does not apply to all

students, based on my seven years teaching experience at ZU and input from other colleagues, it occurs very often. I also noticed in the audited classes that as soon as the teacher put them into groups to work on their projects, their bonding took over and it became difficult to disconnect them or return their attention back to a teacher-centred lecturing mode. To break the group bond, and regain their attention, one of the teachers changed their spatial positionality by asking them to move from one corner of the class to another or asked them to change their seating arrangements.

Overall, this spatial practice and representation of Rbeea'thood influenced how the students spatially positioned themselves in and outside the class, and how they experienced learning, creating and appropriating their own spaces.

#### ***Sitting on the floor: female 'majlis'***

One interesting spatial practice of the female students was their preference for sitting on the floor, whether collectively or individually (Figures 4.7, 4.9, 4.10). "We just like '*nitrabaa*' (sitting cross-legged)", as one student told me. I noted this repeatedly in my observations and interviews with faculty members:

They like kind of..and they like to sit on the floor. Am-m, they don't really see any..., in some cultures, oh-h, you can't sit on the floor. It is just beneath you. Partly because it is a Bedouin ah-h, and they are very down-to-earth.

Another faculty member expressed the same feelings of bewilderment at a practice that he had never seen anywhere else:

*Gergana*: What other observations you have on the way our female students mostly interact with the space, I mean in and outside the classroom?

*Adam*: Again [...] some of them prefer to sit on the floor, and I tell them, why don't you sit at the couches and they said: "we are happy with this and we can work better". Well, I kind of think that is first for me, I never seen it before.



**Figure 4.9:** Sitting on the atrium floor in a group (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



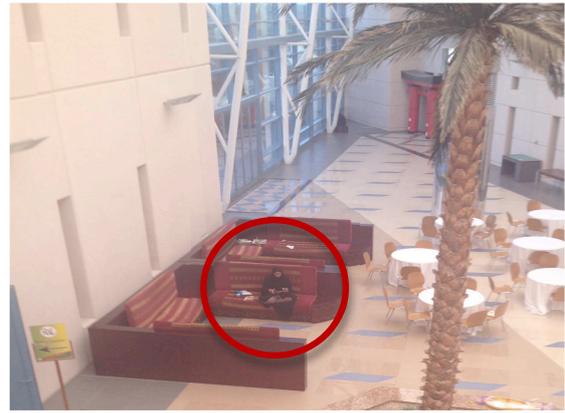
**Figure 4.10:** Sitting on the floor in a group in the water cooler place (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

I constantly observed students sitting on the floors in the hallways, behind the lockers, in the garden and the classrooms. Even when chairs were around, some preferred the floor (Figure 4.11). And even when they sit on chairs and couches, it is noticeable that most of them tuck one or both of their feet up, bent on the chair or supported on the coffee table in front as if they are still sitting on the floor (Figures 4.12, 4.13, 4.14 and 4.16). I even saw a student sitting cross-legged on top of a coffee table in the atrium. In one of audited classes, there was a student who always sat on the chair with one foot tucked under her, which became an idiosyncrasy that I recognised her by (Figure 4.15). Some of the new faculty expressed surprise at this habit, considering the students' spatial practice of having their feet up while facing others in the atrium as a sign of a lack of respect. However, after doing my fieldwork and talking to many students and faculty, I realized that they are just practicing the way they were used to sitting at home.

Sitting on the floor is a local cultural practice as there is a '*majlis*' in almost every Emirati home, which is a traditional group sitting area for family members and guests, and it is mostly on the floor. This originates from Bedouin life when they used to sit on the floor of the tent, drinking coffee, socializing or discussing important issues. For them, sitting on the floor is intimate, provoking feelings of togetherness that strengthen their collective bonds and connects them with their roots and traditions.



**Figure 4.11:** Preference to sit on the floor over the chair (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.12:** Sitting on the couch with the feet up (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.13:** Sitting with feet tucked up (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.14:** Sitting on a couch with the feet up in front (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.15:** Sitting on a chair with one leg tucked under (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.16:** Sitting on the red couch with the feet up in front (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Togetherness and sitting on the floor can be considered as preconditions for recounting narratives, since stories are not told in isolation but in the company of others. Such narratives are relational, being constitutive of, and constituted by, the story-tellers, listeners and commentators, similarly to the narration of the self in its constitutive relations with others in the writing of biographies and autobiographies (Tamboukou, 2010). In the case of Emirati females and Emirati culture in general, the *majlis* is the location, and sitting on the floor the spatial practice and precondition, for the togetherness needed for telling stories, sharing events, resolving conflicts and holding family gatherings.

Several students told me that during Ramadan, they all abandon their modern dining tables and sit on the floor for *Iftar* (the action of breaking fasting at sunset during the month of Ramadan for Muslims): “especially *in* Ramadan we like to sit on the floor and eat on the floor,...we do that as a change; it reminds us of old days; in Ramadan especially we will have a lot of traditional food.”. For them, it is a sign of humility, reconnection with traditions, and a reminder of who they are (Bristol-Rhys, 2010). Others told me that they usually sit on the floor in the family *majlis* when close friends visit them. Thus, it is very natural to them to sit cross-legged on the floor and as a spatial practice of their culture:

*Gergana*: What kind of spaces or changes you would like to have around campus?

*Shatha*: The *majlis* is good, it is presenting the UAE culture.

*Gergana*: I see, I noticed actually that a lot of students like to sit on the floor.

*Shatha*: Yes, and even when they're in the atrium in these chairs, they always-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) Put their feet up.

*Shatha*: Exactly (laughing). This is because, this is part of our culture you know, it is how we live. So I think yes, *majlis* would be good.

*Gergana*: So at home, when you want to rest, you sit in a *majlis* area?

*Shatha*: We have actually, because you know, these days...?

*Gergana*: The modernization.

*Shatha*: Yes, modernization, so we have both, we can sit on the floor, we have a table to have breakfast and dinner. But in the same time, sometimes, ok we sit on the floor.

*Gergana*: You like the floor. I heard that people in Ramadan, they have *iftar* on the floor. Because it reminds them of the culture, do you do that?

*Shatha*: Yes. Even in the garden, we sit on the floor [...] we bring 'sejadeh' (small rug), or the carpet and sit there.

Students repeatedly reported in the interviews that they would like to have *majlis*-style seating arrangements in different corners around campus in and outside classes, as in the previous interview with *Shatha* and the following one with *Amira*:

*Gergana*: What about the DESIGN of the building? Do you feel it represents the UAE culture or you-u?

*Amira*: It's not *ya'nni*, they have to make it *ya'nni*, miss you know, like *aljalsat* (traditional seating areas).

*Gergana*: Right, '*almajalis*' (plural of *majlis*) yeah.

*Amira*: Yeah, *almajalis*. They make, you know the-e-e, we ha-a-ve the- CAR room (students lounge)...It's English style. Yeah. They can make it, *ya'nni*, in the DOWN, like-e..you know-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) On the floor?

*Amira*: Yeah in the floor.

*Gergana*: You mean *majlis*?

*Amira*: Yeah *majlis*. They have, *ya'nni*, the coffee of the UAE's and..*tamir* (dates) that's it *ya'nni* [...] and also miss I ha-a, *ya'nni*, in the classes..you know it's-s a-ah..make like LARGE classes, okay..but in the back. They make like Uhm '*aljalsah*' (*majlis* setting) [...] when the student..when the-e, when the student want to take rest after they finish the class maybe, *ya'nni*, class two hours. And the sir go out..for 10 hours..*ya'nni* for ah 10 minutes they can..they can and come and sit in the back.

[...]

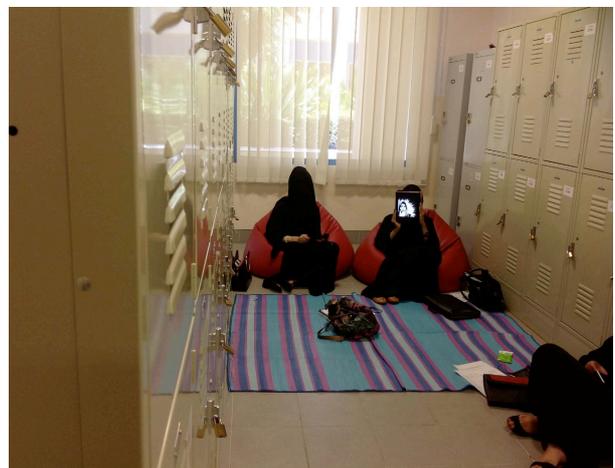
*Gergana*: So do you prefer..do you REALLY rest more when you sit on the floor, at *majlis*, than the normal chair?

*Amira*: While we studying, no, in the table. While we rest, in the floor...eating *ya'nni*.

When I mentioned the students' preference for having *majlis* areas around campus to the Director of Campus Facilities, she told me that they were well aware of it and intentionally did not provide them with such areas. Apparently, in the past, some *majlis* areas existed in public areas but students misused them by lying down, stretching out in public and sleeping, which was not deemed appropriate by the university's conservative administration. Despite this, students were already appropriating spaces and creating their own *majlis* areas by sitting on the floor (Figure 4.17), even bringing their own small carpets to create small intimate *majlis* spaces in the locker areas (Figure 4.18), thereby taking spatial appropriation to a new level. Ideally, they preferred carpeted areas, but the cold tiling was not enough to stop them from sitting on the floor.



**Figure 4.17:** Students creating their own *majlis* in the carpeted library staircase area (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.18:** Students using their own carpet to create their own *majlis* in a lockers area (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

One of their favourite areas was the carpeted grand stairwell of the library. This is a dark, circular, carpeted space, making it as an ideal *majlis* area (Figure 4.17). Although students had been banned from using it as they tend to cause disturbance and litter the area, they never ceased taking a chance to occupy

the space whenever the security personnel were not around. The students also made much use of the bean bags provided for them in the atrium as these were the closest alternative to actually sitting on the floor. Students dragged them around campus to create their own *majlis*-style sitting areas (Figure 4.18). Such actions as dragging the bean bags around, bringing personal carpets and appropriating forbidden spaces whenever an opportunity arises, are what De Certeau (1988) calls 'tactics'. As acts of defiance and subversion, these tactics slowly and silently insinuate themselves into the space of the other. The students are like the city walkers described in his chapter 'Walking in the City', who take unexpected routes that were not fully determined by the city planners and organising bodies.

The students' spatial practice of sitting on the floor was also evident inside the classrooms. In the audited classes, whenever students were assigned group work, some would choose to sit on the floor to discuss their work (Figure 4.19). In some cases, the whole class would sit together if the class space allowed it.



**Figure 4.19:** A small group sitting on the classroom floor (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

On one occasion, in one of the audited classes, the teacher wanted them to sit in a large group and asked them to rearrange the tables to make a u-shape or semicircle. Instead, the whole class, following the lead of two students, chose to sit on the carpeted floor at the back of the class, which offered enough space to allow such spatial practice as per the theory of affordances (Gibson, 1979). Interestingly, when a few of the students showed signs of reluctance or did not sit on the floor, one of the initiating students stood up and started walking towards the back, saying “I will sit on the floor, Sheikh Zayed used to sit on the floor”; immediately, the others laughed and followed her. In behaving like this, her statement and action represented more than just a sitting preference; it held links to their heritage and identity, reflecting pride of being an Emirati by following the footsteps of the country’s revered founder. Eventually, all the students sat at the back of the class in a distorted semi-circle (Figures 4.20. and 4.21), facing each other like in a *majlis*, and started discussing class content at great ease. The teacher commented to me that they needed a picture sitting like this, at which I nodded in agreement, telling her that I had already taken a few. Neither of us sat on the floor; instead we took a chair to one side, only intervening in the conversation occasionally because we just felt that it was their space and we felt awkward sitting with them. The students seemed more comfortable and willing to share ideas, and they welcomed this change in the seating arrangement to something more familiar and close to their hearts.



**Figure 4.20:** Class discussion on the floor (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.21:** Class discussion on the floor at the back of the class (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

I believe this spatial need for grouping in an intimate *majlis* could really be utilized by teachers to enhance the students' learning experience, although it needs to be supported by classroom design and the space affordances. Many spaces in the university are spacious enough to accommodate (afford) a small *majlis* at the back for group work, especially in the art studios, where students feel the need to move and change spaces for inspiration, or to just stretch out, as expressed by one faculty member from the the graphic design department:

I can see myself as an art student or design student [...] I definitely needed my own area, I can pin things up, my table there, and then when I turn around, my colleagues are working, there is a resting area, meaning they can sit down, lean and talk, so it is almost like living room style. So why we go to the café?..Because it is such a nice environment, sort of luxury little more like freedom, the space that you can think differently. And then you come up with like a solution for any problem that you dealing with in a design, project-wise.

However, despite its current prevalence, this practice is slowly diminishing with the advent of modernity, and the influence of other cultures. As one of my interviewed students said, "I don't like sitting on the floor; it's not good for your health", going on to explain how her English teacher told her how she had hurt her back sitting on the floor back in college, warning her against this practice. Many students are significantly influenced by their western teachers and often like to imitate them. Without doubt, many are attracted to modernity and a western life style. Thus, sitting on the floor is slowly being abandoned, with more young students telling me that they no longer liked sitting on the floor, despite acknowledging that it was part of their cultural traditions and practices. Sitting on the floor may be one of the few traces left of their life in the desert but, through modernization and increased wealth, many have become accustomed to a life of relative luxury and comfort that is a far cry from the harsh desert life of their ancestors.

### Modern-desert related

The following two themes, 'Spatial patent' and 'Cocooning', are a hybrid of modern and desert-related themes, emphasising the new identity of Emirati female students as modern children of the desert (Figure 4.22).

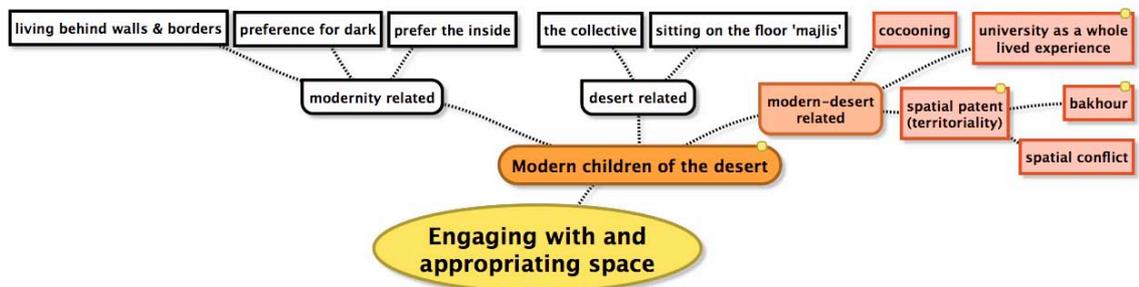


Figure 4.22: Modern-desert related themes.

### *Spatial patent-territoriality*

I constantly observed how Emirati females were extremely possessive and territorial of their spaces on campus, whether inside or outside the classroom. Almost every interviewed student spoke about a favourite spot that she liked to occupy and felt possessive of. Taking possession of one particular place in the classroom usually happened at the beginning of the semester during the first week, or even the first day for many; the students scanned the new classroom space before deciding on one spot that they would like to occupy for the rest of the semester, while some would explore several different spots during the first week to find the most suitable. Their choice was usually linked to their personal preferences and academic status. Usually, they sat close or next to their *rbee'ah/rbee'at*. Like students in other countries, the more committed and high-achieving students tended to sit closer to the front, while others who liked to engage in social networking or even skipping class without being observed by the teachers, tended to sit at the back. Once the Emirati female students decided on a spot, they almost always sat in the same place throughout the academic semester, as clearly expressed in the conversation below. They only changed for a specific reason, such as temporarily working on a project with other students, dealing with other business without being observed by the teacher, or even planning to slip quietly out of class unnoticed once attendance

has been taken<sup>35</sup>. In the latter case, they usually sat at the back, as far away, from the teacher, as possible and closer to the exit — a behaviour I noticed a lot in the audited classes.

*Maha*: Usually in each class, when I sit, first thing I do I just look at the class...because my personality..according to the class, I can participate, *ya'nni*, with the class. Then I start check, this is my place when I start anything: the chair, the table, the place. I HATE anyone sitting in my place (laughter) actually.

*Gergana*: I noticed that (laughing) (I am referring to the one time I deliberately sat in her place while auditing her class. Although trying to conceal it, she seemed quite annoyed about it.)

*Maha*: Re-e-a-a-ly (laughter), and “DON'T MOVE MY STUFF..JUST LE-EAVE IT..DON'T DO ANYTHING”.

*Gergana*: WOW.

*Maha*: Really. This's my personality, usually just I prepare for it, THEN I start, '*Khalas*' (that's it). So like when you sit, I say “fi-i-ne, she doesn't..she doesn't know me (laughing). It's fine”(she is referring to the incident when I sat in her place). When they sit in my place, It's fine.., It's not my place, like original.

[...]

*Maha*: It's..one...last week, it happened to me, like ONE student move my stuff, I was really nervous. Like, WHY SHE MOVE IT?

*Gergana*: So you're telling me that you always sit in one place. THE FIRST DAY OF class you go there and you see..you have a look at the space and you decide where you want to sit?

*Maha*: Where I sit, no one should sit there, really...NO-O-O ONE.  
*Khalas*, It's my place.

*Gergana*: So you don't experiment, you don't try sitting in different places to see which one works better.

*Maha*: In each class..each class, I have a place; when-when I came to the..like this course, this same class, I try to SIT. In another class,

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<sup>35</sup> Attendance is mandatory at ZU. Students were only allowed to miss 10% of the classes during a semester at that time. If they missed more than 10% they failed the course.

like I CHANGE. So it depend on my personality. How I feel..am-m, mood thing. I'm usually. What I have, so I do....and I feel good about it.

*Gergana:* [...] So...so on the first day you choose your place. You don't TRY different places to see which one-

*Maha:* (overlapping) NO.

*Gergana:* You immediately know which one is bett-

*Maha:* (overlapping) *khalas*, that's my place..that's-s best for me. I can recognize it from-m (laughing) far distance.

Clearly, Maha got extremely annoyed when someone occupied her space or moved anything that she had put on the table to mark her space to the extent that she would recite specific verses from Qur'an, 'The Quake', associated with 'shaking the ground underneath' to shake off the other students and make sure they left her space:

*Maha:* I used to take environmental there, ground floor. I LIKE IT. I just, *ya'nni*, WHEN I GO THERE, this is..and I have SPECIAL seat; no one sit there (Laughter). '*Wallah*' (I swear)...I just..you know what I do. First-t I-I usually (laughing) I don't know how to say it. *I read surat az-zalalah* (the Quake). [Translation author's own]

*Gergana:* O-o-h.

*Maha:* "*ltha zalzalt il-ard zilzalha*" (When the earth is shaken with its quake) [Translation by Talal Itani from [www.clearquran.com](http://www.clearquran.com)]. I don't want anyone to sit there (laughing) and true-e-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) WOW...and it works?

*Maha:* It works (laughing).

*Gergana:* When you, when you, *ya'nni*, when do you read *surat az-zalalah*?

*Maha:* When I feel someone will sit..I say, and someone who wants-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) and they don't sit?

*Maha:* They DON'T. I read..I read something from Quran of course (laughing). I say "*ltha zalzalt il-ard zilzalha*", and I say, "ple-e-e-

ase...no one sit", because that's my place. *Khalas*, I see it comfortable. Yeah, If I change it, I say WHERE..WHERE I will go?

*Gergana*: Yeah, you feel lost.

*Maha*: Yeah. When I see the-e..these, like the foremost...like no. It's bad bad bad, here is good.

While Maha's views seemed somewhat extreme, the majority of the interviewed students confirmed this preference for a specific space that they became possessive of, and their annoyance, to varying degrees, when someone else tried to occupy 'their' space:

*Gergana*: [...] And in class do you sit in the same place, all the time?

*Afra*: Yeah.

*Gergana*: Always the same place?

*Afra*: Yes-s (laughing).

*Gergana*: And do you get upset if someone takes the place?

*Afra*: Yea-a-h..BECAUSE IF I SIT BEHIND, I CANNOT hear..and I CANNOT focus. So sometimes I come late..and then a-ah a girl sit in my place (laughing). I will-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) and you're upset?

*Afra*: Yeah. I will not focus today (laughing).

In some cases, a minor conflict could occur over the preferred spot when two students wanted the same place and competed as to who could come earlier to reserve it. In the following interview, Amna admitted having a preferred spot in the class, while, at the same time, criticising the territoriality of the other students and distancing herself from such behaviour she considered as childish and immature:

*Gergana*: What is your favourite class in this case? Which class space is your favourite environment?

*Amna*: Mm-m a-a-h well it is not the class, but the place in the class that I care about, like the table I will sit in a-a-h (pause). Because you know, if it's like the big classes, I don't like sitting in the side..I always

like on front. Because it's better even if you think about it, in front of the table a-a-ah in front of the board I mean a-and a-ah..like in the middle. It's always better sitting in the middle most of the time.

[...]

*Gergana*: Front middle?

*Amna*: Yeah. I always prefer on the front (pause). I get used to that when I was in high school and the school.

*Gergana*: So in all of your classes you sit in that specific place?

*Amna*: No, not always [...] I know one day like I sat on the-e-e..It, well, happened this semester, and you know..nobody was in the place. I knew that in the previous class a student sat on that place, but I said it is a chance, maybe she will not come again (laughter). So I went there and then when she came, she was late actually fifteen minutes or something like that and I was sitting a-a-h looking a-a-h looking the lecture, and she was standing behind me (laughing). Like she came and-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) She wanted the place?

*Amna*: (laughing and nodding her head). I started like, we are not in the kindergarten or something like that. She is going to be a teacher *ya'nni*, and this is a practicum course, Oka-a-y, and I said like "who told you to come here?"

*Gergana*: But do you know what, it's actually true, like I noticed that students...FROM THE BEGINNING, they choose one place or two and they stick to it-

[...]

*Amna*: In the FIRST CLASS of the course, you go quickly so you got the good seat. But sometimes you can't (sigh) because this class it's at 8:00 and it's out of my control to COME at 8:00, so we might be late.

[...]

*Gergana*: So how will you feel if you are sitting there for a month and somebody comes and sits in your place...would you like it?

*Amna*: No-o, I moved from her place. I told her, "oh sorry", a-a-h because she went to my place [...] the one I don't like..'zein' (good), because it was the only one [...] I felt like it's as if we are in KG; we are fighting on a place (laughter), but like it was *ya'nni*, then I told her "O-o-oh you want to sit on the place *ya'nni*; if you want to come it's okay, I will move". She said, "NO NO". Because I really focus on people language, she said, "No..no next class I will COME" (laughter).

*Gergana*: O-o-o-o-h so she is going to come early and make sure she takes back HER place.

*Amna*: (laughing and mimicking voice) "No no, next class you DON'T THINK ABOUT IT EVEN" *ya'nni*.

[...]

*Amna*: I felt like her attitude was like children — childish *ya'nni*. Maybe her friend is next to me, I don't know.

Mouza, another student, shared a similar view and experience:

*Gergana*: I noticed how these students sit on the same chairs in the class, at the same place always, is that what you do?

*Mouza*: We try changing, we wanted to sit in the front, but some girls, you know, *ya'nni*, they sat there first. So every time if we are late, they are there, so *khalas*, I won't bother, I just sit in the same place and not bother anyone.

*Gergana*: Yeah, it feels like it's their place and they don't want anyone to take it?

*Mouza*: Yeah.

*Gergana*: I see, so you always like to sit in the front, I noticed that.

*Mouza*: (laughing) So in every class, it's like the same place, not always different because it's taken.

*Gergana*: O-o-h, but if it's not taken you would sit-

*Mouza*: (overlapping) I would sit in front.

*Gergana*: (laughing) how would you feel if someday I came and sat in your place?

*Mouza*: okay, it-it's fine by me, but some girls like they really don't like it, *ya'nni*, it's like it's their place, *ya'nni*.

This spatial patent or territoriality was not limited to classroom spaces; it extended to include those preferred spaces and cocoons across the public campus spaces that they liked to occupy, both individually and mostly with their *rbee'at*. I noticed that the same specific students occupied the same cocoon, coffee shop corner or space in the library over and over again. Other students also seemed quite aware of these spatial patents that belonged to others and tried not to trespass as some of them were very possessive of their spaces that often seemed to change over time as students progressed into their majors:

*Gergana*: You mentioned that you are still friends with the people who you started with in the ABP (Academic Bridge Program, pre-baccalaureate English support)

*Eida*: Yeah.

*Gergana*: And you meet together in the breaks? SO WHAT ARE YOUR places? Where do you guys meet?

*Eida*: Yeah [...] FIRST in the beginning like in the first maybe two years, we were always meeting in the-e-e F-F-F. You know (pause). In the F area, what's in front of the wing? There was, there's around..and there's a tree, the '*an-n-akhlah*' (the palm tree).

*Gergana*: Oh is it in the-

*Eida*: (overlapping) Those palms..palms in the middle of the Atrium.

[...]

*Eida*: We were always meeting there; and we have like chairs. We always sit there. Even..EVEN somebody come and sit in our place we were like ma-a-a-d and (mimicking voice) "why they sit in our place?"

*Gergana*: Really (laughing).

*Eida*: Yeah. Because we all..every day, every day, like some of them, they..my friends, they come to university from 8 to 5, so they *khalas*, you know..you know. They sit there, they eat there, they play there, EVERYDAY THERE, everything was there *ya'nni*, you know. THEN,

after like we-e entered our majors and like every...each each of us like had her own major a-a-ah we actually-y-y..we meet in-n-n the IT room..because most of my friends, they're studying IT [...]

*Gergana:* It's like-e a SOCIAL ROOM or it's the-e-

*Eida:* (overlapping) Yeah. It's a room for students, for IT students [...] they can si-i-t, they can e-e-at, drink, ah..watch TV, slee-e-e-p, do whatever they want. Like..ah you know PRIVATE room for them.

In one of my mobile interviews, a student showed me her favourite space that she regularly occupied with her *rbee'at* at a side table inside one of the atrium coffee shops, proudly and possessively pointing to the place while passing by her friends:

*Jawaher:* So this is OUR PLA-A-CE (stressing on the letters of our and place with such possessiveness and territoriality).

[...]

*Gergana:* You stick to the same place?

*Jawaher:* We stick in the same place. Never leave that.

[...]

*Gergana:* And if somebody comes and uses that place.

*Jawaher:* A-a-ah..we'll, wait until they leave (laughing).

*Gergana:* Then you sit.

*Jawaher:* Yeah.

*Gergana:* You won't kick them out?

*Jawaher:* No-o. I once did tha-a-t because there was no seat, and a-ah..I was really hungry-y..and I wanted to eat, So I tell them: "CAN I SIT NEXT TO YOU GUYS?", and then, I sit with them and they started leaving (laughing).

Throughout my observations and interviews, spatial patent and territoriality was a very evident spatial practice that not only students knew about, but also faculty and administrators noticed. In my interview with the Director of CPDO,

she explained how the students' 'dominating' behaviour influenced CPDO's decisions regarding public space allocations:

*Rayan:* Last year, we provided each college with a room that they can use for their students, like a *majilis* or an activity or something, and it needs to be managed by that particular college because we don't want the students to abuse the space. And what happened before, is that when you open a *majilis* for students' use, a general students' use, a group of students will be-e-e-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) dominating?

*Rayan:* Yeah, dominating that space, not allowing others to use it. And usually you don't find two groups in the same space, especially if it is cozy [...].

*Gergana:* [...] so could you give examples of misusing, like not allowing other groups?

*Rayan:* They don't close the doors and not allowing other, but culturally each group of students, they're like '*Rabi'e* (tribe), a group of people you know.

*Gergana:* yeah, collective.

*Rayan:* If they get used to use a certain space, the other groups would not come in, because you know they like to have privacy and so on. This is how they ah-h-h...without word, without saying.

While the majority of faculty observed such behaviour, they had different interpretations of it. For example, one faculty member confirmed my observations and saw it as territoriality and students having their own spatial patents:

*Gergana:* [...] I noticed that even within the classroom [...] students seem to have spatial needs, within the class itself, like they are very possessive of the chairs they choose at the beginning of the semester and they want to stay there.

*Beth:* Yes, yes, you took the words out of my mouth, like they have a PATENT, they have patents, spatial patents. And it is sometimes helpful actually for teachers because it is helping you in remembering

their names. They like, they like to sit in certain areas. Some of them go straight to the back and some of them come close near the teacher, am-m-m, yeah, yeah.

However, another faculty member interpreted this behaviour as indicating a 'lack of imagination' on the part of students:

*Gergana*: Did you notice anything different about their use of space compared to other students you have seen in other places [...]

*Jack*: Ahm-m, I am always struck by how they find a space and they stick with it the whole semester, and get decided straight away.

*Gergana*: Yes.

*Jack*: The idea of sitting everywhere you like, I never tell people where to sit, but...and that is helpful for us of course — learning names.

[...]

*Jack*: But I am almost touched by HOW unimaginative they are!

[...]

*Jack*: I don't want to mix up these arrangements of groups, formed in a classroom. Ammm, I don't mind it but I am always struck by how fixed they are about where they sit. You know, even if someone away, they still sit by themselves rather than join. There are only a couple of students that are moving around.

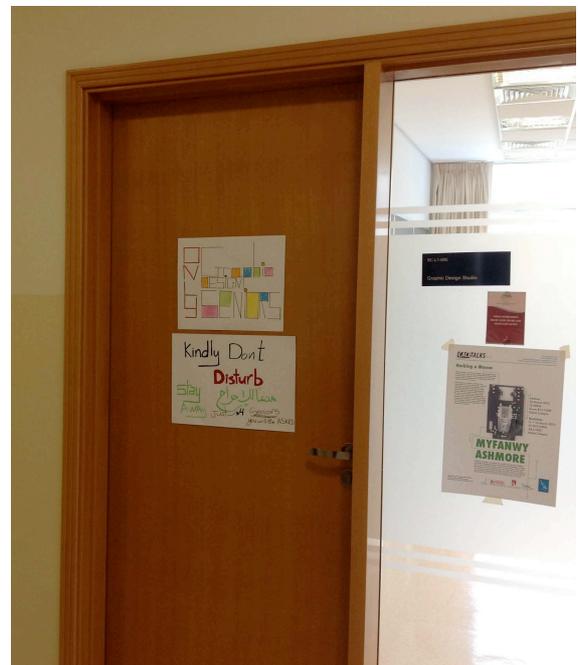
From my observations, it was quite normal for many students to leave some of their belongings in their favourite places as a way of marking their territories and reserving the space, making it common on campus to see unattended laptops, bags, mobiles and books. In one conversation, a faculty member mentioned that she considered this behaviour to be like marking their territory: "it is so funny to think about it, like a dog [...] yeah, they mark their territory. I think that somehow we have to allow them to mark their territory".

I also noticed on some occasions that students used '*bakhour*' (essence) to deodorize their spaces as discussed under smell (see 'Material associations with the body', Chapter 5), as a way of exercising power over the space and dominating it with their scent. According to Seremetakis (1996, cited in Bryant and Livholts, 2007, p. 38), objects of sensory space can also be a dimension of gendered power; in this case, they could be dimension of power in establishing some sort of patent and authority over that space by marking it by smell.

In some cases, this territorial behaviour extended to include feelings and actions of possession of the whole classroom space and not only a particular spot in it. In one of the audited classes, graphic design senior students were quite upset when other junior students used their studio space when they were not around. This led them to hang a sign on the studio door forbidding others from using the space, although the space was not officially designated for them, and was expected to be used by other students when the senior students were not around (Figures 4.23 and 4.24).



**Figure 4.23:** A senior student checking the sign after hanging it on the door of the graphic design studio (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.24:** The sign added by graphic design senior students to keep junior students out of their studio (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Of course, territoriality and spatial possession is nothing new, with history filled with wars over borders and territories. People commonly feel possessive of their properties, marking their territories with fences, walls or even, as in the case of Emirati female students, with bags, books and laptops (Figure 4.25), smells or even signs to occupy a spot or a space (Figures 4.23 and 4.24). For the Emirati females, this aspect of territoriality could also be very much related to their fear of the loss of their identity and their space within society, making them even more possessive of their spaces.



**Figure 4.25:** Students leaving their possessions on the desks to mark their territories (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

This also conjures up aspects of the territoriality of Bedouin life, which, despite being very mobile, was also territorial. Once a tribe had settled in a specific space, the men would mark the area around the tents to ensure that this space remained theirs, for the women, families and animals. Other families and tribes usually respected the other's territory, although sometimes conflicts could arise over such spaces.

### ***Cocooning: a space of their own***

I choose to end this discussion of spatial patterns with cocooning, as one of the most pervasive sub-themes, and one that touches all the others, whether modernity or desert-related.

On a daily basis, I observed how Emirati female students chose the most obscure and unusual little spaces to occupy while on campus. These mostly included small niches or recesses in the hallway walls that seemed to have some structural or functional purpose, such as spaces designed for water coolers. In addition, students chose hidden spaces within the locker areas, under stairwells (particularly the carpeted library foyer, as mentioned earlier), and any other available hidden corners that offered some seclusion and privacy (Figures 4.26, 4.27, 4.28 & 4.29).



**Figure 4.26:** A student sitting under the library staircase (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.27:** Two students in an empty water cooler space (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.28:** The “little niche” referred to in the interview on the next page (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.29:** A group of students cocooning in a locker area (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Najla, one of the students who enjoyed sitting in the carpeted library foyer, clearly expressed her liking of it as cosy, comfortable and dark:

(During a mobile interview)

*Gergana:* (whispering) do you like sitting here? (I was referring to the carpeted area under the library staircase as we passed through it, Figure 4.26)

*Najla:* Yeah I used to like to sit here, but the problem was there was no connection.

*Gergana:* A-a-h, no internet?

*Najla:* Yeah, and then they banned it because, because the girls used to come and eat a lot and make a lot of noise, because it's under the-e library. But I think it's a nice place to sit and study.

*Gergana:* Yeah, you like it, it's comfortable?

*Najla:* Yeah, it's really comfortable and cosy (laughing).

[...]

*Gergana:* you like things a-a-hm darker yeah, lik-

*Najla:* (overlapping) Yes.

While I called these interesting spaces 'cocoon', others, including colleagues and students, referred to them as "nooks and niches", "dark spaces", "in the corners", "cubbyholes" and "holes in the walls", as described in the following interview with a faculty member. In Lefebvre's terms, utilizing language to name, describe and speak about these spaces represents what he calls a 'conceived' space or 'representations of space' in spatial terms (1991, pp. 38-39; Harvey, 1990, p. 219), which is the abstract aspect of space (see Chapter 5 for more elaborative discussion on conceived space).

What I noticed are those little niches where I suppose next to water fountains. When we come in the morning, you come through the main entrance, you turn left, right, pass lecture hall one, there is that little niche, there are ALWAYS little groups of students sitting there (Figure 4.28); and they might have their cell phones sort of..chargers for the laptops across...from there in the hallway, but they will not sit at the hallway. They go into that little cubbyhole...you know what

they do, they sit under the stairwell at the library, and they go to those dark spaces in that area where that the foyer at the bottom of the stairs. So-o they are always getting those little niches in places, yeah. I have seen them sitting in the halls and on the second floor, and up in the education is little niches there and everything.

After I gave a presentation at a ZU College seminar about the students' spatial practices, many of my colleagues became more spatially observant about these cocoons and often shared their observations, views and sometimes even photos with me (Figure 4.35).

As a spatial practice, cocooning was often associated with dark, cool, secluded, small and sometimes secretive spaces where some transformation or activity happens. Most importantly cocoons were located in common areas where students had easy access and control over the space so that they were able to eat, study, socialize or even nap there. These spaces were thus transformed into cocoons, which in turn represents the social aspect of space as 'lived' spaces (Lefebvre, 1991); these cocoons were much more just than a hole in the wall, or a secluded space in a common area; they became a lived space that students cocooned in, escaping from general public exposure or the busy life on campus. That is, the students attached a new meaning and value to such places, transforming them from their intended function and creating one that did not previously exist. Thus, cocoons become precious spaces of their own, as discussed in the following sections.

Although cocoons were considered public spaces, their occupiers treated them as private, using them as resting pods and havens from the busy university life, places where the female students sought to find a space of their own to reflect, rest, study, socialize and appropriate. As public space that they exerted control over, and one that offered the seclusion they often needed and longed for, cocoons were treated as both public and private. In such cases the line between private and public becomes blurred in that it was both relational and subjective. As Tamboukou (2011) argues in her analysis of the epistolary

topographies of a female British artist (Dora Carrington), the problem associated with not being able to realize herself as an artist and fully devote herself to art work lay in the “relationship between the public, the private and the right to privacy [...] it was the right to solitude that Carrington was lacking” and not the exposure to public life (ibid. p. 28). In all of Carrington’s life journey of painting and decorating her houses while immersed in the public life of Bohemian circles, she actually lacked a private studio (‘a space of her own’) within the private domesticity of her multiple homes (ibid). In contrast to Carrington’s ‘spacelessness’, Emirati females find themselves a private space (a cocoon) within the public campus spaces and practices of everyday campus life. At the same time, the university campus as a whole is private and gendered space, initially established solely for them (see ‘Gendered spaces’, Chapter 5). Feminist discourse about this emphasizes the need and importance to establish the private (e.g. through cocoons) as this is considered a basic condition for being human. As Arendt put it, “to have no private place of one’s own (like a slave) meant to be no longer human” (Arendt, 1998, p. 161, cited in Tamboukou, 2011, p. 29). In the university, cocoons seemed to be the female students’ way of negotiating privacy while appropriating space within everyday spatial practices.

I also found a striking resemblance between the Emirati females cocooning spatial practice and perception of such spaces with the way other female students in two UK universities perceived and constructed their view of the university (Quinn, 2003b) despite the institutional and contextual differences. I specifically refer to the interesting choice of words describing the university by one of the students in Quinn’s study: “We are very much in a little cocoon here, a safe space” (Hannah, cited in Quinn, 2003b, p. 452; 2003a, p. 132). While the women students in Quinn’s study constructed the university as their protected safe haven from the masculinist outside world, Emirati females spatially appropriated their cocoons within the larger gendered university space, as a private, safe space of their own, which also reflects how space “is...central to subjectivity” (Rose, 1995, quoted in Quinn, 2003b, p. 451).

In a university where females are expected to stay from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with the majority not allowed to leave campus until after attending the last class on their schedule, many have long gaps between classes, so these students above all constantly looked for a space of their own (“retreat into oneself”) as a way to “care for the self” before facing the public again, as emphasised by Tamboukou (2011, p. 29). During the long hours of being on campus, students relied on these cocoons to rest, nap and recharge, as evident in the conversation with Amira:

*Gergana*: Sometimes I find students sitting on the floor in the hallways. Like in the small place inside the walls.

*Amira*: Yeah. They sleep miss [...] Yeah, they sleep. You know spot in the library when it's-s dark place?

*Gergana*: Yeah. Th-the ONE next to the elevator in the librar-

*Amira*: (overlapping) Yeah..yeah. They sle-e-e-p (laughing).

*Gergana*: O-o-oh. But they..some of them are talking and having fun.

*Amira*: Yeah. Some of them okay, *ya'nni*; me and my friends talking and one of my friends she's sleeping.

*Gergana*: Sleeping! Where else students like to sleep?

*Amira*: A-ahm-m-m miss the mosque, the mosque [...] *Ya'nni* when I went to the mosque for '*Ala'sir*' (the afternoon prayer), a-a-h I saw the student, NOT..all of them *ya'nni*..maybe one or two, they sleep *ya'nni* Miss.

Starting to use the prayer rooms as a space of their own to rest and socialize in, thereby marginalising its original function as a place of worship, despite its significant religious meaning for them stands as a testament to the students' critical and desperate need for a space of their own. This is evident from Amira's explanation in the following conversation:

*Gergana*: But I didn't know people sleep in the mosque. I thought they only PRAY and then they leave.

*Amira*: No, no, there's some girls. They, *ya'nni*, pray and they-y, when they have break, they sleep *ya'nni*. When we go to the

mosque, NOT ALL THE mosques [...] They cannot, *ya'nni*, sleep in wing B ground floor (laughing).

*Gergana*: Yeah, yeah. Because that's a small one.

*Amira*: Yeah. Small.

*Gergana*: So what do you do at the mosque? You pray and you sleep, and what else you can you do there?

*Amira*: I'm not a-ah..me no. But other girls, *ya'nni*. I pray and go out because you know sometimes, *ya'nni*, girls come and pray and other girls is SPEAKING and-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) O-o-o-oh, becomes distracting?

*Amira*: Yeah..Yeah.

*Gergana*: Okay. So some people socialize there?

*Amira*: Yeah (long pause).

In addition to prayer rooms, students occupied (cocooned in) every available space on campus that they can utilize and appropriate for themselves, including the social rooms offered by some of the colleges for their students, and any classes that remained empty between lectures. Although the DXB was initially designed to accommodate 4,000 users, it had already exceeded that quota at the time of my fieldwork in 2013, forcing trapped female learners into a desperate search for any cocoon they could find. Interestingly, even when the university first moved to the new campus, and it was too big for the approximately 2,000 occupants of the time, students still favoured and occupied such cocoons. This could have been because they were a part of the campus public space that was available to them at all times in contrast to the prayer rooms, empty classrooms or social rooms, which all had various regulations of their own to control users' behaviour and the timings of use. Whenever I asked students about their choice of place as I passed by their cocoons, they would say things like, "we like it here, we just like being here". One student I happened to meet daily at around 7:40 a.m. on her way to one of these cocoons (a space originally for a water cooler) that she would occupy between 7:30–8:30 a.m. told me, "there are not places for us on campus to sit...and joke". She would sit there on her own until her friend joined her, usually half an hour later (Figures

4.30 and 4.31). When I asked her why she did not sit in the atrium, she replied that she did not find the atrium “comfortable”, even though it was almost empty that early in the morning with lots of chairs and spaces to occupy.



**Figure 4.30:** A student cocooning in a water cooler niche (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.31:** Two students joining the student in Figure 4.30 (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.32:** Spatial memory showing where the students cocooned (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.33:** A Cocoon established next to the power socket to charge (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

As I wandered around campus, I often found what Betchtel and Zeisel call “behavioural traces” (1987, cited in Strange and Banning, 2001, p. 23) of the students’ appropriation of space, or what I call ‘spatial memory’, like food leftovers, discarded cans and cups, bean-bags (Figure 4.32), computer power

cables or mobile chargers still attached to sockets (Figure 4.33). These indicated their preferred cocoons. That is, the students usually appropriated these cocoons with their bodies and possessions, often also dragging bean-bags provided for them around campus or placing a carpet on the floor to create their own *majlis* inside the cocoon (Figure 4.18). For many of them, having a power socket to charge their devices was one of the main reasons to cocoon in a specific spot; students were very attached to their laptops and mobile devices, so having a space that offered what they needed added convenience to seclusion within the affordances of that space to transform it into their own lived space.

Often, students established their collective by meeting new members occupying the same cocoon:

(During a mobile interview)

*Gergana*: So you used to sit here (referring to a cocoon in the atrium).

*Dina*: Yeah and then I..I-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) Where..where did you use to sit? Where is your favourite place of the atrium (laughing)?

*Dina*: Next to the palm tree because there was..a socket for our laptops so-o..and the internet was fine [...] So I just sit here an-n-d THEN there is a girl I remember towards the beginning, that's how I made friends.

In these ways, the cocoons become a shelter, a place they knew and recognized, a place they related to and felt possessive of. This transformed it from the category of abstract space to 'their own' place, emphasising the locality and connection we tend to build with a 'place' compared to the 'space' (Massey, 1994). Although Lefebvre (1991) never distinguished, and actually refused to distinguish, between space and place, many other scholars, particularly post-modernists like Massey (1994), Rose (1993) and Elden (2001, cited in Tamboukou, 2003, p. 56), have discussed the space-place dualism. I also did not distinguish between the two and used both interchangeably in this research,

however, I tended to connect the abstract and conceived with 'space' and the lived and experienced with 'place', specifically for the cocoons that students transformed from a space into a local place of their own.

These cocoons become an extension or embodiment of the female's constant quest for a space of her own. Both Virginia Woolf (1945) and Maria Tamboukou (2003) emphasised the need and importance for women to have a space of their own; they both focused on the local and familiar aspect of that space, calling it a "room of her own". Woolf (1945) emphasized the importance of having economic independence and a room of one's own to allow for writing and creativity. This need was further confirmed by Tamboukou (2003) while tracing the spatial genealogies of nineteenth century women teachers. According to Tamboukou, for a woman, a room of her own offers a sense of independence and agency away from home and its physical and sentimental restrictions. The Emirati female students shared the same urge and need for a space of their own, but for relatively different reasons than those presented by Woolf and Tamboukou. Specifically, many students wanted a space of their own to cocoon, to share with the collective or to be alone in to study quietly, as clearly articulated in Amna's remark: "I want special place for me" while trying to find a quiet place to study and rest:

*Gergana*: What about the places in the library? Like..what did you think of it when you saw it for the first time?

*Amna*: The-e-e space? I was using the listening room because it was quiet, a-ah I like to sit in a quiet places because of that..a-ah I don't know, I was searching for quiet place, okay?

*Gergana*: Okay (laughing).

*Amna*: A-a-and that's make a-a-h. I was talking once to my teacher in the level and I told her like ah: "don't they like borrow us a room or something?" and she said: "in the library if you want". A-and a-a-h I said: "no-o, I want special place for me" (laughter), and she said: "*Amna, Ya'nni Amna* what? You are student", and I said: "it is okay if I have like a quiet place?" And she told me, she showed me a place that nobody goes to it.

*Gergana*: Which place?

*Amna*: It was here In F, a meeting room, she said: "nobody use it..if you want, go". But '*qalat*' (she said): "don't let others know" so..so it-it's not got *ya'nni, ya'nni..ya'nni* nobody *ya'nni* go and come *ya'nni* make disturbance for the others, but I didn't use it, I didn't like it. Because it is not, it's for faculty. So I didn't go.

Cocooning as a spatial practice was directly triggered by their socio-cultural status and identity as modern children of the desert with all of its associated spatial patterns, like being inside, in dark, private, secluded spaces. Such aspects of spatial practices are more associated with local female students than males as clearly summarized in my interview with Linda:

*Linda*: Yeah, they seem to, kind of, like these nooks and niches and these corners [...] But yeah, this idea of finding these little cocoon-like spaces and hiding in them in groups or even individuals, where their laptops on.

*Gergana*: Any other observations or actually something that you can compare with men because you are actually teaching men?

*Linda*: I don't see men doing that. They don't hide.

Cocooning as a spatial theme encompasses all the others. Cocooning satisfies the spatial needs of the modern children of the desert, which include their preference to dark, cool interior spaces that allow sitting on the floor individually and collectively, and offer some kind of seclusion within the affordances of the campus space.

## **Discussion**

As evident from all of the above analysis, students' spatiality is quite complex. This complexity is not only limited to the interrelationship between its multiple spatial themes and subthemes, but also involves the research's interdisciplinarity and the fusion between the domains of space, gender and education, with all its personal, social, cultural and academic dimensions, which also intertwine and intersect to inform the students' spatial experience. To

explain and analyse such relational complexity, I borrow the concept of 'intersectionality', first coined, as a term, in 1989 by American black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw as a way to introduce the intersection of race, gender and class in the exploitation and exclusion of black women regarding employment in the US (Jordan-Zachery, 2007, p. 255; Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 156). From both historical and epistemological perspectives, the term intersectionality was initially used by black feminist/scholars including bell hooks (1981, cited in Yuval-Davis, p.156) to critique white feminists' discourse that homogenized women's oppression; it also became part of the critical response to a lot of psychology's homogenization of gender in empirical research (Shields, 2008). It initially focused on the relationship between gender, class and race. However, more recently, feminists have used the term as a mean of analysis (intersectional analysis) and theory development in the study of gender, in that the social location of the individual, reflected in intersecting identities, becomes of utmost importance in research (ibid). For instance, Nira Yuval-Davis (2010) argues for the use of intersectional analysis as a way to transcend the dichotomy of recognition and distribution contributing to sociological stratification theory. She equates "intersections" with "social divisions" or social categories on an ontological basis, then argues for their recognition and redistribution within the context of politics and power. Lesley MacCall (2005, cited in Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 156) also makes a similar claim. In this research, I extended the boundaries of intersectional analysis applied by feminists scholars, not by including more categories like Yuval-Davis, but by going beyond social categories to include the material aspect of space and any possibly emerging dimensions, such as personal, social, cultural or institutional / academic, within the boundaries of gender, space and time. This novel way of utilizing intersectionality helped me better understand, address and integrate the complex relationships among all the emerging spatial themes, structures and cultural formations revealed in my fieldwork.

In addition to the concept of intersectionality, there were various spatial aspects (attributes) that cut across all themes and spaces. In particular, the public-private dichotomy seemed to run as a thread, both throughout my themes and within the everyday practices of students, bringing their spatial practices

together. Living in a conservative patriarchal culture, Emirati females seemed to favour the private domain over the public, and therefore tried to establish it within the public domain. This became particularly visible when students appropriated the private spaces of cocoons from within the public campus spaces, by applying a spatial patent on and claiming such territories as private spaces of their own. Students also preferred the inside while sitting in the dark or behind walls to create their own private domains, or when sitting in the private *majlis* of the collective, or even when they used electronic devices to access their private virtual spaces while remaining in a public space (see 'Virtual spaces', Chapter 5). The moment students passed through the university's gates to enter the realm of the private campus space, their daily private spatial practices began.

Lefebvre believes that "[the] 'public' realm, the realm of temple or palace, has private and 'mixed' aspects, while the private house or dwelling has public (e.g. reception rooms) and 'mixed' ones (1991, p.153). In the case of this study, however, Emirati females are away from their homes, which is the private and traditional domestic space historically associated with women (Tamboukou, 2011). The private campus becomes the outside and public, so within it the females try to establish 'the private', 'a space of their own' that they need; they do this, not to be creative or financially independent as emphasised by Woolf (1945) and Tamboukou, (2003, 2011), but to fulfil that intrinsic need for seclusion and solitude in congruence with their nature as modern children of the desert. Regardless of the reason, these females' need for a space of their own seems to cut across time, space and culture. This finding in turn adds a new cultural dimension to the feminist discussion while rethinking what Tamboukou called 'the private hypothesis' and the female's need for 'a space of her own' (2003, 2011), a need that intersects and intertwines with other factors. This need is also shared amongst females for various reasons, shaping what Tamboukou also named the 'female technology of self' (ibid). I find this interplay between the private, public and mixed with their blurred borders, throughout my themes intriguing, and a continuation of feminist discussions on the public-private dichotomy. I also extend this discussion in Chapter Five's analysis of

students' spaces. Paradoxically, while the public exists in the realm of the private, the private is also inclusive of the public.

While exploring the spatio-learning experience of Emirati females, I drew on De Certeau's insights into "penetrating [the] obscurity [of everyday practices as ways of doing things, and] mak[ing] it possible to articulate" them (1988, p. xi), which in turn revealed some of the institutional 'strategies' and student 'tactics' that intertwine with the everyday practices of campus life. In explaining these kinds of practices, De Certeau (1988) introduced these concepts of strategies and tactics. Strategies are usually associated with systems of power and disciplining institutions such as the municipality and the corporation, which are the forces of production (ibid). Tactics are associated with users, consumers and citizens, who endure/receive the forces of strategies, and whose ways (tactics) "manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them" (ibid. p. xiv). Aspects of the students' daily spatial practices confirm his assertion that everyday life is made up of tactics and poaching: it is made of "clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, 'hunter's cunning', maneuvers..." (ibid. p. xix). The students' acts of resistance were not substantive, but silently insinuated themselves everywhere, such as the acts of dragging bean bags to create different seating arrangements around the lockers or inside the cocoons, and avoiding using the arrangements created by the institution. These tactics were also opportunistic, as the students were "always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing' " (ibid. p. xix); examples include seizing the opportunity to appropriate their favourite area, under the library staircase, when the security guards were not around. One obvious strategy of the institution was a decision not to provide the students with a female *majlis* in the campus public area, as explained by the Director of CPDO earlier in the chapter (p. 117). However, the students retaliated by creating their own *majlises*, bringing carpets and using the floor spaces in different areas around the campus. Another strategy was more recently brought to my attention by a colleague: the administration tried to limit the students' use of a 'cocoon' near a lecture hall and administrative offices by adding large potted plants blocking the front. However, students continued to appropriate it finding it even cosier and kept a chair at the back, perhaps as a

'spatial memory' and representation of their 'tactics' (Figures 4.34 & 4.35). Recently, I found bean bags had been brought to the same cocoon. These strategies and tactics contribute to our understanding of the spatio-learning experience. Like the private-public discussion, they also seem to cut across all spatial practices. In fact, these daily spatial practices can be associated with Lefebvre's (1991) perceived aspect of space, and its dialectic relation with the conceived and lived, which will be discussed in the next chapter.



**Figure 4.34:** Students in a niche (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 4.35:** Institutional 'strategy' to limit the students' appropriation of the space (David Palfryman 2014).

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I briefly introduced my findings mapped around the emergence of four interrelated mega-themes and their associated sub-themes, then discussed in detail one of the mega-themes — 'Engaging with and appropriating space'. The decision to categorize my findings around these mega-themes and subthemes was a heuristic one informed by my practice and guided by local cultural formations. As the schematic representation of all the emerging spatial themes in Figure 4.1 shows, students' spatiality is complex. Also, as is evident in this chapter and the next, the emerging mega-themes and subthemes are closely interrelated and intertwined, intersecting, interplaying and, in some cases, becoming inclusive of one another. Some of the subthemes could fit under more than one mega-theme. For example, 'Gendered spaces', discussed in the section on the 'Lived space' of the 'Students' spaces within and beyond the triad' mega-theme (Chapter 5), could also fit under 'Negotiating and contesting spaces' mega-theme since a major

section of the discussion on ‘Gendered spaces’ involved contesting and negotiating them. Other themes are also linked. For example, the subtheme ‘Awareness of space’ under ‘Understanding spaces’ mega-theme depends heavily on observing the physical aspect of space, which in turn links to the material aspect of space, the ‘Perceived space’ sub-theme in ‘Students’ spaces within and beyond the triad’ mega-theme (Chapter 5). Additionally, the students’ awareness of their spatial needs, of how they imagine and want the university space to be, is also linked to the ‘Conceived space’ subtheme under ‘Students’ spaces within and beyond the triad’ mega-theme.

In this chapter’s discussion of ‘Engaging with and appropriating space’ mega-theme, I explained the different spatial practices through which students appropriate and utilize campus spaces, briefly presented in the domain analysis of students spatial practices and cultural domains (Table 4.1). Students created their own spatial patterns and themes as outgrowths of their identity and socio-cultural status.

**Table 4.1:** Domain analysis of the emerging spatial themes relevant to how students appropriate and engage with space.

<p><b>The ways in which the Emirati female students engage with and appropriate spaces while creating several spatial patterns</b></p>	<p>What are the ways in which students utilize and appropriate the space? What are the emerging spatial patterns?</p> <p><b>1. Modern children of the desert</b></p> <p><b>1.1. Desert related spatial patterns</b></p> <p>1.1.1. Being part of the collective <i>rbee’athood</i></p> <p>1.1.2. Liking sitting on the floor — <i>majlis</i></p> <p><b>1.2. Modernity related</b></p> <p>1.2.1. Preference for staying indoors</p> <p>1.2.2. Preference for dark spaces</p> <p>1.2.3. Always being behind walls and physical barriers</p> <p><b>1.3. Modernity-desert related</b></p> <p>1.3.1. Establishing cocoons — cocooning</p> <p>1.3.2. The use of <i>bakhour</i> to deodorize and appropriate</p> <p>1.3.3. Experiencing university life as a whole lived experience</p> <p>1.3.4. Establishing patent over spaces — territoriality</p> <p>1.3.4.1. Emerging Spatial conflict of territoriality</p>
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	<b>2. Affordances</b> 2.1. Spatial Possibilities 2.2. Spatial limitations — physical
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In the next chapter, I discuss the second mega-theme of students' spaces by considering students' types of spaces under Lefebvre's triad, to include those that already existed as well as those constructed by the children of the desert.

## Chapter 5. Students' spaces: within and beyond the triad

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In this chapter, I thematically map and organize the types of female student spaces emerging from my fieldwork within the overarching framework of Lefebvre's (1991) triad of perceived, conceived and lived spaces as explained in Chapter Two, to offer an initial structure and a starting point for organising and analysing those spaces. I believe the strength of Lefebvre's triad, which is considered by many as the core of his theory, lies in its ability to be utilized by different scholars across disciplines. Its trans-disciplinary and abstract philosophical notion allows for multiple interpretations and applications; therefore it has been drawn upon by many scholars in cultural studies (e.g. Harvey, 1990), education (e.g. Middleton, 2014, 2011, 2010), geography (e.g. Soja, 1996, 1991), architecture and urban studies (e.g. Stanek, 2011), and organisational analysis (e.g. Watkins, 2005).

However, it is important to stress that my adoption of the triad should not be seen as reflecting a closed and deterministic theoretical and analytical vision. Rather, it is intended as a point of entry to support a certain perspective, offering an interdisciplinary structural framework within the multiplicity of intersecting factors involved in the research. As this is an exploratory qualitative inquiry into women's spaces, it will not be bound by any encompassing theoretical frameworks or ideas, but will be theoretically and analytically guided by some spatial theories to stimulate new ideas and help us understand the spatio-learning experience of female learners in the UAE.

Thus, my decision to utilize Lefebvre's triad as a major part of my theoretical framework is heuristic, in that it offers structure and organisation for analysing highly complex and intertwined types of spaces. Thereby, it serves a dual purpose: first, it offers an organisation of the students' several emerging spaces within an established framework while also possibly allowing for another; second, it offers a systemic approach for revealing their spatial practices in order to understand the spatio-learning experience itself. Every experience comprises the triad's interrelated aspects of space described by Lefebvre as "the three moments of social space" (1991, cited in Soja, 1996, p. 65). These

moments cannot be separated or reduced to one another, as each moment is constituted of the three interacting, forming and projecting spaces through social interaction.

This complex and interrelated nature of the triad's perceived, conceived and lived spaces, as they all tend to intersect and intertwine, accounts for the difficulty I encountered while trying to organise my findings of students' spaces under each space. Although I was able to identify and recognize the material perceived, the abstract conceived and the social lived aspects of space, I was never able to draw a clear line between them. In fact, I had a great difficulty reducing and fitting my spatial themes of students' spaces into each because all three seemed to intertwine while also being inclusive of one another, with the lived always encompassing the other two. With this in mind, the following sections demonstrate my attempts in utilizing Lefebvre's triad to better understand and categorize Emirati female students' spaces both within and beyond the perceived, conceived and lived intertwined spaces of the triad (Figure 5.1).

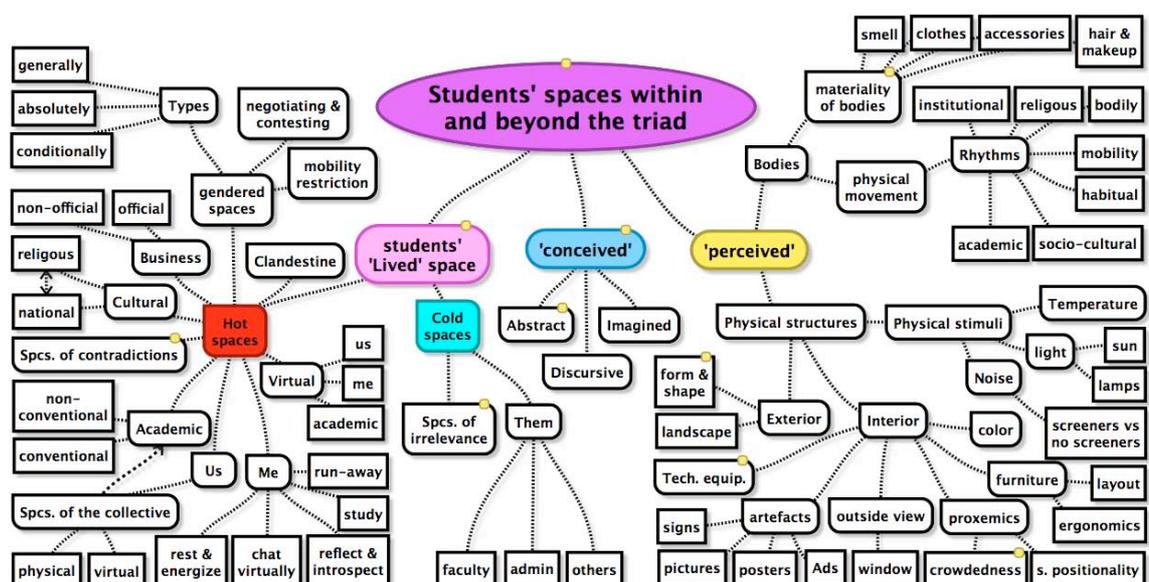


Figure 5.1: Students' spaces within Lefebvre's triad.

## Perceived space: spatial practice

The perceived aspect of the students' spatio-learning experience focuses on the outside, where spatial practice happens. This type of space includes the physical aspect of the space that ensures production and social reproduction (Lefebvre, 1990)<sup>36</sup>. As such, it is the material aspect of space, "the common sense, taken-for-granted physical/ embodied world of social practice" (Middleton, 2014, p. 10) that creates the sensory environment of what we see, smell, touch, hear and feel with our senses. This perceived space, as from my fieldwork, is inclusive of the physical reality represented in its physical structures (architectural and structural campus facilities) and students' bodies, including their physical movements and unique rhythms within the space (Figure 5.2).

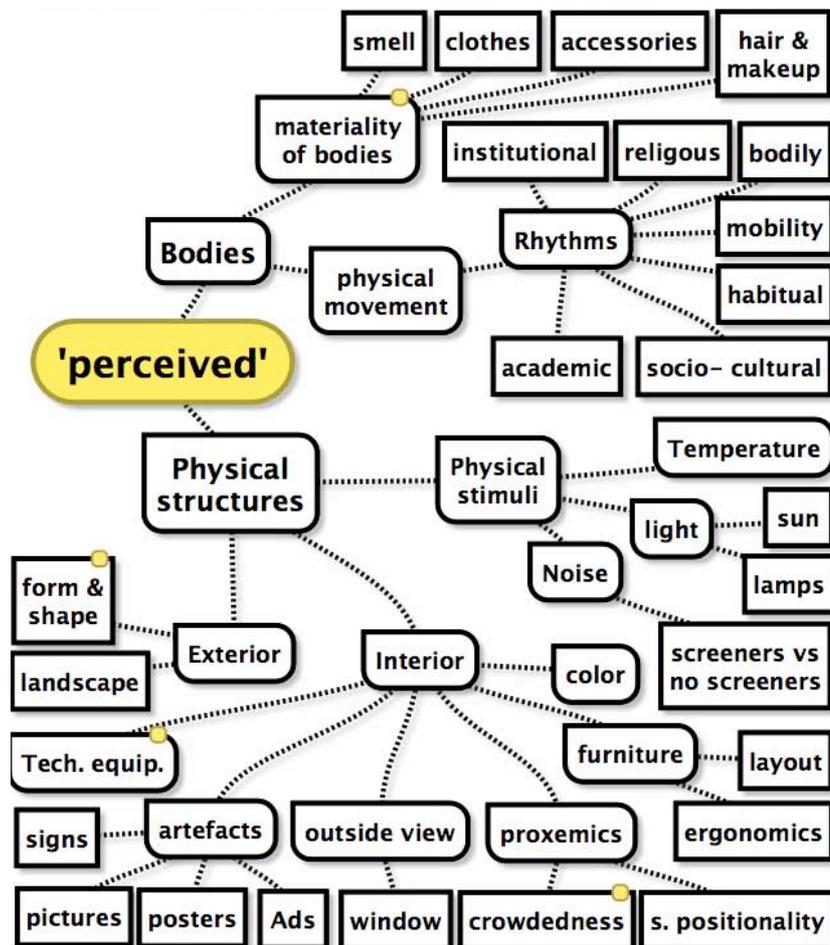


Figure 5.2: Attributes of the perceived space.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 2 for a detailed definition and discussion of spatial practice.

### **Physical environment: physical structures**

The physical environment around us constitutes a major part of the perceived space. Many<sup>37</sup> believe it has direct influence on our behaviour, emotions and bodies. Lefebvre (1991) also asserts this environmental influence, assuming that every space is present before being occupied by actors, and therefore influences them at the same time as they seek to appropriate and determine its collective and individual use through their spatial practices. However, these actors often tend to neglect space and deny its influence experiencing it as rigid and hard to modify: “this pre-existence of space conditions the subject’s presence, action and discourse, his competence and performance; yet the subject’s presence, action and discourse at the same time as they presuppose this space, also negate it.” (ibid. p. 57). The physical environment is inclusive of the environmental factors that we react to in our physical and social space including the material structures with their exteriors, interiors, and what Kopec (2010) refers to as physical stimuli (e.g. noise, temperature, smells and light).

During both my interviews and casual conversations, students always referred to different spatial aspects of the interiors, exteriors and physical stimuli of the campus physical facilities, which I like to call spatial attributes. Several spatial attributes emerged from the fieldwork. These include the interior attributes of colour, furniture, artefacts, technological equipment, proxemics and outside view; the exterior attributes of form (building exterior shape) and landscaping; and the physical stimuli attributes of noise, light, and temperature (Figure 5.2). Out of the nine spatial attributes listed in the diagram under exteriors, interiors and physical stimuli I choose colour, proxemics, layout and furniture, as well as noise to discuss in more detail since these were the most frequently recurring and influential on the students’ spatio-learning experience (Figure 5.3).

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<sup>37</sup> Boykins, 2009; Jacobs, 2009; Caan, 2007; Strange and Banning, 2001; Travis, 2001; Fehrman and Fehrman, 2000; Eisenman, 2000; Mahanke, 1996.

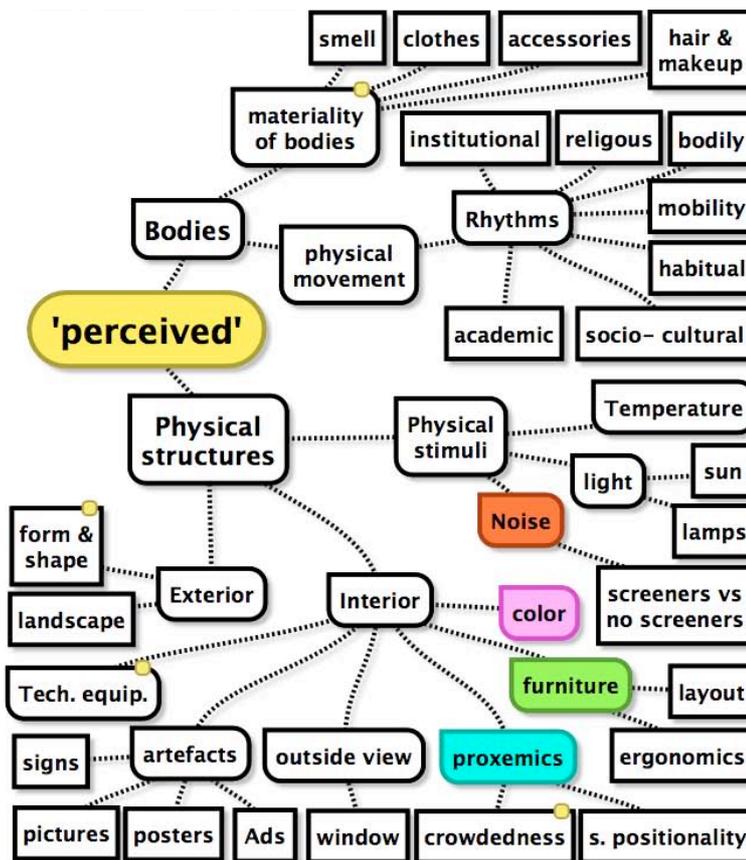


Figure 5.3: The attributes of the perceived space.

### Colour

Colour emerged as a very dominant spatial attribute throughout my fieldwork (Figure 5.3). It was the most frequently mentioned spatial attribute in my interviews and conversations with students when discussing the physical space of campus facilities. Emirati female students like colour a lot. They intentionally wear colourful clothes underneath their black *abayas* to stand out when their *abayas* fall slightly open while walking; their make-up is strong and vivid, as are the colours of their designer shoes and bags (Figure 5.9, p. 183). The conversation below clearly shows one student's awareness and love of colour in her class environment:

*Reem*: I like this class, its big, and I can feel the feeling of coop coope..., I don't know what cooper...what is the word?

*Gergana*: Cooperation maybe.

*Reem*: Yeah, and working and...yeah just come and focus on working.

*Gergana*: So you can only come here and focus on work.

*Reem:* Yeah

*Gergana:* No distractions?

*Reem:* Yeah

*Gergana:* But you have a lot of things here to distract you, materials, colours, aren't you distracted by them?

*Reem:* Maybe just colours because I love colours.



**Figure 5.4:** A painting by art and design students displayed in one corridor (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Reem was also very conscious of the colours and the way they bring 'life' to a particular painting hanging on the wall during our mobile interview:

*Reem:* Miss, you can see there is something special. (referring to a large painting on the wall, Figure 5.4)

*Gergana:* There is something special?

*Reem:* The ey-y-y-es and colou-ou-rs.

*Gergana:* Like what, what do you believe is special?

*Reem*: There is colours ehehe, I don't know what they call it but...

*Gergana*: You can say it in Arabic.

*Reem*: 'Ya'nni Hayaya' (meaning life) [translation author's own]

*Gergana*: Hm-m-m Life-

*Reem*: (overlapping) 'Hey' (yes), li-i-i-fe.

More generally, students' references to colour were mostly linked to the wall colours when talking about campus spaces or describing their preferred or non-preferred learning spaces.

*Najla*: I DON'T LIKE THE WALLS, they are too colourful, they are too childish.

*Gergana*: Okay, do you like something different?

*Najla*: Yeah.

*Gergana*: what colours would you suggest?

*Najla*: Sand colours.

*Gergana*: O-o-h oka-a-y, something from the desert environment-

*Najla*: (overlapping) Yeah..yeah.

In another interview, Amna explicitly expressed her dislike of the new wall colour in the library, even exhibiting some knowledge of the psychology of colour and its role in influencing people:

*Gergana*: Can you recall an incident when you suddenly became aware of the space around you? [...]

*Amna*: If they bring something new, yeah I will recognize it.

*Gergana*: Okay.

*Amna*: If they bring something new, yeah when they change the colour of the library. They make it-t what? (pause) 'Banafsaji' (violet).

*Gergana*: Oh..violet, yeah!

[...]

*Amna*: And I was like how they make it, *yanni*, its 'aslan' (basically)...a-ah the wrong colour for a library (laughing).

*Gergana:* You didn't like it?

*Amna:* Because it's like in-n..there's like A STUDY showed like a-ah you don't use this colour in a-a-a.., if you wanna someone to sleep, maybe use it (laughing). Like you know there is a study of colours like you should choose the right colour in the right place.

*Gergana:* So what's the right colour for a library? What do you think?

*Amna:* I'd rather white...or-r..yellow maybe [...].

The students' focus on and awareness of wall colours may be attributed to the fact that particular academic wings and classrooms in the university are painted in different colours of various shades and intensity. For example, the corridors of the five academic wings (B, C, D, E, and F) at that time were coloured orange red, pink, blue, green, and yellow, respectively. This makes colour more evident, especially as many use the colour of a wing to give directions on campus, using statements like "D wing, the blue one" or "the red wing". While all the interviewed students liked colours, they differed in their colour preferences, with some preferring light pastel colours for the walls and others preferring stronger colours with more intensity. In addition, although female students like sitting in the dark with the lights either dimmed or switched off as I have discussed in Chapter Four under 'Living indoors, in the dark and behind walls', they mostly still preferred a light colour for the classroom walls.

*Gergana:* So what is the worst class you have been to? The least favourite space for you?

*Maha:* WORST?

*Gergana:* Yeah.

*Maha:* It was the-e...,not the first year..the second year was the English class. The colour..it was (pause) Gree..HA (pause) Orang..It was ORANGE. I say.. "Why it's too dark here?" So when he close the light, It's like..gets darkness...I don't want it, but I stay there.

Emirati females' interest in and focus on colour seemed to parallel that of Western women teachers in the Nineteenth Century as evident in their self writing (Tamboukou, 2013); these women seemed to be "obsessed" with their

physical surroundings, and the colours of their premises seemed to take a central role in their writing (ipid. pp. 86-87).

As a dominant element of the perceived space, colour influences humans both psychologically and physiologically (Boykins, 2009; Jacobs, 2009; Caan, 2007; Travis, 2001; Fehrman and Fehrman, 2000; Eisenman, 2000). It is one of the elements that shapes the environment and strongly influences how we feel and interpret it (Smith, 2003, cited in Kopec, 2010, p. 85). This ability to influence directly links it to the lived social space of emotions and interpretations, beyond the pure materialism of the perceived aspect. There are numerous studies on colour, the psychology of colour and its influence on emotions and physiological responses to a space. For example, research found that colour alone is responsible for 60% of people's responses to and perception of a particular space (Jacobs, 2009, p. 8). Although a lot of these studies on colour are anecdotal, with scholarly views varying regarding the degree of colour's influence, the majority at least agree that such an influence exists. Thus, although the psychology of colour and its influence is not the main focus of this research, it is nevertheless necessary to recognize colour's dominant role within the perceived space since emphasized by the interviewees' own words, as in this example:

*Moaza*: [...] the wings don't look the same because every wing has a different colour and when you enter each wing, you feel a different feeling.

*Gergana*: Really-y-y-y. How do you feel?

*Moaza*: It depends-s a-a-a-a.

*Gergana*: Can you describe let's say..in the B wing that has the red orange colour.

*Moaza*: Yeh-h, ehheh I feel energetic because that's the first place you enter, I always MOSTLY park in front of B wing and it is THE START (laughter). BUT THE COLOR, these colours, FOR ME I HATE THE D WING BECAUSE IT'S BLUE AND DARK AND I just FEEL SOMEHOW DEPRESSED when I go there heheh. I have a class there and each time, maybe because of the timings also, I have that class at 4:00 so when I go most of the students are just home

and there is no active activities and I just go there and its dark and I don't really like it.

*Gergana:* So you don't like dark?

*Moaza:* No-o-o I don't like dark colours for a room.

In another interview, Reem directly linked colour to her emotional state:

*Gergana:* Yeah, like you know, the way things are arranged, the tables, chairs, colours, do you think that might have any influence on learning?

*Reem:* Yeah, I think how the girls will feel.

*Gergana:* So..like what?

*Reem:* Maybe if the colours affect our feelings maybe, if we focus.

*Gergana:* So you think the colour affects you.

*Reem:* Yea, I think colours affect me.

Given that colour can directly trigger emotions and specific responses (Jacobs, 2009), many designers and architects utilize it to stir emotions and influence behaviour; it therefore becomes instrumental for achieving the space's function by enabling people in that particular space to achieve their goals and objectives, whether in a learning, health, or corporate environment (Boykins, 2009; Jacobs, 2009; Travis, 2001; Fehrman and Fehrman, 2000). For example, people may be more likely to circulate, mingle and interact in a yellow or red space and be more sedate and calm in a blue one (Caan, 2007, p. 43).

These studies indicate that, as an attribute of the perceived space, colour can make students' educational experiences more or less conducive to learning. In my study, students often referred to the possible influence of classroom colour on their learning:

*Gergana:* Does it matter to you, the space that you are in? Do you feel it matters when you are studying?

*Moaza:* A-a-hm the spaces, I really don't mind them 'bas' (just) I feel like some students would like a-a-a-h-m-m like more colourful spaces

for them to focus. I see many students *ya'nni* half asleep in class I feel like there has to be something to keep them, to keep them up.

*Gergana*: To keep them awake? So you feel that they need some colours?

*Moaza*: Some colours, yeah.

*Gergana*: What colour do you think will keep them awake?

*Moaza*: I don't know, tho-o-se not very bright colours cause it's a university, but some, you know, those pastel colours.

In some cases, the classroom's colour influenced their learning experience to the extent that they wanted to change rooms, as expressed by Maha when discussing her classrooms experiences:

*Maha*: The colour..like..I hate the colour sometimes... I-I remember the first class I came, It was BLUE. I hate it...it was in D.

*Gergana*: (laughing) yeah..yeah.

*Maha*: I hate..I hate wing D. I went to my mom. I told her "I don't want to sit in that place..Just PRAY, DO SOMETHING. I don't wanna sit". I just spend there one week, they moved me..like '*qudret qader*' (Almighty's doing). From God *ya'nni* (laughing).

*Gergana*: God's will.

*Maha*: Because I was praying. I don't want to sit there, I was like feeling...

*Gergana*: depressed?

*Maha*: Yeah, I don't want there.

Both teachers and students referred to colour's role in enhancing or impairing the learning experience. Despite mixed scholarly views on the extent of colour's influence on learning, both had complete conviction of the role of colour in learning, as shown in this teacher's opinion:

*Gergana*: if you can change things or rearrange anything around this place, the campus and classrooms, what would you change to make it more conducive to learning?

*Nancy*: ohhh, bring colours and the ability to move desks around [...].  
[...]

*Nancy*: I would change room colours, more colours and I am not sure what colours would be conducive to learning, I have heard that the pale blue colour, pale green-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) Yeah, pale green and pale blue, they are better for memory retention  
[...]

*Nancy*: And the white makes people depressed, I have a student who made a research on psychology of colours..years ago, and they were actually looking at colours which were used in some literature. They have articles.

*Gergana*: The problem is that a lot of research that talks about environmental determinism is anecdotal [...].

*Nancy*: It is really contextual and really also cultural.

As one student reported, teachers actually utilize colour as part of their teaching pedagogy to enhance their students' understanding of the course content:

I remember, basically I am taking a course called New Media and we are just designing logos and different things and our teacher takes us to the hallways and says "look at the feeling here and there, so it's the same when you do it for the logo, we have to consider colours and things".

In short, as the previous interview extracts reveal, colour emerged as a major aspect of both the perceived and lived space, directly influencing students' spatio-learning experiences. Although colour is part of the sensory perceived space, its influence on behaviour and emotions directly links it to constructing aspects of the lived space.

## Proxemics

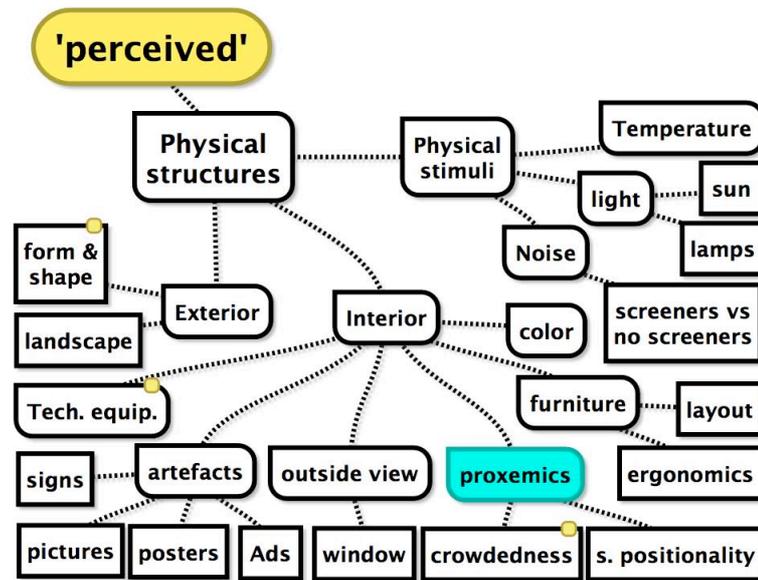


Figure 5.5: Proxemics as an attribute of the perceived space.

In addition to colour as an attribute of the perceived space, proxemics frequently recurred in my interviews, casual conversations and observations (Figure 5.5). ‘Proxemics’ was first coined by Edward Hall (Kopec, 2010, pp. 66-67; Sheppard, 1996; Brebner, 1982, p. 131), and is defined as “the study of the cultural, behavioural, and sociological aspects of spatial distances between individuals” (Proxemics, 2014, para.1). In social learning theory, proxemics is a learned behaviour (Kopec, 2010, p. 67), referring to the level of comfort people can experience in a space, based on four socio-spatial ‘zones’ that they establish around themselves in a social setting (Strange and Banning, 2001, p. 21; Kopec, 2010, p. 67): intimate (0–1.5 feet), personal (1.4–4 feet), social (4–12 feet) and public (more than 12 feet). Proxemics is associated with maintaining what are considered appropriate distances within the perceived space: “wherever possible allowance is to be made for ‘proxemics’ — for the maintenance of ‘respectful’ distances” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 56). Although proxemics is closely linked to the social (lived) space since social and cultural meaning is attached to what is considered a respectful distance as discussed in the next paragraph, I chose to classify it as a strong attribute of the perceived space due to its material existence as the physical distance students occupy and utilize among themselves.

Despite the standardization of these spatial zones, people differ in their spatial sensitivity (Brebner, 1982, p. 139). Social and cultural norms play a major role in determining these distances. For example, I noticed that ZU female students make no differentiation between intimate, personal and social distances when it comes to the females within the collective; instead, these three zones collapse and often intersect, mirroring the strong relationship among collective members within Emirati culture (see 'The collective — Rbeea'thood', Chapter 4). Students usually sit extremely close to each other both in and out of class, often having parts of their bodies and *abbays* slightly touching or in closer contact.

Gender also plays a role in expanding or reducing these spatial distances, specifically the personal one. I noticed that, as a female instructor, students usually approached more closely than what I am accustomed to, thereby invading what I consider my personal space. Interestingly, in such occasions, whenever I stepped backwards to increase the distance, they moved forward. While this inconvenienced me during my first year at ZU, over time I learned to accept it as it helped in establishing rapport and communication with the students. In contrast, whenever males are present, these distances increase since gender segregation is culturally practiced in the UAE. These findings mirror Kopec's (2010, p. 68) assertion of how the traditional conservative cultures of Asia and the Middle East tend to require more space between genders than other less conservative cultures. I also noticed that the Emirati female students would keep more space between themselves and local males than between non-local males. In the university's orientation for new faculty and staff, male faculty and staff are instructed to avoid any physical contact with local female students, except in life-threatening situations and in the absence of other females who could help, as reported by one of the male security guards, who shared a story that happened while he was on duty:

*O'Neil:* Well, there was one time I try to close the door...and there's student came. I told her "We're close the door at 5:55 (long pause). So she came..and there was 5:56..So I told her "door is closed". She said "no", she wants to go because she has a class at the end of the wing, which is..open on front. So I told her she has to go around. She said "no", I said.."force the door", I tried to hold the door, she forced.

*Gergana*: She was pushing against the door?

*O'Neill*: She was pushing against the door.

(laughter)

*O'Neill*: As a security guard, and one of the instruction, you cannot touch the females. So..I had to like..let her go.

*Gergana*: And she went in (laughing).

*O'Neill*: She went.

*Gergana*: Wow okay. So basically as security guard you are not allowed to touch the females.

*O'Neill*: No.

*Gergana*: At all?

*O'Neill*: At all.

*Gergana*: Even if they're sick, and they faint, you cannot save or do any-

*O'Neill*: (overlapping) Unless female lady guard or a female...ah student is not around or female staff. That's only an exception. When they're not around, then a male can touch.

In addition to culture and gender, several other factors influence proxemics as discussed by Kopec (2010, p. 68). Proxemics is affected by environmental factors; for instance, people tend to sit closer on a cold day than a hot one. It varies with personality and emotions; we can tolerate less interpersonal distance when we feel strong and secure but we need more when we feel vulnerable and weak. It also varies by age stage: since it is a learned behaviour, children are less aware of it than adults, and varies by gender, as men are found to need more space. This coincided with my fieldwork as male students preferred more spacious, open areas like the outside courtyard or the open hallways, even in class, they would comfortably sit alone on a desk unlike the females, who cocooned in darker, smaller and more secluded areas enjoying cluttering and proximity to one another in and outside the classroom as discussed in Chapter Four. The men 'need' more space connecting them to open spaces, while the opposite is true for women; these needs are social constructions: Emirati women have been socially conditioned to prefer privacy,

seclusion and less exposure, while Emirati men have always been expected to take leading roles, be exposed, take responsibility and place themselves in physical as well as social centres.

My fieldwork observations and interviews suggest that proxemics are closely linked to crowdedness/crowding and spatial positionality. Therefore, I extended the definition of proxemics to include both of them as attributes and influential proxemics factors. Crowdedness is a feeling caused by too many people in a small space; it is associated with high density: “the ratio of individuals to an area” (Kopec, 2010, p. 71). Crowdedness is often a source of discomfort, especially when it compromises established spatial zones (proxemics) by restricting personal space. I found that both ZU teachers and students dislike crowded classes. For example, one teacher had to change her class location due to crowdedness:

*Gergana:* Do you have any other examples of the way to utilize space?

*Amira:* Uhm-m-m (long pause) Ah, yeah..Miss when..when we *ya'nni'* was-s ah in last semester with Ms. Sam in global.

*Gergana:* Yes?

*Amira:* A-ah..she didn't like that. Is the space of the class.

*Gergana:* O-oh.

*Amira:* Oh yeah. And she said for us the uni.. *'ya'nni'* the class is too small..And-d the students is closer for her, *ya'nni'*, when she teach.

And she can *ya'nni'*, she emailed the university and they changed our class. And change it to wing B *ya'nni'*, in the ground floor.

Students often considered class crowdedness as a source of inconvenience. Although they usually sit very close to their *rbeea't*, they like to have some distance separating them from other groups around them, and room to create sufficient personal, social and academic spaces (see the section on ‘Lived space’). Statements about “big classes”, “very small class” and “I like big classes” often appeared in the interviews:

*Gergana:* What do you think of that class space? Do you like the space?

*Maha:* This class is VERY BIG..and just I can hear..I can see everything. It's good.

*Gergana:* Okay, so you can hear, You can see-

*Maha:* (overlapping) I like the-the classes like the BI-I-I-G.

[...]

*Maha:* I like this classes..the BIG classes..and the instructor can mo-o-o-ve. That's good for her.

At a later stage of this interview with Maha, she emphasises her preference for spacious and low-density classes, linking this directly to a better learning experience:

*Gergana:*[...] What are the conditions that will help you learn best?

*Maha:* You know, the s-s the spa-a-ce.

*Gergana:* Having good space?

*Maha:* yeah...when I got-t the time, the spa-a-ce..the-e-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) Can you describe your perfect space for learning?

*Maha:* It's like...the big of course, the big classes. And I hate like. It..It's like the STUDENTS should be like..MIDDLE..Like between twenty..twenty five. Not like close to 30 students. It's too-o-o...a Lo-o-o-t.

For another student, crowded classes were a serious, annoying inconvenience. In the flow of our conversation, she seemed to associate her favourite topic and teacher with a larger class while linking math, her least favourite subject, with a smaller, more crowded class. This made me wonder about the degree of such influence on the students' learning experience.

*Gergana:* Okay (pause) tell me about your favorite class?

[...]

*Amira:* Uhm-m..International Relation....ah with-th..Dr. *Mike*.

[...]

*Gergana:* Do yo- a-ah...Do you remember which classroom you were in? Where you took it?

*Amira:* A-ah wing B. A-a-a-ah..36 I think.

*Gergana:* Ground?

*Amira:* Yeah, Ground floor.

*Gergana:* Do you like that classroom?

*Amira:* Yeah, It's, *ya'nni*, it's-s ah OPEN. IT'S LARGE. And-d..It's not too much crowded, *ya'nni*, the girls close to each other, No.

*Gergana:* Okay, so you don't like crowded classes.

*Amira:* YEAH, because in math CLASS... The class is TOO MUCH SMALL..in wing F. And you know it's-s..You..You feel like the girls is too much is close to you.

Although research studies on this issue of crowdedness are rather anecdotal, and fail to clarify the degree of such influence, the influence seems to exist. For example, Rawls et al. (1972, cited in Brebner, 1982, p. 139) found that cognitive performance can be improved or impaired by crowding, depending on individual sensitivity to crowding, as some people are less demanding in terms of their personal space. In addition, several studies have associated feelings of crowding with high levels of stress (Kopec, 2010, p. 72). From my field data, crowdedness seemed to have an impact on students' learning experience, with class density being one of the factors that most influenced students' preference for specific classes and teachers, and their overall learning experience.

Another aspect of proxemics includes spatial positionality in terms of the location of how students sit and spatially position themselves in a specific space, including the distances they prefer to leave between themselves, and other objects or people in class. In their interviews, several teachers and students indirectly referred to spatial positionality. For example, finding the most strategic spot to sit in a class was important for many female students, including Amna, who always preferred to sit in the middle of the front row, this having already become a spatial practice for her in school: "I always prefer on the front

(pause). I get used to that when I was in high school and the school” (see the conversation under ‘Spatial patent’, pp. 124-125, Chapter 4).

For teachers, spatial positionality is pedagogically driven in that they ideally want students to sit in reasonable proximity to allow for closer interaction and ensure audibility, specifically in teacher-fronted classes. For example, one faculty member reported intentionally lowering her voice to force students to sit closer to the front:

*Gergana*: [...] Do you try to utilize the classroom space to fit with your teaching? Or do you usually consider the space in your classes in terms of how it might influence students' learning?

*Ola*: unfortunately, I don't have control over which class I am assigned. But once given a class, I..I tend to do my best to make students sit toward the front, not be scattered especially if they are few in number and they are a lot of students, I make sure that they are as close to me as possible. This distance means that they distance themselves from me and from the topic and from what they are studying and I don't like this. I encourage students to come closer and I sometimes deliberately speak quieter than normal, although I have a very loud voice.

*Gergana*: (Laughing) It is a nice trick

*Ola*: And it forces them to-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) To come closer.

*Ola*: Yes, come closer or even make an effort to listen to me. And when they say we can't hear you, I simply then have the courage to say that is because you are too far away.

Students of both genders mostly agreed and elaborated on the importance of sitting closer to the teacher in order to engage and learn more. That is, they consider spatial positionality a precondition for better, more serious learning. It can also be an indication of the students' academic commitment: more serious students usually sit towards the front while less serious students sit further back.

*Gergana:* Well, Do you believe that the space can help you learn better, do you think that space has any influence on your learning?

*Saif:* If you sit in the first, you can understand, in the first what the teacher is saying but if you were sitting in the back, you will go to talk with your friends, pay less attention.

*Gergana:* So, by sitting in the front, you will learn better?

*Saif:* Yeh.

The same concept was confirmed by several female students, as in the following excerpts from Amira's interview:

*Amira:* When the teacher EXPLAIN, the girls who is-s..in the-e, *yan'ni*, back..

*Gergana:* Yeah?

*Amira:* First of all, they didn't, *ya'nni*, hear..Good. And they-y don't..take attention, *ya'nni*. And they play with THEIR phone...and that is dis-s-advantage.

*Gergana:* True.

*Amira:* Yeah, '*chi a'shan ya'nni*' (which is why) ah when I went in any class..I go in front (laughing).

*Gergana:* Oh yeah, that's good actually..you pay attention

[...]

*Amira:* Yeah (laughter).

*Gergana:* Yeah, it's interesting. Well you're a good student *Amira*. That's why-y.

Interestingly, at the end of the above conversation, I could not help but praise Amira for sitting in the front. I believe this indicates where my role as a teacher was overlapping with my role as a researcher (refer to reflexive account and positionality in Chapter Three).

However, it is important to note that, in contrast to Amira, there were other students who disagreed with associating serious learning with sitting at the

front. In another casual conversation with a student while we were both sitting at the back of a class, she told me that she prefers the back as she feels less vulnerable, exposed and picked on by the teacher, which enables her to focus and learn better.

For some other students who usually sit at the front, sitting at the back meant that they had other issues to attend to, or they were planning to slip out of class early after attendance was taken, a practice frequently appeared in my observation notes from the audited classes. The first of these reasons was boldly explained by Fouzia:

*Gergana:* Do you like it? Do you like the space at the back. We have time, you can sit at the back (referring to the back seats at the end of the audited class).

*Fouzia:* (overlapping) Yeah..yeah, I like it.

*Gergana:* Don't you feel sometimes it's distracting and people at the back are (door closing sound) doing their own thing?

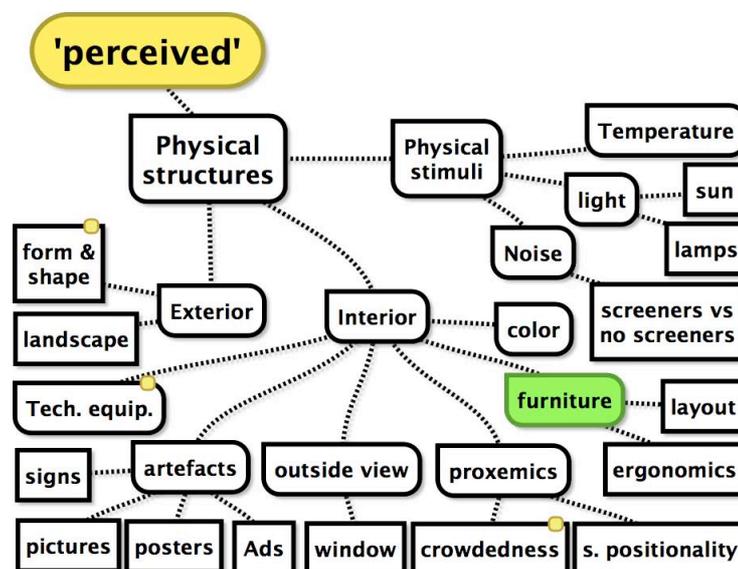
*Fouzia:* E-e-eh..y-you know. We have this habits since high school. If you want to sit in the back, you have something to do, like you have work or-r-r..yeah.

I also observed that students' spatial positionality within the class can be used as means of non-verbal communication in that students distanced themselves from the teacher when upset, or from a classmate when not on good terms. I remember in one of the audited classes that one student was really upset by the teacher's feedback on her project so she immediately withdrew and sat on a couch positioned at back of the class, thereby distancing herself as much as possible from the teacher. She even refused to join the other students when the teacher called everyone to gather around her for group instructions. As an observer, it was obvious that the student needed her own space (see 'Me space' section discussed later in this chapter), sending a clear message of being upset. As it happened, the teacher understood the message and respected her need for distance. After a while, the student decided to move closer again by joining the group and showing willingness to work and

participate. I found this situation to be strong evidence of how proxemics can be utilized as a powerful communication tool. I have always been fascinated by how spatial positionality and proxemics can influence power roles in the class. In teacher-fronted classrooms, the teacher is the spatial focal point: he or she represents a centralised power with everything emerging from this centre. In such cases, most students want to sit closer to the centre so as not to miss out on the information presented by the teacher. In experiential or student-centred classes, power is more decentralised across teacher and students, with the teacher mingling by changing her/his spatial positionality, for example while attending to student groups. In one of the audited classes, the teacher constantly changed her spatial positionality according to the class functions, whether lecturing, advising, discussing, checking student work or even celebrating birthdays. This particular teacher was a graphic design professor, and was very much aware of space and its influence, creatively utilizing it to achieve her pedagogical aims.

In short, proxemics, as a rather visible attribute of the perceived aspect of space, can have a significant influence on students' spatio-learning experiences.

### ***Furniture***



**Figure 5.6:** Furniture as an attribute of the perceived space.

Interior furniture, its layout, functionality and ergonomics, was the third influential attribute of the perceived space discussed by almost every interviewed student (Figure 5.6). People tend to appropriate and experience furniture through the senses of touch, sight and, in some cases, smell. Furniture is considered the basic element in interior design, and female students at ZU were very conscious of furniture layout and the comfort level of the chairs and desks used in classrooms. Students considered the chair comfort level (ergonomics) to be a critical factor in their learning experience, with some even correlating comfort with the ability to focus and learn in class. This is illustrated by the following conversation with Maha about her preference for red fabric chairs over plastic ones:

*Gergana:* Okay, what about the chairs, tables, other things li-i-i-ke..is there a specific design you prefer?

*Maha:* This's like..this chair is GOOD. There's the RED, the RED. There's like..in the-e UP, the..not red, THE USUAL (referring to the plastic chairs in the classrooms), WITHOUT THIS (referring to the red fabric of some classroom chairs), it's-s not comfortable.

*Gergana:* You mean the plastic ones.

*Maha:* Yeah, It's not comf..I hate it, *Ya'nni* [...] Like..that's not comfortable. You feel like.. And it's TOO COLD IN THE MORNING.

*Gergana:* YES-S, I agree with you.

[...]

*Maha:* I don't be comf..I don't even participate because it's not comfortable...I don't partici..I just sit. I I dunno how to sit even (laughing). Like.. Where will I put my legs? Where will I put my hands? I can't, because NOT comfortable. I don't feel it (pause) I don't feel the-e..the class even.

*Gergana:* So you don't participate if you're not comfortable-

*Maha:* (overlapping) NEVER. Yeah...never (pause), when I'm-m JUST relaxed and everything. I just do wherever (long pause).

Similar comments about the chairs' comfort levels repeatedly appeared in my conversations and interviews with other students, like Maimona:

*Maimona:* [...] the chairs, for example in some classrooms the chairs are...don't have these...the sponge, it's just so hard to sit on them, it's not like this one (referring to the chair in my office)

*Gergana:* Oh-h it doesn't have the back seat?

*Maimona:* Yeah, back seat and it's very hard.

*Gergana:* Oh-h-h you mean it doesn't have the fabric, the cushion?

*Maimona:* Yea, yes, it doesn't have the cushion and when you are sitting there for 15 minutes, it's just too hard.

Regarding desks and tables, students prefer desks that can accommodate everything they carry. While some just like a large desk surface, others expect and prefer tables that open up to reveal a storage area underneath. This image seems to have been inspired by Hollywood movie representations of students' desks:

*Maimona:* You know, a silly thing actually when you see these Hollywood movies and you see them going to university, for me I always thought when I go to university I will see different tables like the one that open and you have to put your things and when I came, it..It's just like a normal typical table (laughing), nothing special about it. And something else that, it's different from each room, some classes have these chairs with..?

*Gergana:* With the side small table on it?

*Maimona:* Yes some do have, I kind of like it but sometimes I feel it's very small.

Female students also have their own preferences for class layouts created by different arrangements of chairs and desks. Although all conversations on furniture layout had to be directly initiated by my questions, as students never spontaneously spoke about it, they had a lot to say about their preferred or non-preferred class layouts:

*Gergana:* How would you like the class arranged in terms of tables and chairs, we have different class arrangement, what is your preference? Do you like something that is more of round tables, U-

shape, like this one...or this one...(I am showing her pictures of classrooms)

*Moaza:* No I hate the U-shape like this one.

*Gergana:* You hate the U-shape?

*Moaza:* No I like, it depends, it depends on the class environment for example, is it a discussion? I think it's very nice when you have this U design when you are having a discussion because ehh..you know when you are sitting and having a discussion it becomes sometimes like a debate and you would like the person in front of you to look at you and respond. A-a-a for example if you are sitting and this person is discussing something and he is sitting behind you, and sometime you want to look at the teacher and you want to look that students and you want to see the other students around you and the reactions, even if there is no one saying anything but you want to recognize the faces so ehh..for that example for discussion, I would like to have a U-shape

*Gergana:* Okay.

*Moaza:* H-h-h for example sometimes for a group project I like it to be round, because you know the round table, eh...you are sitting on around place it's like there is no boss in that place you are all together, but when you having a group and some is sitting in the front it's like he is taking the lead.

*Gergana:* What about having chairs in half circle, just chairs and you sitting there in a group?

*Moaza:* Yeah I remember I had that for one class, ahhh actually I did not like that room because it was very dark and ahh I felt like...em...i don't know, I felt like it sometimes so crowded [...] in that half a circle.

While class layout preferences varied, the majority of female students did not like an 'exposed' layout, preferring instead an arrangement allowing them to sit behind the barrier formed by a desk or a table, as expressed by Moaza above. She did not like the exposed half-circle arrangement, preferring other

arrangements that still allow for eye contact while positioning herself behind a physical barrier, which in this case was the table, or even her bag, as discussed in Chapter Four under 'Modern children of the desert'.

The female students' awareness of these different arrangements and their preferences from experiencing them provide strong evidence of the material aspect of the perceived space. At the same time, furniture layout is strongly linked to the aspect of socialization and therefore the lived social space, which constitutes another point of intersectionality between the perceived and lived in the spatial web of interconnectivity encompassing the triad spaces. In line with the connection between the perceived and conceived, and due to the students' membership in the collective with its strong socialization, they always favour what Olson describes as the 'sociopetal' influence of furniture arrangement (1957, cited in Brebner, 1982, p. 129). Olson believes the spatial influence on people is either 'sociopetal' or 'sociofugal'. A sociopetal influence invites people in, promoting interaction and socialization among groups, while sociofugal isolates and promotes individuality. An example of sociofugal design is arranging the chairs in straight lines next to each other; this arrangement does not encourage eye contact, which is considered influential in encouraging socialization and interaction (Sommer, 1974, cited in Brebner, 1982, p. 129). On the other hand, a sociopetal setting might have students sitting at round tables facing each other so eye contact can be established for a more interactive group work.

### **Noise**

The fourth frequently recurring attribute of the material perceived space concerns the environmental stimuli of noise and sound disturbances (Figure 5.7).

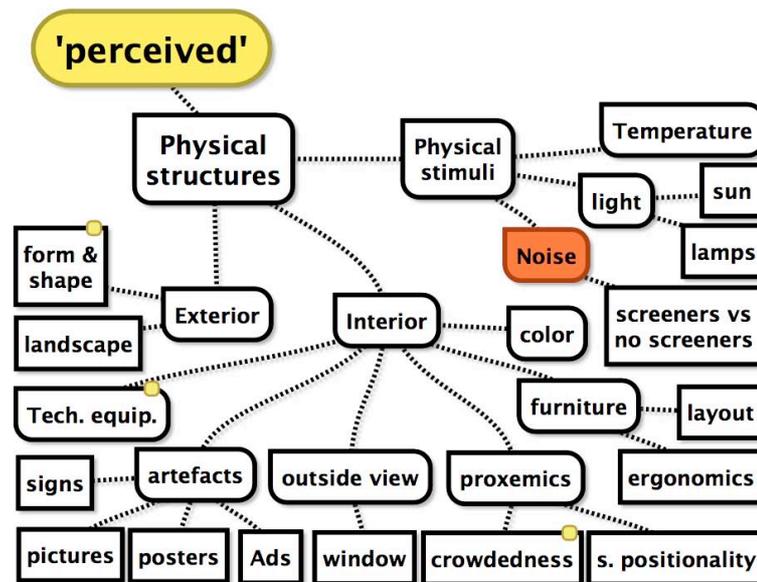


Figure 5.7: Noise as an attribute of the perceived space

Students often expressed their preference for quiet places to study and work, whether individually or in groups. This was quite evident in the conversation with Amna under ‘Cocooning’ in Chapter Four. She seemed to be in a constant quest for a quiet space of her own that she could regularly occupy to study or to share with a close friend:

*Gergana:* So you have breakfast in the main cafeteria?

[...]

*Amna:* I just go to the canteen or to-o a place that I take just takeaway and I go to a-a to to..I have..I know a class-s that is quiet and nobody in this class. It's in the F, level 1, I sit there, but like sometimes my friend come, but now because we have conflict with time we don't have like-

*Gergana:* So where do you sit in wing F?

*Amna:* In a class, a quiet one!

*Gergana:* Ah-h-h, inside the class, where there is no one else?

*Amna:* Yeah, I prefer not to find anybody, okay.

*Gergana:* We share that I like quiet too.

*Amna:* (laughing) Because you know, *ya'nni*, you want to sit in a quiet places to study. Even if I'm not studying I want a quiet place, OKAY. But even if I didn't have like a-a sometimes there is the class

maybe..there is no quiet place so I go to the library to the quiet zone.  
Or-r-r nowadays I-I-I..I tried, *ya'nni*, a ne-e-w place..you know,  
the..the courtyard. It is very good place in specially at 8:00..  
nobody..maybe one girl..two..and the weather is good.

[...]

*Gergana*: what times is relaxing there?

*Amna*: EIGHT

*Gergana*: O-o-okay

*Amna*: At UTR (Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday), *ya'nni*, because I don't  
have anything so I go there, but..I-I just tried it..the sitting-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) and you sit there on the tables?

*Amna*: Yeah.

Noise emerged as a factor that influenced students' learning experience and was closely associated with their ability to learn and focus, even at home:

*Gergana*: So are you someone who GETS AFFECTED by the places  
and the..physical environment around you?

*Amira*: Yes, too much.

*Gergana*: Can you give me an example of that. How it affects you?  
Maybe an experience you had here in the university?

*Amira*: Can I..give an example in the home for example?

GERGANA: Sure, yeah.

*Amira*: A-a-ah..for example, if in the home we have too much  
children in the weekend. And they came to our house, I cannot study.  
And we cannot focus. And-d.. You know..ah me and my brother..we  
feel BA-A-D..because they make noise, but we-e-e like we..we like a  
place that is silent..and also the university.

Many students got disturbed by noise on campus, especially in class. For example, in one of the audited classes situated next to a busy hallway, I repeatedly observed how specific students were always the ones to close the classroom door whenever noises were heard from the hallways. This was quite

evident to me too, since I easily get disturbed by noise. In this case, whenever I heard some noise and turned my head, I saw one student doing the same before getting up to close the door, although others did not react at all. When I asked her about this later in an interview, she told me that noise disturbs her a lot and she cannot focus:

*Gergana*: I also noticed..a-ah..in the class..Like..a-ah that you go and close the door.

*Maha*: Yes, no-o-ise-

GERGANA: (overlapping) All the time, so noise annoys you.

*Maha*: Be..because I can't hear the miss, especially I-I..sit at the BACK, so I can't hear her, the instructor. So I go and close it. Maybe-e? (laughing) when I feel the noise.

*Gergana*: So noise annoys you-

*Maha*: (overlapping) Because I don't like noise and so on.

As evident from the above conversation, female students differ in how much environmental stimuli of the perceived aspects affect them. According to Kopec (2010, p. 47), people are either 'screeners', people who have the ability to tolerate unwanted environmental stimuli like noise, glare and odour, or 'nonscreeners', people who are more affected by noise and can't filter it out. Although the latter group tend to be more sensitive to the environment around them, screeners' ability to filter sound does not mean they are not affected by it at some level. Therefore, designers need to consider the amount of stimulation provided within an environment when designing specific spaces such as libraries and classrooms (ibid. pp. 47-48 and pp. 99-100). A lot of the interviewed students were clearly nonscreeners for noise, among them Maha and Amna, who were constantly looking for quiet spaces.

In the university, students are banned from using certain areas because of noise they make, for example from sitting in their preferred foyer area under the library staircase as their voices disturb library users on the floor above (Figures 4.17 and 4.26, Chapter 4). While many screeners enjoyed cocooning

themselves in that area to study and socialize, others (nonscreeners) sitting inside the library found it noisy:

(During a mobile interview)

*Gergana*: So where do you feel you learn the most on campus?

Which places do you use for learning and studying?

*Najla*: a-a-a-hm, well I don't normally do my studies in campus, like for example girls having one hour, I don't have a lot of breaks, so I prefer for example writing my essays at home, I like to be in a quiet zone, I don't like to be out of the house you know (laughing), working but if I'm ahm like if obliged to, I do.

[...]

*Gergana*: [...] (Whispering while approaching the foyer under the library staircase) Do you like sitting here, in this-

*Najla*: (overlapping) yeah I used to like to sit here but the problem was there was no connection.

*Gergana*: a-a-h no internet.

*Najla*: Yeah, and then they banned it because..because the girls used to come and eat and make a lot of noise, coz it's under the-e library.

*Gergana*: But they are using it now-

*Najla*: But I think it's a nice place to sit and study.

Thus noise emerged as one of the most frequently recurring environmental stimuli in the field, followed by less common ones like light, temperature and odour.

In addition to colour, proxemics, furniture and noise as attributes of the perceived space, I included several other less frequently recurring or influential attributes in the schematic (Figures 5.1 and 5.2, pp. 150-151) to show the overall spatial experience. I will discuss them only briefly here due to word limitations. One of these is windows and visibility beyond campus borders, with the majority of interviewed students preferring to have windows to see outside

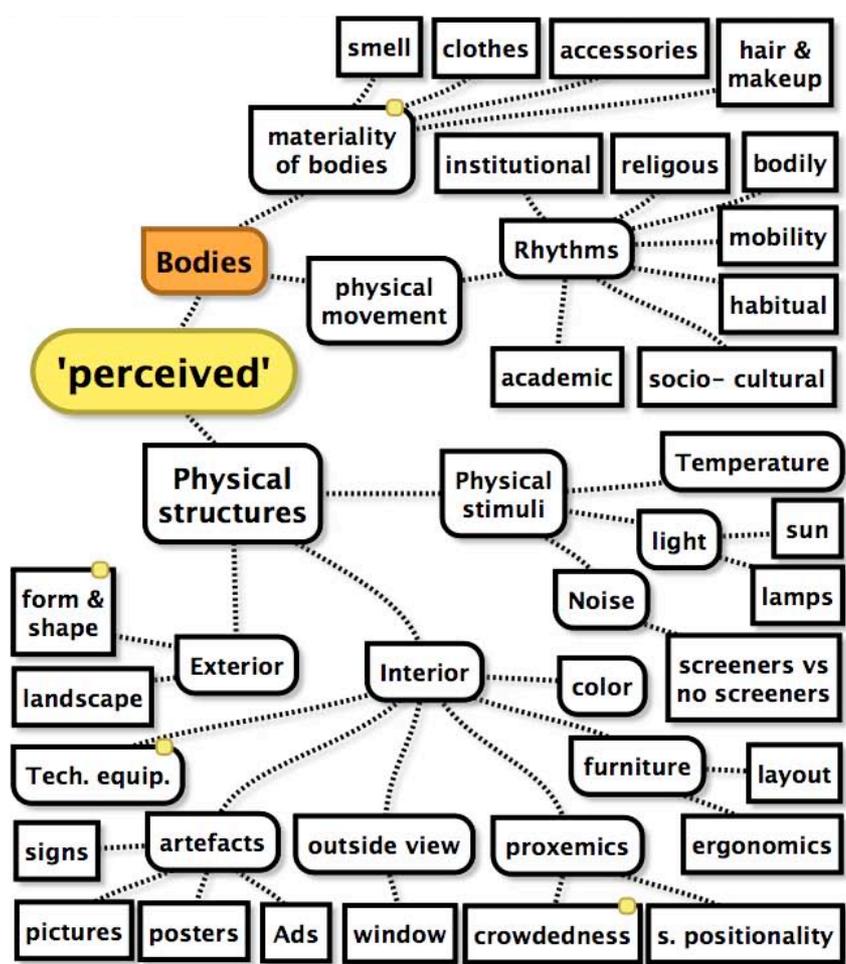
the classrooms as their preferred learning environment. As a way to reach out beyond the physical borders and spatial restrictions practised in such a conservative, private society, windows provided a connection to the outside for the female students. Another interior attribute is artefacts such as posters or pictures on the walls. Although my interviewees did not always pay much attention to the photos on the walls, occasionally a student referred to one of them. Rather, what emerged a lot were comments about the lack of signage and clear directions around campus spaces, especially during the first weeks after enrolment. Another recurring spatial attribute concerned the availability and use of technological equipment and physical infrastructure in classes and around campus; for example, students complained about the location of power sockets and the need for more, the poor quality of some class projectors and their need to access specialised equipment in technology labs.

The least recurring spatial attribute was the exterior aspects of space. Students made barely any references to architecture manifested in physical form (i.e. aesthetics, shape) of the campus building, although as an architect when coming to campus for the first time, that was the first thing I noticed. From observing and talking to female students, they seemed to focus their attention on the inside more than the outside. As modern children of the desert, the dark, air-conditioned indoor environment was their most preferred perceived space (Chapter 4). Although, I am aware that there are several other attributes of the physical space, such as structure, lighting, and furniture texture and material, I only included those emerging from my field data and only discussed in detail the most frequently recurring.

### **Female students' bodies**

The perceived space of the female students is strongly manifested in the physical presence of their bodies: the materiality of bodies and their associations (e.g. clothes, accessories and smells), and physical movement with its unique rhythms (Figure 5.8). Although there is a significant literature on the female body, my focus here will only be on its physical presence and the pure material representation of the perceived space. It is the medium that allows for our physical existence in space and time, and therefore it

appropriates while also being appropriated. In describing Lefebvre's perceived space, Middleton (2010) defines it as "that of the everyday 'social practice, the body, the use of the hands, the practical basis of the perception of the outside world'" (ibid. p. 4). The body in this case represents the object and medium of spatial appropriation. With the help of our hands, legs and body we manoeuvre, sit, run, wander, and carry other objects, thereby appropriating spaces. On the other hand, the body is also the object upon which different forces impress themselves, including social, cultural, academic and institutional. This partially resonates with Foucault's (1977) work in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, presenting the ways different types of institutional punishment were inflicted on prisoners' bodies, thereby making the body the medium upon which physical punishment is inflicted as an institutional spatial practice.



**Figure 5.8:** Female students' bodies and their spatial attributes: materiality of bodies, movement and rhythms.

### ***Materiality of bodies: Material associations with the body***

From field observations and interviews, I noticed that female students had a very strong sense of awareness of their bodies, being very much aware of their own movement, gestures and particularly what I called 'spatial extensions' like their clothes (*sheilas* and *abayas*), accessories (bags, shoes, jewellery), hair and makeup, and body smells (perfumes and *bakhour*) (Figure 5.8).

Most of these Emirati female students paid special attention to their clothes and physical appearance, including makeup and other bodily accessories. Appropriately covering and protecting their bodies by wearing *sheila* and *abaya* was the most visible and important practice governing the body's material aspects. To them, physical appearance matters socially and culturally (see discussion on appearance and social status under 'Living indoors, in the dark and behind walls', Chapter 4), as well as religiously. It has its roots in their religious and socio-cultural upbringing in that females are taught that their bodies are sacred and should not be revealed in public; instead, they should be covered and can only be revealed to immediate family members, other females or husbands. In Islam, showing any part of a female's body in public, except for the feet, hands and face, is considered '*haram*' (sinful). Some more religious students will even cover their faces with a veil. At the same time, cultural traditions allow others to not even cover all their hair as long as they wear the traditional *sheila* and *abaya* to conform to local cultural practices of modesty.

On campus, I could differentiate three groups of female students in terms of clothing and appearance. The first were the modest, the traditional students, who represent the majority, usually wearing *abbaya* and *sheila* covering the head, though not necessarily all their hair as some was sometimes intentionally exposed at the front for style. Some also use a very bulky hair accessory under the *sheila* to collect their hair at the back of their head just below the crown to give the illusion of very thick and long hair underneath. As an admirer of their black, long and thick hair, I was surprised to discover that the volume under the *sheilas* was not only hair. Their *abayas* are usually black, although often decorated with embroidery, beading or crystals. There is a variety of *abbaya*

styles and designs that all cover the whole body, although some can fall open at the front to show the colourful and very fashionable clothing underneath.

The second group is the conservative, religious students who usually cover themselves from head to toe, revealing only their face, hands and feet, while some even cover their faces with a veil. They usually wear their *sheila* to cover all their hair, while their *abayas* are loose with minimal decorations to hide the contours of their body and avoid attention. While smaller than the first group, this group is quite common on campus.

The third and smallest group is the non-conservative modern group, who I like to call 'the rebels'. There are few of these students, and they are usually half Emirati (i.e. with mixed ethnic background) or Emiratis with a very liberal background, or the very few international students. These students wear modern western clothes like jeans and shirts, with short, modern hairstyles. However, they still abide by university rules on modesty by making sure that whatever they are wearing is not overly revealing. Although this is the smallest group, it is the most visible and criticised by their peers. These students are easily recognised on campus as they stand out against the black majority of *sheilas* and *abayas*. There are also other groups that situate themselves between the two of these three groups. For example, there are those who will alternate between wearing *abayas* with modern clothes, or even those who wear *abayas* without the *sheila* to reveal a short, modern haircut; however, these are also a minority.

In addition to the *sheilas* and *abayas*, hairs, shoes, bags and accessories (mostly designer products), as well as the strong smell of perfumes seemed to be an extension of the physical representation of students bodies. The general scene on campus is a black sea of moving *sheilas* and *abayas* appropriating and creating spaces of their own with small flashes of colour represented by makeup, designer shoes or bags (Figure 5.9 and Figure 4.6 in Chapter 4)



**Figure 5.9:** Students carrying coloured bags (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Students love wearing their *sheilas* and *abayas*, as well as shoes, bags and accessories; they are attached to them and often referred to them in different contexts. They were also always interested in observing, commenting, approving or criticising the clothes and physical appearances of each other. I regularly observed the looks and gazes students direct towards each other, especially in public areas like the atrium, which was often associated with this kind of spatial practice. This is evident from the interview with Amira and her comments on how she dislikes the atrium environment as people tend to “stare” and criticize her physical appearance. However, despite her own disapproval of other students’ actions, she also commented on how some exaggerate their makeup and clothing:

*Amira:* Sometime when we-e...when you sit in the Atrium, it's-s ah..you know, It's crowded and they STA-A-A-RE. But in the classes, there's no girls and silent.

*Gergana:* They stare at you in the Atrium?

*Amira:* Yeah, and also atrium when we went..when you sit in atrium, everyone come and see you-u Like, *ya'nni*, sometime they see in a different eyes. You think "why they see like this?"

*Gergana:* O-oh, they look at you differently?

*Amira:* YEAH, *ya'nni*, ALL THE GIRLS.. same this. They see your BA-A-A-GS. And sty-y-les, so (laughing), I like to be in a place..don't wants..don't..someone see me and..

[...]

*Gergana:* And they..criticize the fashion? How-

*Amira:* (overlapping) Yeah '*wallah*' (I swear by God's name). And they see from you from (laughing)..from-m, *ya'nni*, down and up: What's you we-e-ear...which BRA-A-ND-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) Oh..Really-y?

*Amira:* Yeah, *wallah*. And even the teachers or professors, they see the professors what they wear.. and what their style (laughing)-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) I'm gonna stop walking and talking in the Atrium from now on (laughter).

*Amira:* And there's also something miss, some girls-s a-ah..sit togethers in groups..and they talk about the..the girls go and come... They said: "see see what's her STYLE..It's not li-i-ke", *ya'nni*, " It's not good".

*Gergana:* O-o-kay (pause) That's interesting-g. So the Atrium is like a gossip hub.

*Amira:* Yes-s (laughter).

[...]

*Amira:* They talk about the BAGS and the clo-o...the *abaya* (laughter). Even me miss, *ya'nni*, when-n-n for example, when I go to the atrium. I..I went to the Atriu-um. When I see some bags I like it. I say for my friends: "see see her bag" (laughing)...and *abaya*, *ya'nni*.

[...]

*Gergana:* So ba-a-gs, *abayas*...what else?

*Amira*: Make-up (laughing). And sometimes the makeup..when it's over, *ya'nni*. We said "Oh, It's TOO MUCH...it's not a wedding" (laughter).

The same comments on how students like to observe each other's clothing and appearance repeatedly appeared in my interviews. Comments on students' hair, make-up or clothing mostly happened in the exposed space of the atrium but were not limited to it, allowing for such an evident spatial practice by the observers, and of the observed. This spatial practice of observing and criticizing has its roots in the socio-cultural formations of Emirati society in conforming with their social status, as discussed in Chapter Four under 'Living indoors, in the dark and behind walls'. Despite the contradictory views of some students in disapproving of such spatial practices while still practising it themselves, and regardless of the reason, it is quite prevalent in both the observers and observed as part of their perceived space.

The students' physical appearance represented by their *sheilas* and *abayas* was also considered a symbol of their cultural and national identity, and a spatial representation of who they are and how they would like to be perceived. Female students were quite vocal in criticising and strongly objecting to the appearance of 'the rebels', who were not conforming to social practice by abandoning their *sheilas* and *abayas*. As mentioned earlier, despite their being a minority, these students' spatial practices were quite visible. *Amira's* interview<sup>38</sup> shows that she seemed quite upset and confused while referring to this group of people: "but, *ya'nni*, our Emirati, *ya'nni*, okay..'why you don't wear your *abaya* and *sheila*?". She represents the common fear of losing their identity, discussed in Chapter Four.

According to Spradley (1980, pp. 152-153), one of the universal themes found by ethnographers in every society involves practicing "informal techniques of social control", which are ways to get people to conform to specific social rules and regulations, allowing social life to continue. In this case, it was the pressure

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<sup>38</sup> See conversation with *Amira* under 'Modern Children of the Desert', Ch. 4.

female students put on each other to wear *sheilas* and *abayas* by staring, gossiping, socially excluding others and even verbally criticizing each other. Such practices of social control are even more escalated when the group feels the threat of extinction or loss of identity, being a minority in their own country. Furthermore, because members of UAE society are very closely related and intertwined, almost every family knows the others, so disappearing in the crowd is not an option for these female students. On the contrary, spatial visibility leaves them socially exposed and culturally confined to the socio-cultural rules of the majority.

This practice even culminated in a campaign by Student Life (an institutional division of Enrolment and Student Services at the university) to enforce proper conduct and dress code. They used a strong visual and spatial representation of what is considered proper appearance for an Emirati female, producing several brochures that they posted around campus. They also created life-size two-dimensional stands with an image of an Emirati female wearing a 'proper' *sheila* and *abaya* (Figure 5.10) carrying a sign with the following words in Arabic (Figure 5.11):

*Rules of dress and conduct*

- 1. Zayed University holds the name of a great man*
- 2. Being respectful on campus reflects your respect to its name*
- 3. Your ethics are like a mirror and modesty is the master value of these ethics*
- 4. Femininity means gentleness, proper conduct, calmness*
- 5. The success of the initiative is the result of cooperation and commitment.*

[translation author's own]



**Figure 5.10:** A life-size two-dimensional stand with an image of an Emirati female (Gergana Alzeer 2013)



**Figure 5.11:** The sign carried by the stand (Gergana Alzeer 2013)

Wearing traditional dress is very important for the majority of Emiratis since it links to their sense of identity intensified by the fear for losing it being a minority in their country. Therefore, publicly calling for it through such visual banners and linking it to proper conduct alongside other practices like the disapproving looks and gazes and even verbally criticizing one another can all be considered informal techniques of social control (ibid). Replacing the students' long *abayas* with modern clothing was socially resisted and institutionally contested. That the students' clothes, hair and accessories are seen as an extension of their bodies and a strong spatial and symbolic representation of the local Emirati culture is a testament to Foucault's observation that "in every society, the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations" (1977, p. 136). In fact, when I asked one of the students during a mobile interview to explain the meaning of the poster (Figures 5:10 and 5.11), she said:

*Dina:* I think it's the right thing to post because it shows like a person should be wearing something respectful.

*Gergana:* So modesty, yeah?

*Dina:* Yeah. Because some people wear like *sheila* and *abaya* and..but THEN when you see the clothes underneath.. It's all very revealing.

Another material extension and association of students' bodies is their exaggerated use of perfumes and Arabic '*bakhoor*' (essence). I have never been to a university that is as full of aromatic smells and French perfume as this one, often smelling them in classrooms, hallways and the entrance gate as students pass me. I asked them about this several times, and they explained that in order to get an intense smell, and prior to using a French perfume, they would usually 'smoke' their *abayas* by hopping over a '*mabkhara*' (a decorated vessel to hold burning coal with *bakhoor* on the top to release the essence) (Figure 5.12).



**Figure 5.12:** *Mabkhara* (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Emiratis are fond of using *bakhoor* and the practice of scenting themselves and their surroundings. Female students even practiced it on campus: a few times, I came across a student carrying a *mabkhra* or spraying on expensive perfume while in the toilet. Using *bakhoor* is usually practised on special occasions, like weddings and *Eid* celebrations (religious holidays), as a way of cleansing and blessing their surroundings and demonstrating possession of the space. In a

way, they are marking their spatial territories and exercising power over the spaces by dominating them with their smell, which, as an object of sensory spaces, can be considered a dimension of gendered power, according to Seremetakis (1996, cited in Bryant and Livholts, 2007, p. 38) as discussed in Chapter Four under 'Spatial patent'. Students only practice this in spaces of their own that they can control, such as their own booths during events like the ZU carnival and National Day celebrations. They even use it to scent and create an atmosphere when giving an important presentation in class, especially for class projects linked to their identity and culture. Similarly, a newly hired administrative assistant in my department, who was a local female graduate from ZU, regularly used *bakhour* to scent her office, our meeting rooms and our offices' corridors, thereby revealing culturally entrenched nature of this spatial practice (Figure 5.13).



**Figure 5.13:** An Emirati female administrative assistant deodorizing our offices' corridor (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

As discussed above, my fieldwork revealed various spatial practices associated with deodorizing the body and its surroundings, in addition to the role of the

clothing and accessories associated with the physical appearance of bodies as an important manifestation of Lefebvre's concept of perceived space.

**Physical movement of the bodies**

Spatial practices 'secrete' society's space through physical flows and interactions (Lefebvre, 1991), in addition to the flows of goods, labour and information (Harvey, 1990). Accordingly, the perceived space includes the female students' movement of and with the body, involving every physical movement performed on campus: shaking the head, waving hands, walking around, pouring water, sipping drinks, opening doors, manoeuvring, and so on (Figure 5.14).

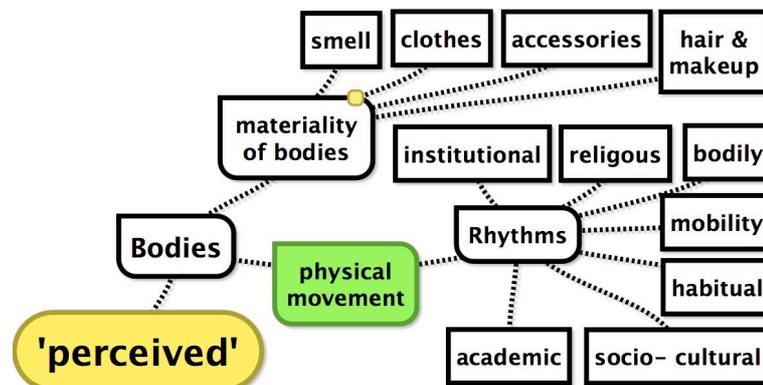


Figure 5.14: The physical movement of bodies.

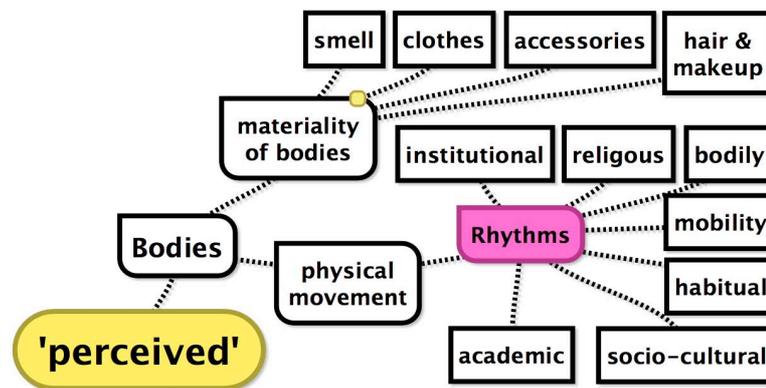
Although most bodily movements are common to all humans, there are some unique aspects that are culturally and socially driven, and specific to that cultural group. The students are very much aware of their physical movement and gesture, often conforming to culturally-appropriate ways to move, sit and gesture, thereby incorporating modesty into all their perceived behaviours. For example, they have their own unique way of walking: I constantly observe with admiration how female students walk slowly and gracefully, gliding like models, with straight backs to keep the *sheila* in place while the silky black fabric of their long *abayas* seemed to harmoniously dance with and around them, moving from one side to the other, creating a beautiful scene. Students usually walk with a slow rhythm and almost never seem to be in a rush, even when late for classes. I enjoyed watching them walk in the hallways, although I had to admit

that at times it was a source of annoyance to me and other faculty members when in a rush, as students slowly walking in a row blocked the hallways. This students' physical movements with and of the body (their hands, feet and other parts) can be analysed through their unique rhythms on campus, discussed below.

### ***Rhythms***

According to Lefebvre, our bodies are “traversed by rhythms rather as the ‘ether’ is traversed by waves” (1991, p. 206). I draw on Lefebvre’s ‘rhythmanalysis’ (1991, 2004) as a way to explore and organise the students’ spatial practices of body movement through their daily rhythms within and across the different campus spaces, applying “the principles and laws of a general rhythmology to the living body and its internal and external relationships” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 205). In other words, I explore the female students’ spatial rhythms that secrete and create the perceived space. “What we *live* are rhythms - rhythms experienced subjectively” (ibid. p. 206), once again linking the perceived with the conceived and lived.

Rhythms are not spaces, but are “always bound to space” as well as time. “[A]s sequential relationships in space” (ibid. p. 206), they require both spatial and temporal dimensions. Rhythms are also associated with the body, “in the body and around it” (ibid. p. 205); they either happen within it or are produced through its movement. Lefebvre identifies several rhythms, like those of the body, such as “sexuality, fertility, social life or thought” (ibid. p. 205). Inspired by his categorization of rhythms, I would like to go beyond these to include the unique spatial rhythms perceived and practiced by Emirati female students on campus. These rhythms include repetitive spatial practices, routines, pulses and cycles that happen within the body or are practised by it: bodily, academic, religious, institutional, socio-cultural and mobility related rhythms (Figure 5.15).



**Figure 5.15:** Types of bodily rhythms as part of the perceived space.

First are bodily rhythms, linked to physiological and biological needs and operations within the body. Lefebvre identifies these bodily rhythms as “breathing, the heartbeat, thirst, hunger and the need to sleep” (1991, p. 205). Female students regularly eat in the cafeteria, drink coffee, tea and water and need to access bathrooms. Lefebvre (1991, p. 205) also mentioned those of ‘fertility’ including having menstrual cycles and, for married students, pregnancy. Obviously, these bodily rhythms are common to all humans and are not limited to Emirati females. However, the following rhythms are unique to the participants.

Secondly, mobility and spatial manoeuvring rhythms involve specific sequential movements that are often mechanically performed and are very much bound to the affordances of space. These include manoeuvring around objects on campus, turning left or right whenever the hallways end, opening closed doors to get inside or turning on a faucet. For example, at the university gates, the students’ mobility rhythms are conditioned by the physical space (affordances) as students enter straight past automatic glass doors towards identity card scanner. After scanning, they move either right or left depending on the gate (left at Gate 2 and right at Gate 1) towards the door leading to the academic wings indoors. Some students go around the scanners to avoid traffic but their route and mobility rhythms are very much linked to what the campus space affords (see theory of affordances under ‘Engaging with space — spatial appropriation’ in Chapter 4, p. 88).

Thirdly, habitual rhythms represent some of their unique habitual practices and bodily gestures that I identified across the majority of the female students. For example, they never stop adjusting their *sheilas*, fixing them by wrapping and unwrapping them around their heads. This practice does not simply involve rolling the loose end of the *sheila* over the head on the top but requires a specific skill. They start by fixing one side of the *sheila* closer to the ear with one hand while rolling the other side with the other hand around the head and neck, then setting it loose on top of the head so it dangles down. In this way, the *sheila* is well wrapped around the head but not fixed, which requires them to repeat the routine many times a day. I failed to master this routine despite trying several tries. Although this is a constant rhythmic spatial practice, they tend to overdo it when nervous or under pressure for example, during exams. I have noticed that even when their *sheilas* are already well wrapped around the head and neck, some students unconsciously unwrap and rewrap them several times while focused on a challenging task or answering exam questions. It seems this helped them think or justifies their need to stretch their hands while keeping them occupied by creating a rhythm of their own that breaks the monotonous stillness of the body. As a teacher, I addressed this issue while discussing best practices in presentation skills to warn them about how distracting it can be during their presentations. Although it is very easy to fix the *sheilas* with a pin, students tend to leave them loose, allowing them to keep that rhythmic habitual spatial practice.

Another visible habitual rhythm is texting, messaging or chatting on their smart phones. On a global level, young people as early adopters of mobile technology are frequent and heavy users, especially of digital media (Cahir and Werner, 2013, p. 60; NewsRx Health & Science, 2012, p. 313); several studies like the one by Haddon and Vincent (2009, cited in Cahir and Werner, 2013, p. 60) and Mcpherson (2008, cited in Cahir and Werner, 2013, p. 60) associate young people with technology, considering them “symbolically linked to cutting-edge technology because they are young” (Cahir and Werner, 2013, p. 60). Like all young people and even more in this case, ZU female students are extremely attached to their mobiles as if they are an extension of their bodies and selves. In fact personal communication technologies including mobiles are considered

an extension of the self by “expanding the reach of the human senses, and allowing humans to experience, influence, and participate in events by reducing the constraints of time and distance” (Vishwanath and Chen, 2008, p. 1761). These devices act like prosthetics allowing female students to access virtual space, providing a gate to the outside world, beyond the fixed physical borders of campus space, and an escape from their everyday lives (Cahir and Warner, 2013). Female students text each other unceasingly with rhythmic finger movements on the touch pads of their mobiles and iPads. The general impression of students imprinted in my mind, whether in classrooms, the atrium, cafeterias or the elevators, is of them sitting or standing, each holding her device and texting, even while in conversation with others (Figure 5.16). The device truly becomes an extension of the self.



**Figure 5.16:** Female students texting on their devices while waiting for the class to start (Gergana Alzeer 2013)

Fourth are religious rhythms evident on campus, including the routinely performed rituals of praying, ‘wodo’ (washing for prayer), *Quar’an* recitation, and using ‘*subha*’ (prayer beads). The majority of female students pray five times a

day, of which at least two ('*Al-dohur*' (noon) and '*Al-aser*' (the afternoon) ) are performed in the female prayer rooms on campus. The action of praying itself has its own rhythms, with females following a specific routine of body movements accompanied by recitation of verses from the *Qur'an*. The action of *wodo* also follows a specific repetitive routine of washing specific body parts three times in preparation for prayer. Additionally, some of the more religious students routinely recite Qur'anic verses and prayers in the prayer room during their breaks, while others continuously recite prayers when counting the prayer beads they carry in their bags.

The fifth type of rhythm is the socio-cultural, which includes repetitive spatial practices influenced by the unique Emirati culture and triggered by the needs and practices of socialization. Emirati females enjoy one another's company and socialize within and outside their collective with their *rebee'at*, as discussed in detail under 'The collective', Chapter Four. They regularly gather to socialize within their cocoons, in the atrium, cafeteria, library, and even the virtual space of their smart phones or other devices. Almost every interviewed student shared some stories of her social rhythms of routinely gathering and socializing with friends between classes:

(During a mobile interview)

*Gergana*: Maybe you can take me to your favourite or least favourite places.

*Najla*: well I..I, okay (laughing), after class I normally call my friends and then we meet up a-a-a-h we used to meet up a-a-hm like before the first canteen comes, we used to meet up at the end of wing B. in a-a-a in vision café, there was this a-a-h waffles. It, it was really nice, so every week we would eat it with my friends would go like (mimicking voice) "we are gaining more weight!!! (laughing) Stop it" (laughing).

[...]

*Najla*: Yeah and then we stopped going to that place, it got boring. Ahh we started going to the subway..subway area, we have lunch there and sometimes i-i-I used to go this side (laughing)..to the PALS centre coz I'm in the PALS.

Other socio-cultural rhythms as modern children of the desert include their spatial practices of cocooning, finding a place of their own, and regularly sitting inside in dark spaces and behind barriers or objects (see Chapter 4). Some appropriate the same cocoon during specific times of the day, notably the student I met daily at around 7:40 am on her way to a cocoon that she would occupy between 7:30–8:00 a.m. (Figure 4:30, Chapter 4). Others find a spot and appropriate it as a meeting place for friends, especially during the first year of general education, although this usually changes once students entered the majors, when they find a different space and a different routine for socializing, as explained by Eida in the conversation discussed under 'Spatial patent' (Chapter 4, pp. 127-128).

Students also follow less repetitive rhythms with a longer temporal cycle: yearly celebrations of birthdays, National Day, the ZU carnival, and a few others. On these occasions, students wear more festive *abayas*, set up booths to display and sell their handmade products, skip classes and increase the frequency of socializing. Interestingly, some rhythmic practices on these occasions, including their habit of skipping classes, might also create academic arrhythmia, an inconsistency in attending classes. Arrhythmia is very common spatial practice by itself. The students' spatio-learning experience is never rigid; instead, its organic and dynamic nature allows for new rhythms to emerge while others disappear or fall out of rhythm (arrhythmia).

Sixth are the academic rhythms related to studying and learning, among them registering and regularly attending classes according to schedule, reading and preparing for class, taking exams and submitting projects. Each student also has her preferred study spot in the library or elsewhere that she uses at specific times. For example, one of the interviewed students, Amna, shared her specific spatio-temporal academic rhythm: she constantly uses an empty classroom as a quiet place for study, and she regularly sits in the courtyard to study at 8:00 a.m. on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, as earlier expressed in the conversation under 'Noise' (pp. 175-176). She also often visits the study rooms and the quiet zone in the library at 4:05 p.m., or later when it is quiet:

*Gergana*: So for study only the courtyard, the classes, the..the one that nobody is in it-

*Amna*: (overlapping) Hmm, empty classes a-and a-a-a sometimes I borrow a room in the library.

*Gergana*: O-o-h the closed ones, the study room-

*Amna*: (overlapping) yeah.

GERGANA: What about the quiet zone?

*Amna*: Yeah sometimes I go to it, but I prefer I go to it at four-O-five, at four thirty when nobody is there, but sometimes they talk a lot even if it's the quiet zone.

Some of these academically associated rhythms vary according to the subject taught. For example, photography class includes the rhythm of taking photos while history entails reading history books and completing writing assignments. Academic rhythms lie at the core of students' academic experience as they are the main reason for the students' presence on campus.

The final spatial rhythm is institutional rhythms, triggered and reinforced by ZU's institutional policies and procedures. An example includes enforcing a daily scanning system for entering and exiting. Students must scan their identity cards both when they arrive and leave, creating a spatial rhythmic practice. Other institutional rhythms include the annual surveys administered to entering and graduating students, a faculty evaluation survey commonly known as SELE's (Student Evaluation of Learning Environment), library operation hours that allow a flow of students at specific times, and annual vacation days and holidays. One of the most evident are the daily practices of gender segregation in which specific spaces become closed to female students after specific times (see 'Gendered spaces' later in this chapter). Incidentally, there are several other institutional rhythms that are more relevant to faculty and staff than students that I will not discuss here as my focus is on the students' rhythms.

From the fieldwork discussed so far, I noticed that students' unique rhythms can be linked to three temporal cycles, as rhythms must exist in time. These cycles

represent the temporal dimension that allows such spatial practices and rhythms to happen:

1. Micro cycle (daily and weekly): this includes daily rhythms and spatial practices repeated each day by students from the moment they enter campus in the morning through the gates until they leave. The micro cycle also includes the repeated weekly timetable.
2. Macro cycle (semester-long): this includes repetitive practices within the academic semester cycle, most importantly registration for courses, drop and add procedures, and exams, all repeated across semesters rather than on a daily or weekly basis.
3. Mega cycle (academic life): this refers to actions spaced across the whole academic experience, starting with admission, registration and enrolment, and ending with graduation, withdrawal or dismissal.

In addition to the above rhythms and their cycles of the perceived space, there are also rhythms of the conceived and lived space, which I will discuss in the following sections

From all of the above attributes of the perceived space, from physical structures and their interiors, exteriors and physical stimuli, to the students' bodies, their associations, physical movements and rhythms, I found the perceived space (the real space of social and spatial practice) extremely dominant in the students' conversations and understanding of space, as well as in my observations due to its practicality and materiality, as well as closer association with the students' spatio-learning experiences. The following two spaces of the 'conceived' and 'lived' complement and further crystalize our understanding of the spaces described under the 'perceived' spaces.

## 'Conceived' space: spaces of representations

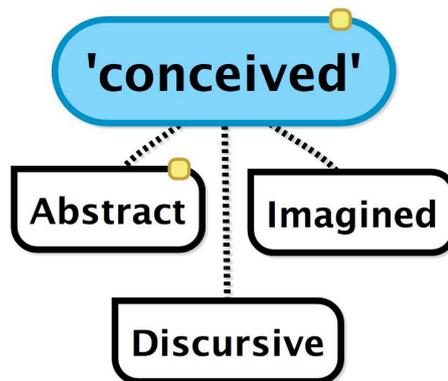


Figure 5.17: The attributes of the conceived space.

'Conceived' space is an abstract, imagined, discursive, and mental construction (Figure 5.17). Stuart Elden, for example, interprets Lefebvre's 'conceived' space as "a mental construct and an imagined space" (2004a, p. 190). In fact, the majority of scholarly interpretations of Lefebvre's triad consider conceived space as an abstract conceptualization associated with and defined by experts and policy makers in mathematics, engineering, urban planning, philosophy and so on (Elden, 2004a, Stanek, 2011, Middleton, 2011, Harvey, 1990). I understand it as the space prior to being experienced by users, with no attachments to emotions, memory, meaning or relationships; it is the abstract physical layout designed by architects and planners or established by nature. Thus, the conceived space of the students' spatio-learning experience involves the mental imagination and abstract conceptualization of the university campus space by ZU officials and policy makers. For example, when the design of the DXB was announced as an international competition, Sheikh Al-Nahayan (President of ZU at that time) chose the design that was most in congruence with his own vision of ZU as a safe haven for female students, an oasis in the middle of the desert, as explained in my interview with the Director of CPDO:

*Rayan:* It was a competition and done by the Dubai Municipality and it was awarded to this company (Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum, Inc., in coordination with Shankland Cox) as a joint venture.

*Gergana:* Okay, so Dubai municipality chose the winner, not you guys?

*Rayan:* Dubai municipality was the project manager of this project, they are the authority who we show the tender and the administrative, this actually was selected by Sheikh Al-Nahyan.

*Gergana:* Ohhh okay, am-m, so what I have read also said that the idea for this to be felt like an oasis in the desert.

*Rayan:* Correct.

*Gergana:* So, it is not a ship? Do you know what is the design inspiration of the design?

*Rayan:* The inspiration, it is like an oasis, because this whole area around us is somehow like in the middle of the desert and how it felt at least at the beginning.

Additionally, my conversations with faculty members about the campus space and its architecture revealed that several, including myself, imagined the design as a high-tech ship with a funnel or submarine with a conning tower in the middle of the desert (Figure 5.18). This was reiterated in the following conversation with one faculty member while sharing her first impressions of the campus space:

*Randa:* [...] what struck me about it...I don't know if something struck me, really. I don't feel that I was like yeh, wowed, or something but I sort of when I walked in, I built a familiarity with structure that from outside I rejected it, meaning, I used to see the building from outside, driving in and around, and I used to sort of ah-h, this is an ugly building-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) You found it ugly?

*Randa:* Yeah and reject it, when I got familiarized with it from inside, I like it, and then I like the outside. Now, I like the outside because, yeh it is a ship. It used to look like a ship, but it looked ugly for an outsider. That is how it felt to me.

*Gergana:* It is interesting you said it is a ship because for me I described it as a ship, and that thing-

*Randa:* (overlapping) Everyone sees it as a ship.

*Gergana:* Everyone?

*Randa*: Yeah, yeah, everyone. They talk as if it is a ship and they talk but it used to look as an ugly form of ship.

*Gergana*: Modern, cold, iron in the middle of hot desert.

*Randa*: It is a ship putting it 'safinat al ma'rifah' (the ship of knowledge) they made it. Probably this is the concept, the idea. It could be the architect, somebody told me.



**Figure 5.18:** DXB's exterior from distance (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

The way Dr. Randa expressed her feelings and perceptions of the campus space very much relates to the 'lived' and 'perceived' space. The way she spoke of the 'conceived' space when referring to the abstract concept of the design inspiration while relating it to her first impression of the 'perceived' campus exteriors, then establishing familiarity with the 'lived' campus spaces, linked the three spaces of Lefebvre's triad and made it difficult to separate them.

As a representation of space, the 'conceived' space also encompasses all of the signs and significations, codes and knowledge, that allow such material practices to be talked about and understood, no matter whether in terms of everyday common-sense or through the sometimes arcane jargon of the academic disciplines that deal with spatial practices (engineering, architecture, geography, planning, social ecology and the like)" (Harvey, 1990, p. 218).

In this context, the language used by the architects of the ZU campus to describe it represents another aspect of the conceived space: a linguistic representation of space, a discursive construction that allowed them to describe and talk about it. Many technical and architectural terms, such as 'tensile structure', were used during my conversation with the Director of CPDO while describing the architectural and structural elements of DXB:

*Rayan:* And the design we have..this courtyard that has lots of green and water and all the buildings overlook this courtyard with big glass façade but all the external façade if you noticed the windows are smaller.

*Gergana:* Yes.

*Rayan:* To reduce the heat-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) And the light?

*Rayan:* The light and dust coming in. So that is why this is one of the concept, and then you have the wings on the side. That was the original inspiration of the architect and the tent and the tower is the focal point of the design. It is like it is one connecting all the academic wings together with the library, which is part of the centre campus.

*Gergana:* So, it was a tent?

*Rayan:* It is a tent okay.

*Gergana:* From distance it looks like a ship, [...] it shows a tent, but from inside, it has nothing to do with the tent. So I wanted to check with you what is it exactly?

*Rayan:* This is, they call it tensile structure, it is like a high tech tension material that stretches over a metal structure. So the idea

that it reflects the heat, reflects the light and at the same time, it passes through, you know.

Abstract visual representations of the ZU space include maps and structural blueprints of the building, a lot of which are posted around campus to provide directions (Figures 5.19 and 5.20). There are also maps of the campus site plan posted on the windows of the university gates showing the different entrances. One member of the security staff told me that they use it to direct visitors or people who have lost their way to the correct gates (Figure 5.21).



**Figure 5.21:** Floor plan of the campus interior for directions in the hallways (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.20:** Detailed floor plan of the campus academic wings (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.19:** Campus map for visitors posted on the gate (Gergana Alzeer 2013)

The 'conceived' space also includes operational schematics and plans on campus: schedules, class timetables, meetings, regular events and the operation hours of the campus. These can be all considered representations of the rhythms of the conceived space.

As mentioned earlier, the conceived space is imagined, a mental construct. Although it is mostly that of policy makers, planners and experts, I found rare references to such a conceptual space in interviews with the students. For example, one of the students told me how she had a mentally constructed image of the university prior to attending the campus, imagining her classroom and desks. Having constructed this image in her imagination inspired by Hollywood movies, she was surprised to see otherwise when she arrived at the university (see conversation with Maimona earlier in this chapter under 'Furniture').

My fieldwork revealed that the conceived space was barely recognised by the female students, only once emerging in the interviews, with the closest that students referred to it being when they noticed directional maps. Thus, this conceived space really seems to be the exclusive domain of experts, policy makers, professionals, social engineers and urban planners, as found earlier by Lefebvre. In short, I found the 'perceived' space (the real space of social and spatial practice) far more dominant in the students' conversations and understandings of space than the 'conceived', which was almost absent for them.

### **'Lived' space**

Lefebvre's lived (social) space, or its translation into spatial terms as 'spaces of representations', encompasses real life experience with all its codes, symbols, meanings and significations (1991). "They are the spaces of imagination based on our daily life" (Chen, 2006, p. 64) and manifested through spatial practice. In establishing his lived space, Lefebvre tried to move the concept of space beyond the bicameral compartments of material and mental spaces. Although Lefebvre considered the three moments of space (perceived, conceived and

lived) as equally important, he strategically focused on the social (lived) space to break the binary of material and imagined, thereby allowing for the 'other' or even 'others' of what Soja called the 'third space' (1996, p. 65), and Foucault's 'heterotopias' (1984) (see theory in Chapter 2). The lived space takes a central role, embodying and encompassing the perceived (material) and conceived (ideal and abstract) without being reduced to either (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996, p. 66; Zhang, 2006, p. 221). In many respects it seems to be the culmination of both. Therefore, I will elaborate on the students' emerging, lived spaces as inclusive and strategically balanced between the other two, the perceived and conceived.

In line with the above argument and my research findings, the lived space seemed to be the most interesting and revealing in terms of spatial patterns and the types of spaces that emerged from the students' appropriation of and interaction with campus spaces. It can also be explained and understood through the rhythms that develop in each one of the emerging spaces. I found that the students' lived spaces can be categorized according to the intensity of the lived experience and its rhythms, including the degree of emotional association with each place, in two over-arching categories, 'hot' and 'cold' spaces (Figure 5.22).

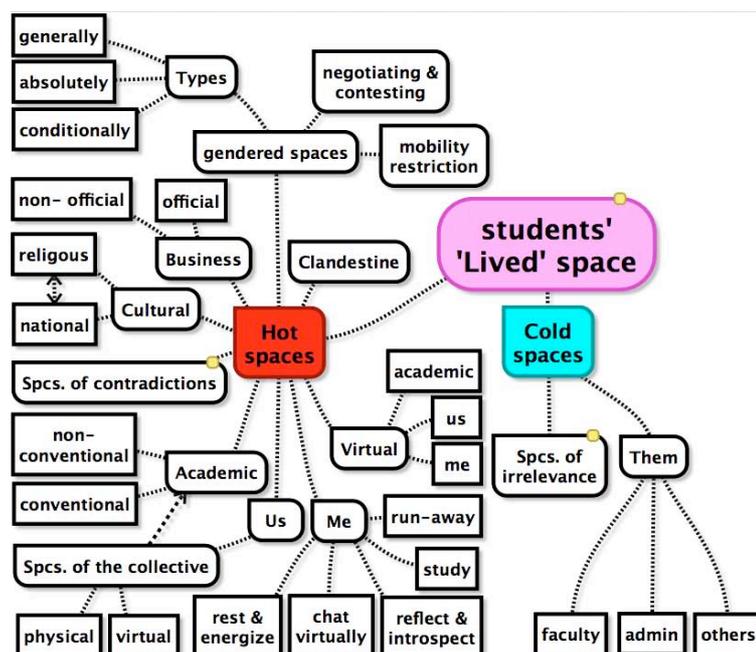


Figure 5.22: The types of hot and cold spaces emerging under the lived.

## Cold spaces

Cold spaces are those lived spaces associated with neutral or low intensity of the lived experience and its socio-spatial interactions, including less frequent rhythms of spatial practices, and neutral or low degree of emotional intensity and association with the space. I divided these cold spaces into two types that I observed on campus: 'Spaces of irrelevance' and 'Them spaces' (Figure 5.23).

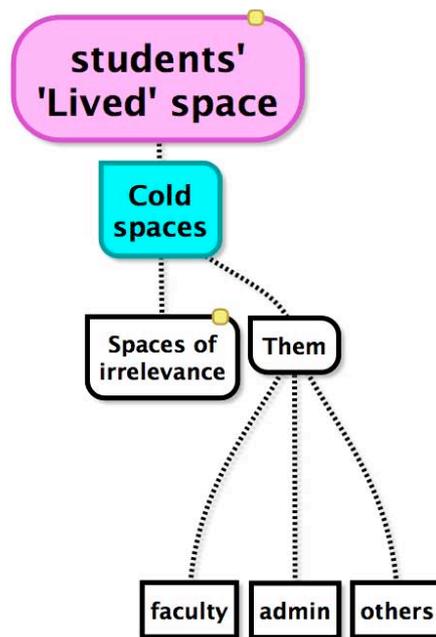


Figure 5.23: Types of cold spaces.

Spaces of irrelevance include the many spaces and places that we barely experience, just passing by without paying particular attention to them. They are neutral spaces, having no significance to us in terms of their function, meaning or emotional associations; therefore, I called them 'spaces of irrelevance'. Examples of these include the emotionally and experientially insignificant paths and hallways that students only use as en route to their destinations. I noticed during my fieldwork, and especially during the mobile interviews, that a lot of such spaces exist for the female students. When I asked my participants during the mobile interviews to take me around campus following their usual daily route, all seemed focused on moving from one important destination to another, without commenting or reflecting on most of the spaces in between. It was as if these spaces did not exist for them. Rather, our paths formed fragmented and

compartmentalised lines with 'stations' that they identified as places to eat, study, socialize, and so on. Many of the spaces in between were not associated with any function, activity or social interaction that mattered, or had any kind of emotional association. That is, students appear to live a compartmentalised experience in which a lot of the spaces in between do not exist for them, although these spaces are passively and unconsciously appropriated by the female students' bodies and movements. However, it is important to note the subjectivity and relationality of such cold lived spaces, in that what is considered an irrelevant (neutral) cold space for some students can be a very hot one for others, depending on the type of interactions and relational as well as emotional associations they have with that space.

The other type of cold space —Them spaces — includes all those spaces that are rarely experienced by the students because they belong to others, or are associated with functions not relevant to students' daily lived experiences. Faculty lounges and offices that students access only during office hours for brief interactions with their instructors are two examples. One of my interviewed students refused to use an empty faculty meeting room despite her desperate quest for a quiet space of her own: "but I didn't use it, I didn't like it. Because it is not, it's for faculty. So I didn't go", immediately establishing it as a 'cold' space for her, whereas it is a very hot one for faculty.<sup>39</sup> Thus, non-possession and lack of control of a specific space places it in the list of cold spaces as a 'them' space.

Another example of cold spaces is the administration building, including human resources, housing, finance and publications services. Students have minimal interaction with such departments, as confirmed by one of the interviewed administrators: "I don't see much of them coming around here, coming on the way from the atrium to here". In addition to faculty offices, lounges and the administration building, there are other them spaces that students will occasionally come across, such as places designated for security guards, cleaners and senior administrators.

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<sup>39</sup> See conversation with Amna under 'Cocooning', Chapter 4.

Cold spaces tend to be easily forgotten and overlooked by their users, who barely remember their spatial details. They also seem to be experienced without mindfulness as if appropriated and utilized in an unconscious spatial mode of experience. However, it is important to distinguish these cold spaces from the conceived space, as the former are lived spaces that we tend to experience and appropriate, even if briefly and occasionally, while the conceived space does not go beyond being an abstract, mental construction of the lived realm of experience.

### **Hot spaces**

Hot spaces are high intensity lived spaces, associated with higher levels of interaction, strong emotional experience or response, and higher frequency rhythms of the associated spatial practices. These spaces are usually significant and meaningful with functions relevant and constructed by their users. They can also be possessed and controlled, which tends to make them easily remembered, identified and appropriated, as the “lived experiences most remembered are [the ones] imbued with strong emotional, imaginary and sensory perceptions” (Bryant and Livholts, 2007, p. 39). Several types of hot spaces emerged during my fieldwork, which I categorized as ‘Me’ (individual) space, ‘Us’ (social), ‘Cultural’, ‘Academic’, ‘Business’, ‘Clandestine’, ‘Gendered’, ‘Virtual’ spaces, and ‘Spaces of contradiction’ (Figure 5.24).

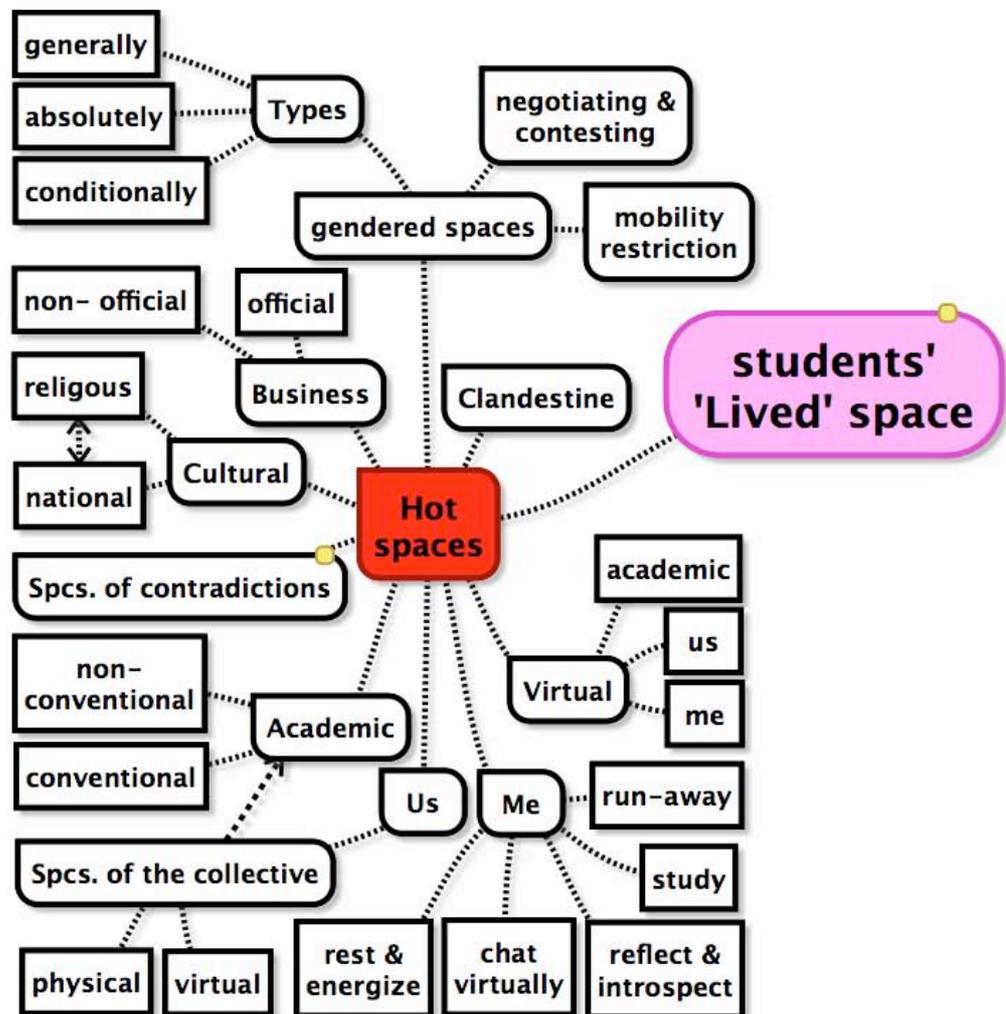


Figure 5.24: Types of hot spaces emerging from the fieldwork.

### **Me space**

'Me' spaces are personal spaces of seclusion and individuality that provide some degree of privacy and quietness — the space for being alone. Although Emirati females prefer to live in the collective and operate in groups, there are times when they like to be on their own, to reflect, study, or make a personal phone call. It is the space that Amna referred to in her quest for a quiet place: "I want special place for me"<sup>40</sup>

Any place on campus can be transformed into a me space as long as students have some degree of control over it to be able to access and appropriate, and

<sup>40</sup> See conversation with Amna under 'Cocooning', Chapter 4.

preferably unlimited access in terms of time. The most preferred me spaces are those available to students at all times, such as the campus public spaces that do not limit how long students stay. Students were very creative in finding these secluded spots, cocoons and niches; a me space could be a favourite spot in a classroom (Figure 5.25), one of the quiet study rooms in the library, a cocoon in the hallways, the water cooler space (Figure 5.26), a table in the cafeteria, a secluded bench in one of the gardens or a spot on or under the library staircase (Figures 5.27 and 5.28).



**Figure 5.25:** 'Me' spot in the graphic design studio (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.26:** 'Me' cocoon space inside a water cooler space (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



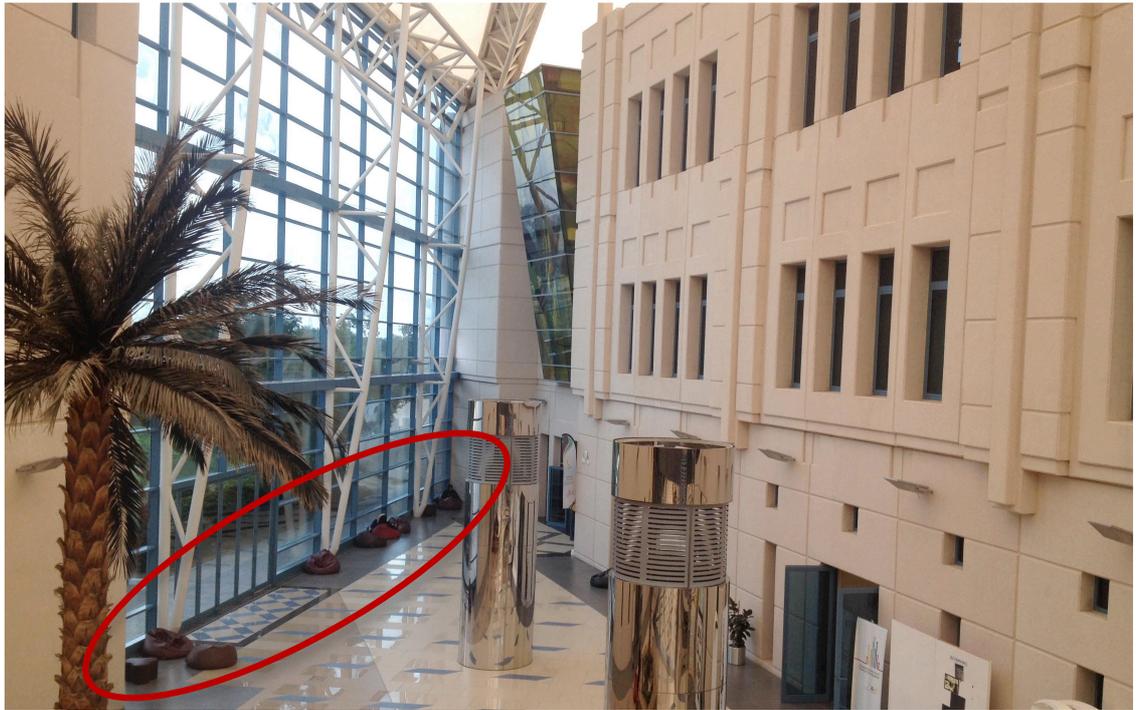
**Figure 5.27:** Private 'me' space under the library staircase (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.28:** 'Me' space on the library staircase (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Me spaces identified from my fieldwork were usually associated with the secluded, private, quiet and in some cases dark nature of a cocoon (see 'Cocooning', Chapter 4). However, as stated earlier, what is considered a private space by many students is actually part of the campus public space; even when students use an empty classroom, it is still considered public and

open to other campus users. In all of the students' spaces, there was a very fine line separating or transforming the public into private and vice versa<sup>41</sup>. The moment a student decides to individually occupy a secluded spot in an open public space, she immediately constructs her 'me' space. For example, some students sit alone on bean bags in the open atrium space and seem to prefer edges and distant corners to the centre (Figure 5.29).



**Figure 5.29:** Students utilizing distant edges and corners of the atrium as 'me' space (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

I also noticed many me spaces in the gardens and courtyard area. This made sense: given the students' attachment to interior, air-conditioned spaces, the outside remains a quieter, more secluded and rarely occupied space, hence a perfect me space, as I often noted in my observation notes:

I am currently sitting in the garden between wing E and D. The garden has an organic shape with wooden seats attached to a wall [...] A student is passing by as the wind is moving her abaya to the sides. She sat in a secluded area behind the organic shaped wall and started working on her mobile as usual, definitely wanted a me space. (GA, field notes)

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<sup>41</sup> See discussion on public-private under 'Discussion' in Chapter 4.

In another account I wrote:

While coming out of the garden area through the exit door and by the emergency stairs, I saw a student sitting crossed legged on the floor while working on her phone, another me private space, definitely not me study space though! (GA, field notes)

Despite the students' active social life and their attachment to the collective, the majority of the interviewed female students spoke of a favourite space of their own to use individually or collectively. In some cases there was more than one favourite spot:

*Maimona*: I remember different things, I was in the library, I remember once I entered the library and they have changed everything, they changed the space.

*Gergana*: Do you know when?

*Maimona*: It was I think this year, okay, yes it was this year and I had a specific place where I sat, it was close to Sandellas (a cafeteria in the atrium that can be seen from the library windows overlooking the atrium] and I like to sit there because I see the view and I can see people around it.

*Gergana*: So it was your spot and you always sit there?

*Maimona*: Yeah, and then I liked it but a lot of girls were sitting on the ground and they were chatting so I felt like hm-m-m-m, I don't want to read a book here anymore.

Then one day I went there to sit and all tables were removed and there is this place they called 'quiet zone'.

*Gergana*: Oh okay, so that's the area you used to sit in? [...] so you don't like that one anymore and you went to the other side of the library, to the quiet zone.

*Maimona*: Yeah, the quiet zone, there is a specific table I like to sit on, in front of the window and you can see...you know, you can see the outside and I feel so concentrated on my laptop and I just feel the sun is come through and not locked in the place.

Thus, for Maimona, a special space of her own seemed a necessity for resting, studying or cocooning; and when this space is no longer satisfying as a me space, she finds another. Maimona's me space also seemed to fulfil a longing for physical freedom by providing a view that extends beyond her current spot or even the "locked" campus space as per her last phrase.

'Me' space links to the self centre and inner space that allows for reflection, introspection, learning and creativity. As stated earlier, both Tamboukou (2003) and Woolf (1945) have emphasized the female's need for a space of her own to unleash her creativity. This resonates with one of my conversations on types of spaces with a female faculty member and the emphasis she put on having her own personal office space, her me space:

*Gergana:* okay. Well, if I ask you about the space here on the campus, the new campus particularly, can you share an incident when you became really conscious and aware of space around you at this moment, you felt that the space has such an influence on you?

*Ola:* Definitely, I mean because I was working at Zayed University in the old campus, I didn't have any personal space office-wise. You just have cubicles, you could over hear the conversation that is taking place between faculty and staff and students coming in and out from one big office that is just divided by walls, so even when some answer their own cell phones or their telephone line I could hear the conversation. When they are typing on their computer and laptops I could hear them on the keyboard. It was extremely annoying.

*Gergana:* Yeah.

*Ola:* When I was told that the new campus will have like just personal offices, I could not believe it. And when I saw my office I was lucky enough to have like a big window and I quickly change the furniture to suit me. I did feel here that I can be creative. When I moved to my office, I knew that it going to be successful for me and it is going to be a very good space and work environment.

*Gergana:* How do you think that this space has a role in your teaching, or even the students learning experience in class?

*Ola:* Well, my private office definitely allows me to concentrate on preparing lectures beforehand, even if I have five or ten minutes. I can, you know, quietly meditate and clear my mind to work and if a student has a problem, and I really want to speak to them privately, it gives me this freedom to take them and be like an elder sister or even sometimes maternal with them or guide them to say you “are not really doing..their work”. If I don’t have this private space, I would not be able to have this private conversation.

Later in the interview, she even associated how having a room of their own makes some of her students better and more creative writers, linking it directly to Virginia Woolf’s (1945) correlation between creative writing and having a space of their own.

*Ola:* Men always have a room of their own, but women, always placed together in a room, not really have given their own private space at home.

*Gergana:* Yeah.

*Ola:* But the man always does. The brother does, the father does the men have the privilege of seeking work outside and the social places and they can create spaces outside the home environment, if they are unhappy. But women are usually stuck in the domestic. And they don't even have the room of their own, how we expect them to read or write or produce anything [...]. My female students who tend to have a room of their own, ironically like Virginia Wolf who has a room of her own, tend to be more creative.

*Gergana:* Hm-m-m, and when you say a room of her own do you refer here metaphorically having the space to be creative or having a physical room for themselves?

*Ola:* Their own bedroom. They don’t share with any one. So this is a step for creativity, having a place of your own. Especially the ones who write, writers. I am in contact here with an Emirati writer, beautiful young woman, and although she lives with her own parents

in Al-Ain, she decided to rent an apartment in Abu Dhabi where she works..because she needed her own space. And when I asked, she said this..the way, she is..she is being with the family, they are all the time-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) Yeah, that energy distraction and the whole.. yeah.

*Ola:* Although she has her own bedroom, like her own room but she still..she wanted this small apartment in Abu Dhabi where she can have her real, real space like her own freedom of space.

Me space is thus a manifestation of students' need for privacy, to be "left alone" as they have clearly explained to a curious faculty member who attended my presentation on student spaces and ended up asking students about this in the corridors:

*Adam:* And again you mentioned something about the areas, the corners and when I walk to get my food, from the cafeteria, I see that, and I talk to them about it.

*Gergana:* You did?

*Adam:* I did, I talked. They said that they want to be left alone.

*Gergana:* Yeah, 'me' space.

*Adam:* Ye-a-ah.

*Gergana:* Like the cocoon thing.

*Adam:* Yeah yeah, very private, and they want..they told me about.. like Emirati people the thing they want is to have their own space, and that is why they don't like to live in a block of flats because they think they don't like apartments because they want to have their own space. They are very much conscious of their own space and they want to be, you know, very private I think-k.

Another faculty member described the students' me space as 'run-away' space while relating how her students escape from physical reality by entering their own borderless escape space for browsing, texting and phoning. Interestingly, this type of me space could be a 'virtual' space or even an 'us' (social) space

when chatting with others over the phone. More on these two spaces will follow in the sections below.

What is evident from the above analysis is the pervasive nature of me space as a lived space that becomes associated with meanings and experiences related to individuality, privacy, seclusion, studying, creativity or escapism. I have divided these various me spaces into the following categories: me study, me rest, me reflect and mediate, me chat virtually or on the phone, and me run-away. Possibly there are also others that I did not encounter or notice (Figure 5.30).

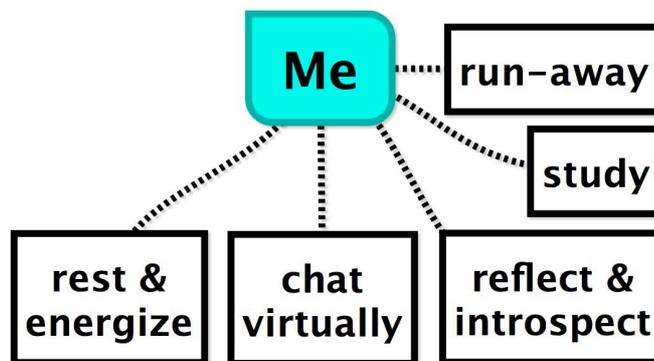


Figure 5.30: Types of 'me' spaces.

### ***'Us' space***

The second type of students' 'hot' space is 'us' space. It is the space of socialization and companionship, the space of togetherness and often that of the collective. It includes all the social spaces appropriated by the female students in pairs or groups. It is also the most dominant amongst all the hot lived spaces due to female students' strong attachment to socialization and being in a group with each other (*rbee'athood*) as part of their collective. Therefore, it includes the different spaces of the collective (Figure 5.31).

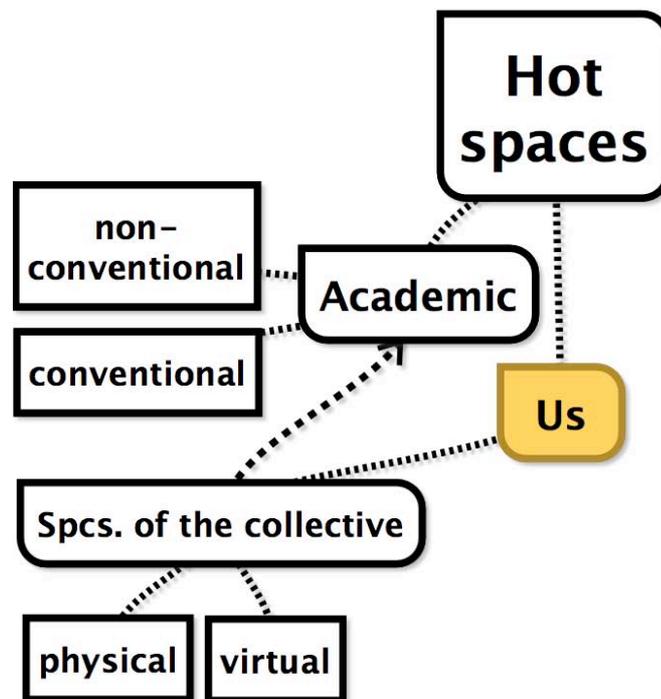


Figure 5.31: Types of 'Us' spaces

From what I observed, the space of the collective includes every physical corner, spot or cocoon on campus that can be utilized and appropriated by the collective, as I have extensively elaborated under 'Cocooning' and 'The collective' in Chapter Four. Students conduct all sorts of activities in these us spaces: they eat, chat, socialize, study and enjoy being together, they even sleep while with their collective members, as Amira told me in an interview: "me and my friends talking and one of my friends, she is sleeping".<sup>42</sup> In all of 13 interviews, female students referred to places where they consistently meet with their friends (*rbee'at*), as part of their campus life, as in this example:

*Gergana*: Are there any other favourite places you like to use around campus and to SIT IN-

*Amira*: (overlapping) Uhm-m (long pause), classes.

*Gergana*: You like to sit in the classes?

*Amira*: Yeah, in the break..a-ah at 12 o'clock we go to the classes...and because you know in the wing A and wing B the classes is empty-y-y at-t during break time.

*Gergana*: Ye-e-s.

<sup>42</sup> See conversation with Amira under 'Cocooning', Chapter 4.

*Amira:* Yeah we go and sit and play-y (laughing)...and talking-g..And sometime..because you know there's a project...we put a video-o..and watch films.

*Gergana:* Oh okay. So you use the-e, those empty classes to practice..have Fu-u-n.

*Amira:* Yes. AND EAT (laughter). We take our lunch...from the cafeteria and eat in the class (laughing)

*Gergana:* You like it there?

*Amira:* Yes.

*Gergana:* More than the cafeteria?

*Amira:* Ye-e-s, because cafeteria is too crowded.

*Gergana:* O-oh okay, so you really like more private places-

*Amira:* (overlapping) Yeah (laughing).

As this extract shows, privacy was an important aspect of us spaces, although, like me spaces, many us spaces are part of the campus public space. These included every available space that allows active socialization of the collective like empty classrooms, certain corners or spots in the cafeteria, atrium, library, hallways, gardens, university gates or sometimes even bathrooms. Interestingly, the library emerged in my research as an important us space for socializing or hanging out, making it one of the noisiest libraries I have ever attended, which constantly posed a challenge to the librarians in maintaining a quiet environment against such cultural practice. This eventually led the librarians to create the “quiet zone” area within a section of the library in which they desperately tried to enforce silence and no socializing.

More interestingly, students spend a substantial amount of time socializing in the bathrooms while fixing their make-up, hair and *sheilas*, washing for prayer or even smoking in the more secluded bathrooms. The following are excerpts from my observation notes while in one bathroom showing how it can transform into us space:

I followed two students who went to the washrooms. Washrooms are places of socialization and image creation, they spend a lot of time

fixing their make-up and *sheilas*...washing for prayers and other things. I do feel like an intruder when I go there as there are many students talking and socializing often in loud voices, but maybe that's me feeling conscious about observing them. They seem to ignore my presence and go ahead with their conversations while fixing their *sheilas* and make up, leaving their big bags on the sink counter blocking that area quite possessively... I found it rude at times when I needed to wash my hands. (GA, field notes)

I also noticed that the university gates (gates 1 and 2) are particularly interesting spaces that departing students transform into a social — we space. While waiting to be collected, they socialize extensively with their peers as in the following observation notes. I even noticed that some of the students who drive their own cars stay at the gate just to spend some time with their *rbee'at* who are waiting to be driven home.

When leaving at 4:40 p.m., there was a huge crowd of students at gate F, socializing while waiting. The gate became a station of interaction and socialization...It sounds as if in a beehive with all their noises and talks but with minimum movement...except for one or two standing alone and playing with their mobiles. All are waiting in groups or pairs for the buses or their relatives to pick them up. A group of three are even sitting at the far end corner of the gate room on the floor, while others are either standing or sitting on the available chairs, all in groups! (GA, field notes)

I recorded numerous observation notes and photos of students collectively in different spaces across campus, socializing or passing the time, repeatedly stating: “as usual, they are sitting in the atrium” or “behind the lockers”, “in the outside gardens”, “laughing, eating [...] and gossiping together”, “they are studying behind the lockers [...]” (Figures 5.32 and 5.33).



**Figure 5.32:** 'Us' space in the outside gardens (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.33:** 'Us' space in the atrium while group studying (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

The space of the collective also includes spaces for student groups to work on academic projects or other group assignments. This space can also be considered part of the 'academic' space (to be discussed later in this chapter), which again demonstrates the interconnectivity and overlap between the types of lived spaces. The majority of faculty members in their interviews emphasized the importance of group work and the students' need for a group (us) space to be able to work together on joint projects both in and outside class. This us-academic space seemed an important spatial need that directly influenced the students' learning experience.

In addition to the physical-us space of the collective, there is also the 'virtual'. This is the nonphysical space that allows members of the collective to chat, text, tweet and follow one another on twitter, or even see and speak with each other using social networking while physically apart. Through this space, members of the collective can always remain connected with each other, whether in class, the cafeteria, hallways or even outside campus (see section on 'virtual space' for more details).

At ZU, the students' experience of togetherness cuts across all campus spaces, creating a space of their own — us space. This is a space utilized in a way that is completely different from what it was initially designed for, which "imagine[s] new meanings and possibilities for spatial practices" (Harvey, 1990, p. 219).

### ***Cultural Space***

This is the space of culturally related practices, gatherings and events. One could argue cultural practices include almost all the daily practices of UAE female students as everything they do is culturally driven on some level, and therefore intersects with 'me', 'us', 'academic' and 'virtual' spaces. However, for the purposes of clarity and organisation, I limit 'cultural' to spaces involving national or religious practices and events (Figure 5.34).

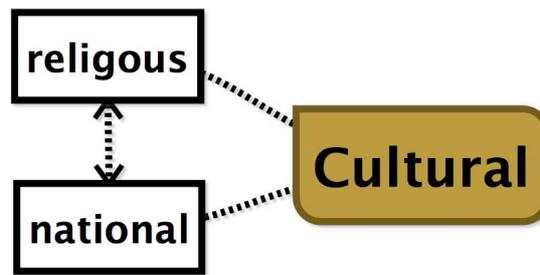


Figure 5.34: Types of cultural spaces.

During specific cultural events like the national day celebrations or the ZU carnival, campus spaces are transformed to allow for practices associated with such events. Most of the university's public and social spaces, like the atrium and the outside courtyard, are filled with local tents, traditional sitting areas, or *majlises*, and booths for exhibiting commercial or hand-made products, offering traditional food and Henna services (Figures 5.35, 5.36 and 5.37).

On occasions like the national day celebrations, students wear festive *abayas*, while some bring their younger siblings or children wearing the colours of the UAE flag. These events include food, performances, games and activities for children, henna tattoos and many other festive activities. During the ZU carnival, students run booths to exhibit and sell their handmade work or products from their small businesses. On such occasions, students are usually honoured by a visit by one of the local leaders (*sheikhs*) to see their work and motivate them (Figure 37) or celebrate National day with them. These cultural spaces associated with such occasions are limited to the open campus public spaces, without extending to the classrooms, library, labs and so on



**Figure 5.35:** The usual atrium space (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



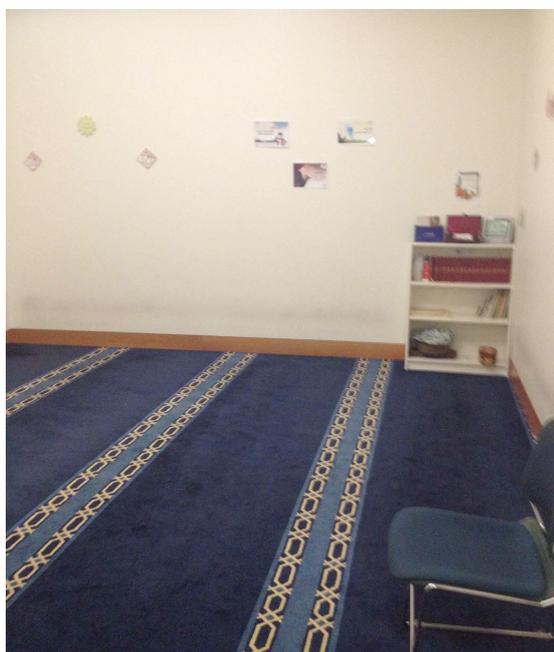
**Figure 5.36:** Atrium transformed for the ZU carnival (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.37:** Local leaders attending the ZU carnival (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Other cultural spaces include those associated with religious practice or symbols like the designated female prayer rooms and *wodo* washrooms available on each floor and wing of the University (Figures 5.38 and 5.39). Students regularly attend these spaces to pray and read the *Qur'an* during their breaks. This religious spatial rhythm becomes more intense during *Ramadan* (a

holy month for Muslim people during which they fast and increase the frequency of religious practices).



**Figure 5.38:** Female prayer room (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.39:** Female wodo' washroom, (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

As the UAE is a conservative Islamic society, Islam has a significant influence on students' life. There are prayer rooms in every public space, such as shopping malls. These religious spaces have an important symbolic status and are considered by students to be among the most essential and important on campus, as evident from Amna's comments:

*Gergana:* Uhm..like which places do you think from the ones she showed you were the most important? (I am referring to her orientation tour on the first day)

*Amna:* The-e canteen.

*Gergana:* Uhm

*Amna:* The prayer room I was..because the first time a-ah I was the first day, I was going to pray and I don't know where to pray...Ok-kay so I asked the students and I got like..till I get to the place it took, *ya'nni*, time. And I was..I was angry, *ya'nni*, ah-h little bit ah-h-h [...]

*Gergana:* You were angry? Why?

*Amna:* Because I did not find the place quickly (laughing)

*Gergana:* Which place?

*Amna:* The praying room.

In addition to the designated prayer rooms, students transform many private corners into prayer areas. For example, I often came across students praying in the area behind the lockers and in the dark at the back of empty classrooms, thereby transforming them into religious, cultural spaces. One faculty member told me a story of how for her finding students praying at the back of the class immediately transformed the classroom space into something different:

I can remember, this is sort of odd one of student learning, it could be more a self-learning. When I first came at Zayed university, I was in the old campus and I went to one of my classrooms, one of the few lessons that I was taking, and when I went into the classroom, it was dimmed, the lights have been dimmed and I thought it is unusual, and as I entered into the classroom, I looked at the back and there were students on the floor at the back of the room. And you know, it is a sort of cross-cultural, I was trying to make sense of that very quickly, and what is happening, you know. Have they lost something? Is somebody sick, and suddenly..click that they were praying in the classroom. And so, was that..that kind of privacy thing about it and the dimmed light in it, it did make me very conscious, I was in a different cultural kind of space if you like.

In addition to these national and religious spaces, there are hybrid spaces that fall between them, which accommodate cultural practices that are considered both national and religious. For example, one of my interviewees led me to consider the cafeteria as a cultural space since it represents the UAE's spirit through the philanthropic gestures of its female students towards the cleaning staff:

*Gergana:* Which places here, around campus, you feel represent you as an Emirati female? [...]

*Shetha:* Ah-h-h-h, yeh, actually, I have one place that I feel like there is an Emirati personality in, and sometimes I will tell you the both

places that there is this feeling of Emirati our culture and personality shown and the other place where no culture.

*Gergana*: No culture or identity at all.

*Shetha*: Yeah.

*Gergana*: which ones?

*Shetha*: Don't laugh, but the canteen.

*Gergana*: Not laughing.

*Shetha*: Ah-h-h (laughing) sometimes, I see girls bring the food go to to..if there is still food, they don't eat. For example ordered two *Shawarma*, they eat one and the other one left, they don't throw it.

*Gergana*: Ok, what they will do-

*Shetha*: (overlapping) They gave it to the cleaner, and she take it.

*Gergana*: That is so nice.

*Shetha*: I saw this, I saw this many times, and even my friends, like when I eat, sometimes I eat they told: "finish your plate or just clean it, clean the area that you didn't touch and give it to someone", here I feel like that I am still in the UAE.

*Gergana*: That is nice, so the feeling of caring for people.

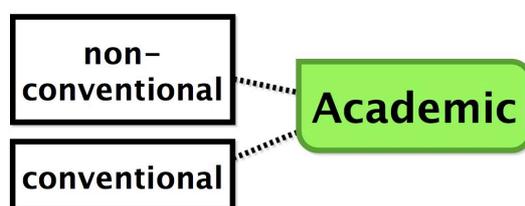
*Shefa*: You know this is part of our religion, and our culture, because our religion asks us to take care of other people. And it also don't throw the food, because someone need it.

Helping less privileged people is a loved, admired and encouraged practice in the UAE, both culturally and religiously. Wealthier people are expected to help poorer people through '*zakat*' (obligatory Islamic practice that involves giving a minor share of one's wealth in the form of money to the poor), and will almost always offer '*sadaka*' (preferred Islamic practice of offering material support to the poor in the form of money, clothes, food and so on), which female students often practice with the university's cleaning staff. Students often tip the cleaners and offer them eatable leftovers that remain after social gatherings, birthday celebrations or even large meals bought for lunch in the cafeterias, as *Shetha's* interview above shows.

In short, the cultural practices described here, whether national, religious or a combination, are always associated with cultural spaces and should therefore be recognised as lived spaces.

### ***Academic space***

This is the space of academic practices where teaching, learning and studying happen. It is the platform that allows for such practices and the construct that emerges from them as well. Academic spaces can be divided into conventional and non-conventional (Figure 5.40).



**Figure 5.40:** Types of academic spaces.

Conventional academic spaces include those where traditional teaching and learning usually happens and is expected to happen: classrooms, design studios, the library and its study rooms, and labs. All of the interviewed male and female students considered the classroom to be the main place for teaching and learning on campus; whenever they referred to learning, they associated it with the classroom. In describing her preferred learning environment, Amira even associates the classroom with her future, as learning in class leads to a better future:

*Amira:* You feel like, *ya'nni*, it's (the classrooms) a place for relaxing and studying. Because when we want to study we have to know, *ya'nni*, a good environmental that you feel it's relaxing. Not a-ah too much color, *ya'nni*.

*Gergana:* Uhm (pause) So-o..so a class for you is a place to rela-a-x. Place to study-

*Amira:* (overlapping) Yeah

*Gergana:* What else?

*Amira:* To learn (laughing).

*Gergana:* Okay-y, to learn. What else?

*Amira:* And-d..to communicate with the girls (pause)

[...]

*Gergana:* What..What is a class environment for you? What does it mean to you?

*Amira:* Our future (pause)

*Gergana:* Oh that's interesting...future-

*Amira:* (overlapping) *Ya'nni*, WE HAVE TO, *ya'nni*, FOCUS on classes and understand what we-e learn because it's depend on our future , *ya'nni*, If we didn't a-ah focus on class, so we will not , *ya'nni*, we will not know what we have to study for the future.

For art and design students, their studios are not just traditional classrooms used during official lessons, but are also their place for self-study or working on projects:

*Gergana:* So when you've joined your major, where did you used to hang out? Did you mo-

*Dina:* (overlapping) With the girls I KNEW, actually it was in the canteen.

*Gergana:* The canteen! Okay.

*Dina:* Otherwise as an art student, I feel we were so BUSY-Y and we are mostly in studios. Like it was in our breaks if it's a three hours break or in one hour break..we need takes that time to work on our project, So we save time more in the house..to work on other things.

*Gergana:* So basically you were staying in the studios and working?

*Dina:* Yeah, the B..C level.

In addition to classes, labs and studios, the library is another main study area for female students, as well as being an important us space for socializing or hanging out, as explained earlier.

(During a mobile interview)

*Gergana:* Do you want to show me your favourite place, where you like to sit..and study? [...].

*Afra:* A-ah..when I study I go to the library almost..like (pause).

*Gergana:* So library is always the place where you used to study?

*Afra:* Yeah.

*Gergana:* Do you sit there in the study room or you just a-ah-

*Afra:* (overlapping) No I just sit out..ah the places good where the quiet area, it's better.

Students repeatedly referred to library spaces during interviews and casual conversations as relatively quieter places to study than the rest of the campus:

*Gergana:* Where do you go to work, and learn or study? [...].

[...]

*Shatha:* Yeah a-a-a-h-h-m-m I used to work in-n-n th..the library sometime when I have a huge project or-a-a I have to go there and work there because it's silent.

*Gergana:* h-hm-m. Is it silent?

*Shatha:* Yeah, and in this rooms..?

*Gergana:* A-a-h study rooms.

*Shatha:* That they have, yeah the study rooms.

The university's Peers Assistance Leaders (PALs) centre is one of the spaces most commonly associated with learning or getting academic help. It offers a student-led mentoring program where academically successful students offer academic support to others on different university subjects. It has been a very successful program with the majority of students attending the centre to get help, especially if facing academic difficulties in a specific subject. What makes it even more successful is that students can communicate with the PALs in Arabic, which often helps them overcome the normal language barriers created by the usual English-medium classroom teaching to better understand the subject content. Although it might not be a conventional program compared to other universities in the UAE, the centre is considered a conventional academic

space on campus accessible to all students for academic help. The centre itself consists of two main rooms. The first is the PALs' social room, where PALs members meet, hang out, prepare study materials and receive training. They primarily arrange and appropriate the room, so it clearly reflects their preferences and collective spirit, as represented by the painting of flowers on the walls, coloured bean bags and the furniture arrangement (Figure 5.41). The other room is the centre's main room where mentoring happens. It has round tables and chairs for students to meet privately with mentors; it also includes some comfortable couches, a notice board with the centre's schedule and contacts, some potted plants, and PALs mentors' and mentees' motivational statements, posted on stands (Figures 5.42 and 5.43). The centre emerged in several casual conversations and interviews as a favourite space to socialize and help others, if a PALs member, or to study and receive academic support if a regular student.



**Figure 5.41:** The Pals' social room during an iPad training session (Gergana Alzeer, 2013).



**Figure 5.42:** Academic space: Pals mentors helping other students (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.43:** Pals' social room (Gergana Alzeer 2013)

In sum, the conventional academic space on campus comprised various types of classrooms (lecture rooms, laboratories and design studios), the library spaces and the PALs centre.

In addition to these conventional academic spaces, it became clear that the campus also includes non-conventional academic spaces; that is, any space that allows teaching or learning to occur, even if it was originally designed for a different purpose. The spaces that emerged from the fieldwork included the atrium, the outside courtyard, the stairs, the hallways, the gates, the cocoons and the cafeteria. Students' preferences vary, with some preferring to study in the atrium, while others find this noisy so prefer the outside courtyard (Figure 5.44). This was evident from one PALs student's spatial quest for a quiet space to sit and study in order to help a visually impaired student outside the Pals centre space:

*Amna:* Someti-i some of them like the quiet places...that's, *Ya'nni*, better for them and comf..they feel comfortable, and they are in CLOSE place.

*Gergana:* O-o-h okay. Are you talking about ah visually impaired students or-r others?

*Amna:* The ones that I dealt with ar-r-re visually impaired, the low vision and the blinds [...]. One of them is actually, *ya'nni*, I felt like..when we I asked her she said like closed ones.. We went to the

atrium..I told her like "let's try the atrium" and-d but she said "it's noisy". Actually there was no place for us (laughing) we went..to the-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) So where did you go?

*Amna:* Courtyard.

*Gergana:* Oh, your favourite place.

*Amna:* (laughing) Yeah. I told the student to try that, maybe it's better.



**Figure 5.44:** The outside courtyard (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Other non-conventional academic spaces included the cafeterias and coffee shops on campus. It was interesting to see that for many students these were favourite places for studying and doing homework:

*Shatha:* Yeah, a-a-a-h sometimes like when I have some homework and assignments like a small things I-I went to any café like-e Sandela's or-r-r the Coffee Beans and the library, I work with my friends.

[...]

*Gergana:* And that's it? you don't work anywhere else?

*Shatha:* A-a the canteen, the places where I can do two things like eating and working.

These spaces offer a place for eating, socializing and working on projects without time limits on using the space. For example, students can stay in the cafeteria all day without ever being asked to leave, as opposed to empty classrooms or library study rooms that are time restricted according to their schedules. In addition, I noticed that many students prefer to sit at those cafeteria tables that are closer to walls where power sockets are available to charge their laptops (Figure 5.45).

I also came across a few university instructors using non-conventional spaces outside the classroom as part of their pedagogical approach. For example, two communication professors regularly utilized public spaces such as the atrium to help students practice public speaking for the communication class (Figure 5.46).

One of these two instructors extensively elaborated on the type of classes ZU has, and how he would like to break away from the traditional class setting by moving into what he called 'alternative teaching spaces' such as the hallways, atrium and outside courtyard, which can be a useful and enriching learning experience:



**Figure 5.45:** Students sitting in the cafeteria to study close to power sockets (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.46:** Public speaking class in the hallway (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

*Jerry:* From the faculty side of it..faculty (pause) and this is of course a generalization, but they like classroom, it is safe. The classroom is easy, you go in, you shut the door.

[...]

*Jerry:* So th-the problem is I guess..alternative learning spaces will be useful and..and sometimes I break out of my classrooms. And I mean I tend to move classrooms as...so on the register they hate me because I'll just..I'll go to them and ask "Okay, can I change rooms?" halfway through or every-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) (laughing)

*Jerry:* Four times a year, I might. Four times a semester I might change the room of the class (pause).

*Gergana:* And..how do you think that influences your learning? Or affect-

*John:* (overlapping) I-I think it changes the context. Because the eh depending on the CLASS..so if it's public speaking class, changing the context towards..taking place, it..it changes the environment for the students. They have to get used to a new place. I moved my class into hallways, I've used the atrium-m. I-I just move it arou-und.. And I think, for me-e as an instructor, It CHANGES the the way you teach [...].

*Gergana:* Uhm

*Jerry:* And so this idea that okay, I can have a class in a hallway (pause) and it's still as valid as having class in a CLASSROOM, we mean obviously there are reasons why you want to do it in the hallways. So, I think that An-and the fact that (pause) in taking these courses to different places in the university, which I think could be really useful, that it..It's not set up to accommodate that.

[...]

*Jerry:* So that yes it's it's a learning space. But it's also public space.

*Gergana:* Yeah.

[...]

*Jerry*: Yeah, so it does have the..the ability to be a class, but it could be alternative space.

(See appendix 5.1 for the whole extract)

Other non-conventional academic spaces include the gate rooms, where students study while waiting to be collected, the hallways, their favourite cocoons and social rooms, and any other space on campus that students can appropriate in order to practice academically. This also includes virtual academic spaces like Blackboard (ZU's official class management site) or other platforms that allow learning to happen online (see the following section on 'Virtual' space).

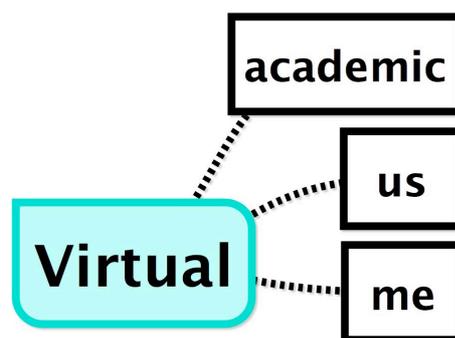
Whether conventional or non-conventional, inside or outside class, the academic space lies at the core of an academic institution. In all interviews, both faculty and students constantly emphasized the importance of such spaces for academic practices of teaching, studying and learning, whether individually or in groups (as seen in 'me' study and 'us' study spaces).

### ***Virtual space***

Technological advances have created this new space of virtual reality accessed through computers, smart phones, tablets and the internet. Although, in the context of my research, virtual space could be included within me, us or academic spaces, I choose to categorize it as a separate space due to its unique nature and growing influence on and use by female students. This non-physical space has no borders or spatial limitations, extending beyond the materiality of the campus spaces, and is constantly growing and evolving. Nevertheless, it always remains connected to the physical space because students need a physical portal to access the virtual space, a device in the sensory world, notably a mobile or computer to access it; they also need to be physically present in a specific spot on or off campus. They definitely cannot access the space by just imagining or physically walking into it.

It is important, however, to acknowledge that virtual space is not new. There is a diverse, growing body of literature on virtual spaces and on online environments, with the internet considered to be “the next frontier in human subject research” (Morrow, Hawkins and Kern, 2014, p. 1). Such research includes the space of mobile, online and distance learning (e.g. Ally, 2013; Jaggars, Nikki and Stacey, 2013; Clary and Wandersee, 2009), social networking (e.g. Cheung, Chiu and Lee, 2011) and virtual reality in general, including online/offline games and other technological applications (e.g. Morrow, Hawkins and Kern, 2014; Markham,1998). However these fall outside my current interest and extend beyond the focus of this research with its Lefebvrian overarching framework of the female students’ emerging spaces.

From my findings, females students’ virtual space can be one of socialization and the collective, an us space such as the social networking spaces (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). Virtual space is also used for writing personal notes and academic research with user-generated content on sites for making individual notes or for using search engines, a me space (e.g. electronic diary, notes, weblogs). Finally it can also be an academic space for online learning or a platform to share academic material (Figure 5.47).



**Figure 5.47:** Types of virtual spaces.

Of these three types of virtual space, the us space of socializing and chatting predominated in observations, with almost every student connected to others, constantly texting or chatting. This practice emphasised the students’ collective sense of identity even while sitting alone as discussed in Chapter Four under ‘The collective’. It also parallels the global explosion in the use of online social

networking, especially among the younger generation (Cheung, Chiu and Lee, 2011; Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert, 2009). Cheung, Chiu and Lee (2011) found that the factors that drive college students' intention to use online social networks like Facebook are strongly determined by social presence, meaning they are driven by their need to connect and communicate with their peers, which also seemed to be more evident among groups who share the same social values (ibid), as is the case of the Emirati female students.

Interestingly, during interviews, students referred most to the virtual-academic space of learning and studying as in the following extracts. Their references probably reflect their awareness of being college students interviewed about space in an academic institute. Despite this, the social aspect of virtual-us space still emerged and intertwined with the virtual-academic as evident in the last sentence of the extract:

*Gergana:* Okay can you tell me about your most satisfactory learning experience?

[...]

*Shatha:* Aa-a-h once in typography class [...]. We have to-o-o contact a-a uni..at San Francisco University, we have a project actually. And this-s-s communication and this project was really enjoyable and like a-a-a good experience because we talked to..to other people in different place. So-o-o I think this is a really good experience for me because we need to to think different we need to see how people think [...].

*Gergana:* So that was very satisfying and you connected with different space, different kind of mentalities-

*Shatha:* (overlapping) Different language, different religion, different place, and different areas-

[...]

*Gergana:* How did you connect to them? through what?

*Shatha:* Through h-h-h-h-m-m, it was up to us, but at the first, it was by e-mail. And then like Skype or SMS, and then the nice thing that, till now I am contacting my friends in San Francisco.

Several interviewed students emphasized and supported further integration of technology at the university to allow better access to such virtual learning and research spaces; however, some emphasized the need to also restrict students' access to social networking sites that compete for their attention and might distract their learning. Once again, this indicates the dominance of the virtual-us in their spatial experiences over the other two types.

*Amira:* And-d-d uhm-m (pause) Miss, *ya'nni*, It's a good idea to-o, *ya'nni*, to give iPad for each student in-n. Not for each student, *ya'nni*, each class come..and they have the iPad on the table. 'Mathalan' (for example), *ya'nni*, when I face some difficulties when teacher explaining, in the meaning, *ya'nni*, *mathalan*, I can *ya'nni* search about it the meaning, and..and see what's the meanings. And..but sometime they..ah also in the same time control the iPad, *ya'nni*, we cannot play it. Just for the learning (pause) and-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) Okay, but you can use your mobile to find the word.

*Amira:* Yeah, we can, but when I, *ya'nni* use my mobile, I go to my contacts and see-e-e (laughing)

*Gergana:* O-oh, Okay. So you wanna have access to devices, but not all the contacts and social networking-

*Amira:* (overlapping) Yeah, not all them. *Ya'nni*, because also miss you know now [...] When they do open, okay I do-o I take a notes. But in the same time I go to the Insta-gra-a-a-m (laughing).

*Gergana:* O-o-h okay, you look at other things.

*Amira:* Yeah.

The importance of the virtual space for female students stems from its borderless nature and the many possibilities it offers. Although utilized by students all over the world, it takes on a more important role for Emirati female students because it is a space of relative freedom and female agency. It allows them freer access to the outside world beyond the physical and social limitations of their conservative culture, while still relatively protecting their privacy and anonymity. It can also offer the capacity to momentarily escape the

everyday life, which is essential for maintaining a self of 'being' (Cahir and Warner, 2013, p. 60). This explains students' strong attachments to their devices, and what might appear to an outsider as excessive use compared to local males or females in western culture:

*Gergana:* So, you see a difference in the way male students use the space compared to female students?

*Rayan:* Yes, actually the boys they like to chat, talk on the phone, play and leave. The girls.., they are ah-h-h-h, there are different groups of girls, some of them, they like to sit in very very small groups like two friends together just chatting, or reading, they spend a lot of time on using media you know twitter and-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) More than the boys?

*Rayan:* More than the boys, I noticed. The boys they use their blackberries or phone, but the girls are more attached to these things, socializing through the media.

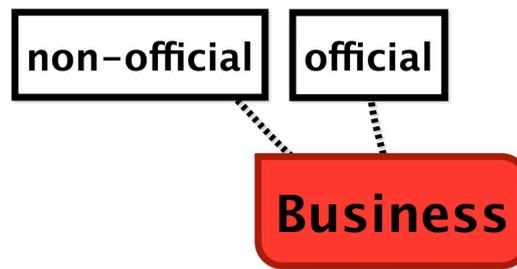
*Gergana:* I think also it is their gate to the outside.

*Rayan:* Exactly.

With the growing interest and research concerning the use of technology in education, and ZU's focus on the use of technology, including the recent introduction of iPads into the ABP and general education courses (baccalaureate), the virtual space is taking an increasingly significant role in their learning and spatial experience. Further research could usefully investigate this space and its role in influencing learning.

### ***Business spaces***

These spaces are associated with the exchange of goods and services in return for money. From the fieldwork, it became clear that there are two types of business spaces in the university: official and non-official (Figure 5.48).



**Figure 5.48:** Types of business spaces.

Official business spaces include officially established campus shops and services such as cafeterias, coffee shops, hair salon, convenience store, bookstore, perfume store, and other temporary booths for selling hand-made products or providing other services, usually set up on occasions such as the ZU carnival, national day, health fairs, and so on. Since Emirati females generally enjoy shopping, ZU students constantly visit these official business spaces. Some students mentioned them by name during the interviews as preferred spaces on campus:

*Gergana:* Where is your place on campus?

*Fouzia:* Student Life.

*Gergana:* So only Student Life?

[...]

*Fouzia:* Yeah (pause), and I like..this canteen (laughing), the Circle K (ZU convenient store)

*Gergana:* Oh Circle K, okay.

*Fouzia:* Yeah (pause)

*Gergana:* You buy things from there-

*Fouzia:* (overlapping) Yeah they have good stuff (pause).

These official business spaces seemed like a direct translation to what Stephen Ball (2004, p. 12) in his discussion of the commodification of education refers to as the new relation between children (students in my case), education and capital. The university as an academic institution is viewed as a site of consumption (ibid), where products and companies advertise and sell their products to student customers.

In contrast, non-official business spaces are those where some type of business exchange happens, even though they were not originally designed or designated as business spaces. From my observations, I was surprised to discover that some female students managed to establish business relationships with cleaners, as some of the cleaners, who desperately need to supplement their income, offered a product or service to female students for money. This type of relationship was usually associated with two campus spaces: the locker areas in the hallways of the academic wings, and the university gates. For example, during one of my observations of the hallways, I went to pour a drink from the water cooler next to the lockers in wing F, and there behind the lockers, I noticed a male cleaner handing a card to a student who then paid him back with money. I was curious and immediately asked the student, who seemed a bit uncomfortable but told me that she just bought a prepaid card for her mobile. Having noticed this incident, I often observed this type of hidden business transaction run by the cleaners to provide supplementary income. I only saw such private exchanges around the locker areas, which offered some privacy and seclusion off the public hallways; the cleaners were always worried that their supervisors might punish them for trying to sell such cards on campus. I initially assumed that they sell them cheaper than the official stores on campus, before later discovering that the price was the same. The students were buying these phone cards mostly to support the cleaners as part of their religious and cultural obligation to support the less privileged (see earlier conversation with Shatha under 'Cultural spaces') while also saving themselves a long walk to one of the campus stores as the cleaners were conveniently available to sell them cards as soon as they entered the academic wings from the main gates.

The other non-official business space that I observed was the university gates and their surroundings, including the parking lot. As a business space, the gates included a carrying service offered by some of the cleaners for students who requested help with extra luggage. I often observed how some cleaners came to the gate hall and wandered around at specific times of the day, sometimes pretending they wanted water from the cooler at the gate, just as an excuse to be present there. They then wandered back and forth between the

parking lot and the gate halls. Initially, I assumed that they were just taking a break, but in fact they were fishing for business. Once I realised what was happening, it became clear that there was a regularity to the cleaners' 'tours'. For example, I often noticed how some students park in the drop-off area before coming to the gate to fetch available cleaners to help them carry whatever they need to bring inside, such as art projects, bags, birthday cakes, and so on. Students frequently bring many things to campus; even when they are not celebrating their birthdays on campus with friends, they often like to bring food and have a picnic together, while students in clubs bring various materials. In addition, many of the female students wear high heels, and are used to having help around, having grown up with nannies, maids and cooks. Given such a life style, they rarely struggle to carry their own things, depending instead on the cleaners to carry things for them in exchange for tips. I discovered that some students even have the mobile numbers of cleaners to call when they need help. Thus, the potential to earn gratuities and conduct business exchanges definitely makes it lucrative for cleaners to hang around the gates hoping for customers. Although such business transactions are forbidden on campus, it is clear that many in authority know and ignore this given the cleaners' desperate need for extra income and the limited scope of such businesses, based as it is on tipping. The cleaners usually accept whatever amount of money the students offer in exchange for their service, while the prepaid phone cards cost exactly the same amount without evident profit, I assume the cleaners buy them at bulk, which allows for marginal profit. Generally, the ZU community is quite aware of the cleaners' difficult living conditions and regularly organises fundraising campaigns for them and other workers, including the security staff.

Although my findings about this student-cleaner relationship were limited to the gates and lockers areas, I believe many other undiscovered business spaces possibly exist around the campus alongside the official business spaces.

These emerging business spaces, to some extent, conjure ideas from the long and controversial debate on the commodification of education and the role of market in higher education (e.g. Karpov, 2013; Dongping, 2006; Ball, 2004; Shumar, 1997). Accordingly, universities worldwide seem to increasingly adopt

private sector practices as competing for prospective students while marketing their 'products' (Quinn, 2003a, pp. 5-6), thus transforming the university into a business by itself. With such view, the universities reduce themselves to being just a sector of the economy, which "looks at the institution of education as a supermarket, and its students as customers and consumers" (Karpov, 2013, p. 22). Although ZU is one of only three federal institutions that are heavily attended, it is increasingly developing its marketing strategies in attracting more locals and to some extent expats who in turn pay high fees to attend an institution that is free for locals. Although such aspects of the commodification of the institution as a whole do not accurately reflect the way ZU is, institutionally and nationally, perceived, and did not directly emerge in any interviews or observations of the students population, the emerging official and non-official business spaces however, indirectly contribute to this larger concept of perceiving the university as a space for business with the students being customers and consumers.

### ***Clandestine spaces***

As indicated by their name, clandestine spaces are hidden, secretive and sometimes forbidden lived spaces, linked "to the clandestine or underground side of social life" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33). I discovered a network of hidden corridors and other places on DXB that are associated with practices that often require more privacy and secrecy. Some of these spaces are for smoking, as most female students do not smoke because it is culturally unacceptable, especially for young women who are still under their parents' guardianship. Therefore, the few female student smokers have to do so secretly in remote, hidden spaces such as rooftop areas, secluded outdoor corners and even some bathrooms. In their quest for such spaces, they sometimes come across other university smokers, whether faculty or staff, creating awkward situations, as explained by a faculty colleague while discussing campus spaces:

*John:* [...] am-m..you know because I am a smoker, I go to smoking parts of the university that most of people don't know about.

*Gergana:* Oh okay.

*John:* And there is an entire network of corridors that exist here, that am-m-m, but every now and then students find themselves there, we

used to have it on the roof, and I used to go for cigarettes, and sometimes will find a student there smoking.

*Gergana:* Oh RE-E-ALY, that is interesting.

*John:* That was difficult, because do you acknowledge them? Do you tell them off?

*Gergana:* Or you just ignore?

*John:* So there are all these kind of hidden, illicit spaces on campus.

*Gergana:* Tell me more about these spaces and if the students use them?

*John:* Am-m, they might stumble across them, but that's very interesting, I can show you it, it's workers and some of the canteen people, maybe some faculty, maybe some students Just smoking and it is trashy and dirty. It is just over there, but it is that network of corridors that go there.

Other clandestine spaces are associated with the forbidden practices of the 'boyat' (the local word for lesbians or sometimes the ones acting and looking more like boys). These spaces represent what is referred to mostly in feminist theory as sexualised spaces, manifested through the tight and intertwined relationship between sexuality and space (Baydar, 2012, p. 699). Although I came across such practices only once, on several occasions my closer colleagues spoke of similar incidents of catching students engaged in some sort of sexual act: "they are often in the outside behind the labs area, I did not know what to do and just continued walking", one colleague told me. These spaces are mostly the most remote, hidden, and least frequented corners of the campus.

Once such spaces are appropriated by the Boyat, they transform them into sexualized spaces, thus allowing queer community members to claim these hidden private corners of the campus public spaces as their exclusive territory. Such claims of territoriality are often practised in sexualised spaces where politics of inclusion and exclusion vary according to the cultural and political context of these spaces (Labor, 2012). This is more evident within larger city

spaces that would allow for what Bell and Bennie (2004) call “sexual citizenship”; “[i]n connecting sexual politics to the politics of space, the main argument has been to link rights-claims to contest over space: to establish forms of queer territoriality as the base for political work” (ibid. p.1810). While western universities are moving towards establishing spaces for queer communities to support diversity (Pope et al., 2009, cited in Chesanko, 2014, p. 26), at ZU, however, such spaces become immediately stigmatised since in this society homosexuality and same-sex relations are considered a taboo. Other students start avoiding these spaces, worried they are going to be associated with the *Boyat* community. A few students told me they avoid certain bathrooms on campus that are usually attended by the *boyat*, as just going to a particular bathroom would stigmatize them and influence their reputation. This again confirms how spaces are socially constructed and the identity of the space depends on the type of practices and the people appropriating it. I have discovered that the minority Boyat’s finding hidden, private spaces to appropriate and transform into sexualised spaces, and the majority of students’ avoiding such spaces and pretending they do not exist has become a usual spatial practice at ZU. There is a large body of literature on sexuality and sexualized spaces, often linking space to identity construction and agency; although this is very interesting to investigate, it falls outside the scope of my research.<sup>43</sup>

As with many of the other types of hot lived space, clandestine spaces intersect with other spaces including the non-official business spaces, being often considered part of us or me, while many of the cocoons are clandestine as well. This makes the lived space even more complex and intertwined, involving both symbolic and hidden codes.

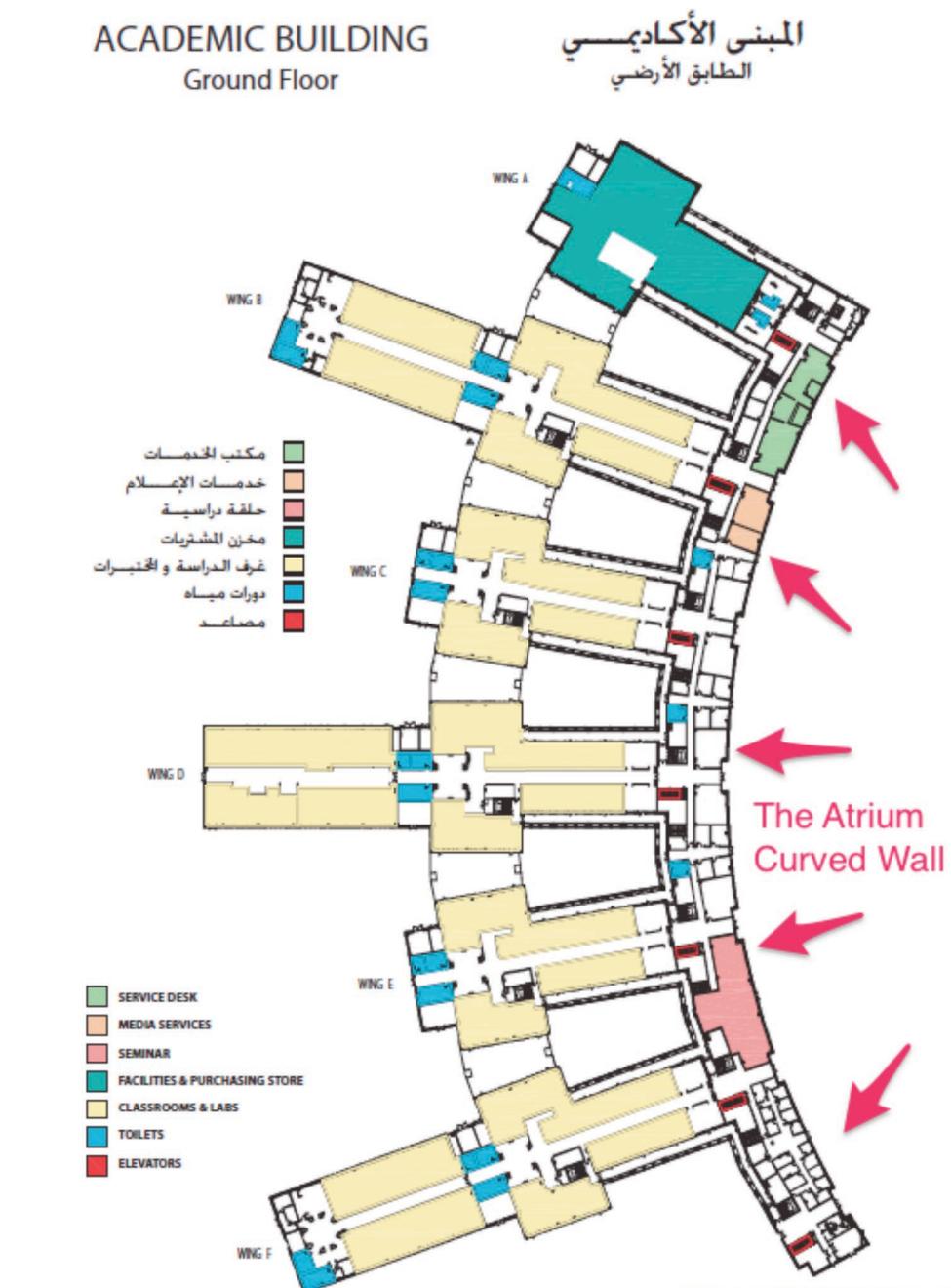
### ***Spaces of contradictions***

These appropriated spaces provoke mixed emotions by sending contradictory messages due to their physical nature and/or the types of social practices that

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<sup>43</sup> For a good overview of the literature on sexualized spaces see volume 19, issue 6, 2012 in *Gender, Place & Culture Journal*, themed around ‘sexualised productions of space’.

construct and are constructed by such spaces. The atrium is the largest space of contradictions (Figures 5.49-5.52). Indeed, it was the space that inspired me to create such a category of spaces. It is essential for our understanding of its unique nature as a lived space of contradictions to describe the atrium both as a physical space and a social construction in terms of the types of spatial practices that construct and are constructed within it.



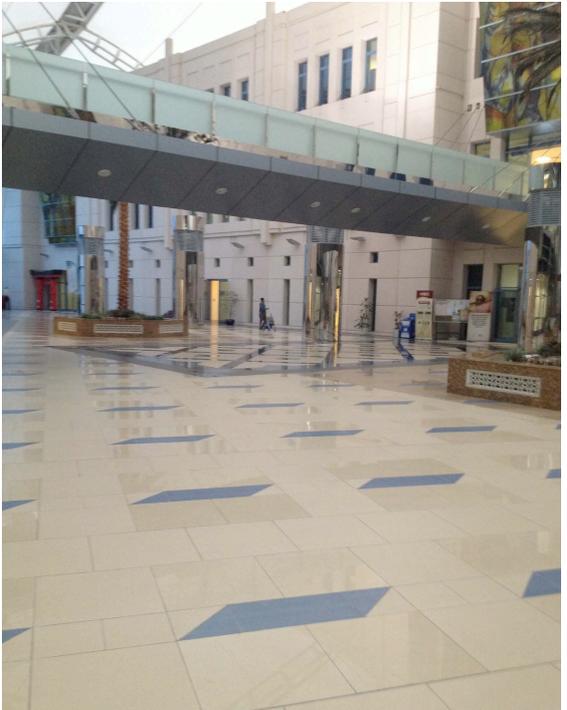
**Figure 5.49:** Ground floor plan of DXB showing the crescent that constitutes the inside ring wall of the atrium at the end of the academic wings.



**Figure 5.50:** Interior view of the atrium from the bridge (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.51:** The atrium ring wall and interior (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.52:** The atrium bridge (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Functionally and physically, the atrium represents the indoor soul and core of the university campus. It is an open public space that is centrally located, connecting all the academic wings with the administration, library and main cafeterias as well as the convention centre via the main outside courtyard (refer back to Figure 1.10, Chapter 1, p. 25). When viewed from above, its form takes the shape of a bow created by the intersection of a crescent-shaped arch constituting what is called the 'ring' wall at the end of the academic wings and a straight line representing the inside wall of the building housing the library and entrances to the courtyard, cafeteria and administration building (Figure 5.49).

The atrium's interior has high walls that form the facades of a three-story ring wall on one side and the library straight wall on the other. These walls include windows overlooking the atrium from meeting rooms, faculty offices and the library, and entrances to the atrium at ground level. The atrium's floor is covered with large glossy tiles, while its ceiling is a white canvas tent-like covering sky light that allows natural light through, making the atrium one of the brightest indoor spaces on campus (Figure 5.50). Running along the atrium ring wall are round columns covered with mirror like steel interspersed with artificial palm trees (Figures 5.50 and 5.51). Towards one end is a bridge connecting the first floor of wing F to the library (Figure 5.52), and near the middle a water feature at the base of what appears to be a large cone whose inside creates a foyer with the library's grand staircase (Figure 5.50). The atrium has two small coffee shops at each end (wings B and F), and another kiosk offering light food closer to wing B entrance. It also has a perfume and make-up store in the middle. There are several flexible seating arrangements of green leather couches, coffee tables and coloured bean bags scattered around, which are always occupied by students. The atrium is a large, well-ventilated, open, very bright and noisy echoey space. It is always occupied by students, and is also a transitional space that faculty, staff and students cannot avoid while moving between university buildings.

What makes the atrium such an interesting space, in addition to its physical form, is that it is a social construction, a hybrid that includes a multiplicity of spaces, such as me, us, academic, business, and possibly others. Students use

it to move between buildings, meet and socialize, drink and eat, study, celebrate birthdays or even sing:

*Gergana*: What do they do in the Atrium?

*Eida*: Like they..sometime they eating, they..okay, they study..they watching movie..they talking together. A-a-ah..they maybe a-a-ah celebrating birthday for their friends or something.

*Gergana*: Yeah.

*Eida*: A-a-a-a-h they (laughing) singing for example.

*Gergana*: They sing in the Atrium?

*Eida*: Yeah, they put songs sometimes.

[...]

*Eida*: A-and a-ah...maybe they screams. Not scream ah...they make noise-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) They speak aloud, Yeah.

*Eida*: They speak aloud, you know.

*Gergana*: It's weird because they do that only in the atrium.

*Eida*: I don't. Because maybe...it's a..It's a space as you said a-ah..a big space. Everyb..everbody's there.

The atrium is even more interesting for the contradictory feelings that students often revealed about it. While some considered it their favourite space, others saw it as their least favourite, even though they liked spending time there! Some even contradicted their own statements by initially presenting it as their favourite meeting (us) space, then as their least favourite at a later stage of the same interview. This appears in the interview with Eida who considered the atrium space next to the palm tree as her favourite spot to meet her friends; she even exhibited possession and territoriality of this space (Figure 5.53).<sup>44</sup> Then, at a later stage in the interview, Eida explained that the atrium was her least favourite space, describing it as a noisy space where many things that she disapproves of happen, like gossiping and observing others' appearances.

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<sup>44</sup> See conversation with Eida under 'Spatial patent', Chapter 4.



**Figure 5.53:** An atrium artificial palm tree close to wing F entrance (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

*Gergana:* What is your least favourite place on campus?

*Eida:* A least favourite place, uhm-m (long pause) a least favourite-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) Something that you-

*Eida:* (overlapping) A-a-h, Maybe the atrium.

*Gergana:* Least favourite? It was your favourite at the beginning and now least favourite?

*Eida:* Now it's least, because (pause) It's very noisy...a-ah, there's many things that happen there that (pause) maybe (laughing). You know what I mean (laughing).

*Gergana:* Yeah? tell me.

[...]

*Eida:* Even there's you can see many many, many faces and many people, many STYLES, many way Of-f like..like you know the..the girls how they look? How they wear? How they. I don't like how they..they use the..like they wear, they do, so I don't want to see them. I don't want to sit with them and to see them, so I..I prefer to be

in the IT or in the-e..when the class. So I can work and to finish my work and to do whatever a-a-ah Like.

*Gergana*: Yeah

*Eida*: 'Ya'nni A'nhum ba'eed' (I mean away from them) [translation writer's own]

[...]

*Gergana*: Yeah and some students told me that they tend to OBSERVE what each one is wearing. And what do they-

*Eida*: (overlapping) Yeah. Sometime when I went there, I I I start observing them and see them, so I feel like "what I'm doing ya'nni?"

*Gergana*: (laughing).

*Eida*: "I have to go up ya'nni, inno khalas' (I mean enough).YEAH. It's..it's-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) Yeah.

*Eida*: I don't like like..it's not-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) It's interesting, so you don't like the Atrium.

*Eida*: Yeah

Eida's mixed feelings about such practices in the atrium were shared by several other interviewed students. This also resonates with "women's sense of estrangement from the everyday spaces of their lives [which] has been shown to be related to fear, the fear that they are always watched and evaluated" and in this case observed (Tamboukou, 2011, p. 31).

I realized that all cases of contradictory statements about the atrium correlated with students' academic status as junior or senior students. Being at the exploratory stage of their academic cycle, new students seemed to need and exercise greater spatial breadth, and therefore initially enjoyed the atrium as a new space, while senior students, who were more limited in their spatial exposure, focused only on specific spaces (spatial depth). Consequently, they tended to avoid the atrium, as evident from the previous conversation with *Eida*

and the following one with *Dina*, a recently graduated student, who I managed to interview while she was visiting the campus:

*Gergana*: So would you just take me through your usual day when you used to be here on campus. Like I just want to see the university through you, through your experience.

*Dina*: I think as a fresh uhm-m ah (pause) as a new student in Zayed University, the most place I would hang out (pause) in is the atrium since it was the best place to see girls being active, sitting down, socializing with other people..since I didn't have, like I dunno people from the school days.

*Gergana*: Right.

*Dina*: So that is the best place to meet new students. And talk to them and interact with them.

At a later stage from this mobile interview, I asked her about her least favourite space on campus:

*Dina*: Actually I would say my favourite place is the least favourite at times..like this area itself

*Gergana*: The ATRIUM?

*Dina*: Ah..yeah, I think the stares and the glances at times, I feel uncomfortable (laughing).

*Gergana*: Wh-what do you mean? like people are staring, keep watching and-

*Dina*: (overlapping) Yeah yeah, all time.

[...]

*Dina*: We're girls. We have it in our blood (laughing)

*Gergana*: I know I know. Isn't that interesting...and they watch what everyone is wear-i-ng and etc.

*Dina*: Yeah, I think. I don't know. It's a concept of..I don't like people JUDGING others by what they wearing before knowing a person.

*Gergana*: Yeah (long pause).

(We continue walking in silence towards B wing)

A lot of the negative feelings associated with the atrium emerged from socio-spatial practices of gossiping, observing and criticizing the physical appearance of other atrium users,<sup>45</sup> or even inappropriately laughing out loud, as mentioned with sadness and disappointment at her younger Emirati female peers by one of the senior students while describing the spaces and behaviour that according to her do not reflect the real Emirati identity:

*Shatha:* And also the waiting room where the scanning, sometimes I feel like yes there is people where they smile to the workers, they say hi, they welcome them, they say goodbye for them. This part of communication, this is part of our culture. There is other spaces like the atrium.

*Gergana:* Yeah?

*Shatha:* I can't see like sense of Emirati personality or Emirati culture. I see them screaming, laughing, in a way you feel ashamed that this is an Emirati girl, and sometimes you feel like they just give the cleaner, yes, sometimes, they just eat, and let the cleaner take the food or take dirt or the waste from them after they go. This is not, *ya'nni*, this not respectful way to treat a cleaner or to show your personality.

*Gergana:* This is interesting, it is weird, why would you think in the canteen, they will have a different attitude (see earlier conversation with Shetha under 'Cultural spaces'), and the students in the atrium will have another, or do you think that different students are sitting in the atrium than the ones who use the canteen?

*Shatha:* Maybe because, I think the people in the atrium, they are new students, I think I am not sure, *Ya'nni*, because I was there when I was new. I always sit there because, it is closer to the classes.

*Gergana:* To classes, yeh.

*Shatha:* Yeah, I was sitting there, yeh, I was, so I know that these students are new, they don't have the chance to learn more.

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<sup>45</sup> See discussion on appearances under 'Modern children of the desert', Chapter 4.

For many students, including Afra, the atrium seemed to provoke socially and culturally improper behaviour, so they avoided sitting there as a way of preventing themselves from behaving 'badly':

*Gergana*: Do you sit in the atrium?

*Afra*: Nah, No.

*Gergana*: You don't use the atrium?

*Afra*: Because..if I sit there, I will..sit and chat and talk about the...the girls, Like WHAT THEY ARE WEARING and *abaya* (laughing).

*Gergana*: So you observe what others are doing, It's like a fashion show-

*Afra*: (overlapping) (laughing) So I don't like It.

*Gergana*: (laughing) O-o-oh. I didn't know tha-a-t so many people are watching others-

*Afra*: (overlapping) EVERYONE SIT HERE, make it. Like It's not..like ALWAYS. But if you sit, you see one girl wearing *abaya*, It's not, you see it, It's NOT NICE..or something, you will talk (laughing), it's normal.

*Gergana*: So you make comments on people's clothes and things.

*Afra*: Yes (pause) and hair also, now the hair fashion.

Associating particular behaviour with a specific space is very common as the physical environment silently communicates and constantly interacts with the people experiencing it, sending messages and providing cues that can influence behaviour and emotions (Boykins, 2009; Jacobs, 2009; Caan, 2007; Strange and Banning, 2001; Travis, 2001; Fehrman and Fehrman, 2000; Eisenman, 2000; Mahnke, 1996). For example, Strange and Banning (2001) explain the nature of a space's non-verbal communication as being both "functional" and "symbolic". It is functional in fulfilling the purpose that it is created for; for example, a library should be equipped and designed to function as a library. Its symbolic nature, on the other hand, is based on the non-verbal messages the environment communicates to people; For instance, having a sign that verbally welcomes all to a state-of-the-art library while not having an access ramp or elevator for the handicapped leaves a non-verbal message that

contradicts the welcoming words; hence, it is the building that never lies. These non-verbal messages are perceived as more truthful than verbal ones (Mehrabian, 1981, cited in Banning and Strange, 2001, pp. 17-18). In all such cases, users' responses to a specific space are based on their cultural model as discussed under 'Engaging with space — spatial appropriation' in Chapter Four, which embody the socio-cultural factors that make us who we are and drive our responses or ways of appropriating such spaces.

On the other hand, the few interviewees who described the atrium as their favourite space said it allowed them to hold social gatherings (us space) and stimulated conversations about others (gossiping). Interestingly, some even loved the brightness and openness while avoiding exposure in the middle:

*Gergana:* What do you think is your own space on campus? Where is *Najla's* space?

*Najla:* My-y spa-a-ce?

*Gergana:* Yes.

*Najla:* Ahm, any corner in the atrium (laughing).

*Gergana:* Any corner? In the middle on the side, you like sitting in the middle of the-

*Najla:* (overlapping) No I hate sitting in the middle.

*Gergana:* Wh-y-y?

*Najla:* I don't know, NOT COZY-Y-Y, ITS TOO EXPOSED but sometimes it's fun cause you know, I get to laugh at people (laughing).

*Gergana:* A-a-a-h you watch the people.

*Najla:* Ya-a-a-h

*Gergana:* Obse-e-rve, okay

*Najla:* I like to observe people and then you see new stuff you get to talk about it with other people.

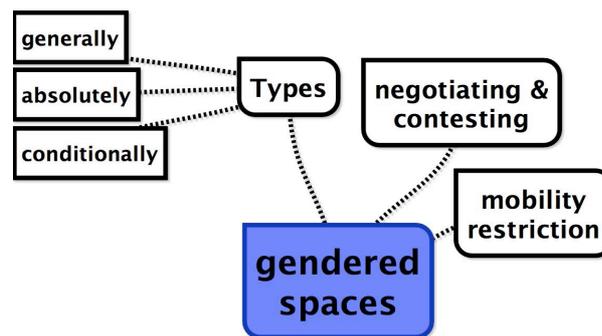
Thus, the atrium seems to send contradictory messages to its users. While it invites them to utilize it and socialize within it as an open central space, its

bright, open atmosphere also makes them feel uncomfortable, exposed and vulnerable to social surveillance and criticism. The paradoxical atrium conjures images of Bentham's 'Panopticon' (Foucault, 1977) — a place of tight controls and constant surveillance — while at the same time allowing female students more freedom to explore, socialize and practice alternative social practices (e.g. laughing aloud, gossiping, celebrating birthdays, singing in public) than other campus spaces or even the outside totality of the UAE. Additionally, whereas some students considered it a 'private' space for their collective to socialize, observe and criticize others, allowing them to behave and express themselves freely, others perceived it as an open public space requiring modesty and proper behaviour, which again brings us back to the blurry borders of the private- public space discussed in Chapter Four. This type of response to the atrium space reflects the students' cultural model, which promotes the collective identity and social status based on appearance. Thus, it legitimises criticism, while encouraging calls for modesty and less exposure of female students. Overall, I received the most mixed feedback about the atrium like no other on campus. As a space imbued with such contradictory messages, feelings and mixed feedback, the atrium rightfully earned its name and categorization as a space of contradictions. I also believe that other spaces of contradictions possibly exist around campus, although they are yet to be discovered.

### ***Gendered spaces***

These spaces are designed for and associated with one specific gender. They are constructed and identified based on this gender's utilization, appropriation, and construction of social relations. Gendered spaces are a manifestation of what Massey (1994) considers a profound and intricate connection of space and place with gender. This connection allows gender "to be seen as inscribed, via body practices, in the production of spaces" (Löw, 2006, p. 119), creating gendered spaces. Since spaces and places are gendered, and that gendering differs between cultures, societies and across time (McDowell, 1999), then the gendering of space and place reflects and is affected in each society by the way gender is constructed: "particular ways of thinking about space and place are tied up with, both directly and indirectly, particular social constructions of gender relations" (Massey, 1994, p. 2). Although gendered space is a concept initially

developed and discussed by feminist geographers, like Massey (1994), McDowell (1999) and others “of how space becomes gendered across historical and political periods” (Bryant and Livholts, 2007, p. 29), for the purposes of this research, I borrow and partially utilize that concept to discuss the gendered spaces that emerge within the lived space of the Emirati female students. At DXB, I identified three types of gendered spaces: ‘generally’, ‘absolutely’ and ‘conditionally’ (Figure 5.54).



**Figure 5.54:** Types of gendered spaces.

Generally gendered spaces are initially established to cater for one gender, like women’s schools and universities. Likewise, ZU “was founded for UAE national women in 1998” (Zayed University, 2014, Para. 4). Generally, it is a university designed and intended for female students, although it is not a strictly or absolutely gendered space as the university employs male faculty and staff. In 2010, ZU started enrolling Emirati male students at DXB. Still, the vast majority are female, and gender segregation is institutionally practiced to ensure full separation between Emirati male and female students as I will further discuss in the following section of ‘conditionally gendered’. However, the university’s status as a generally gendered space dedicated only for women is slowly diminishing with the increasing number of male students at the university; officially, the university is no longer considered as a women-only institution. Nevertheless, there are still traces of such a generally gendered space (women’s only); many people still perceive ZU as a women’s university since it was originally established as a single gender institution. Currently, there are on-going discussions on whether the men’s program should continue due to the social complexities and spatial difficulties of accommodating an increasing

number of both genders while ensuring segregation in a university initially designed only for females. Whether ZU reverts to being women-only or continues to move away from this will have a huge impact on the types of gendered spaces that emerge on campus.

Absolutely or strictly gendered space includes those spaces that are solely created for and strictly utilized by one gender, like toilets or fraternity clubs. At DXB, these include female washrooms, prayer rooms, part of the gym, students' social rooms and the beauty salon, and the male *majlis*, washrooms and prayer rooms (Figures 5.55, 5.56 and 5.57). These are the most obvious type of gendered spaces that always exist within larger, overarching spaces, and are not necessarily limited to a single gender institutions



**Figure 5.55:** Female social room for 'hala' (welcome) club members from the College of Communications and Media Sciences (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.56:** Male prayer room door (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

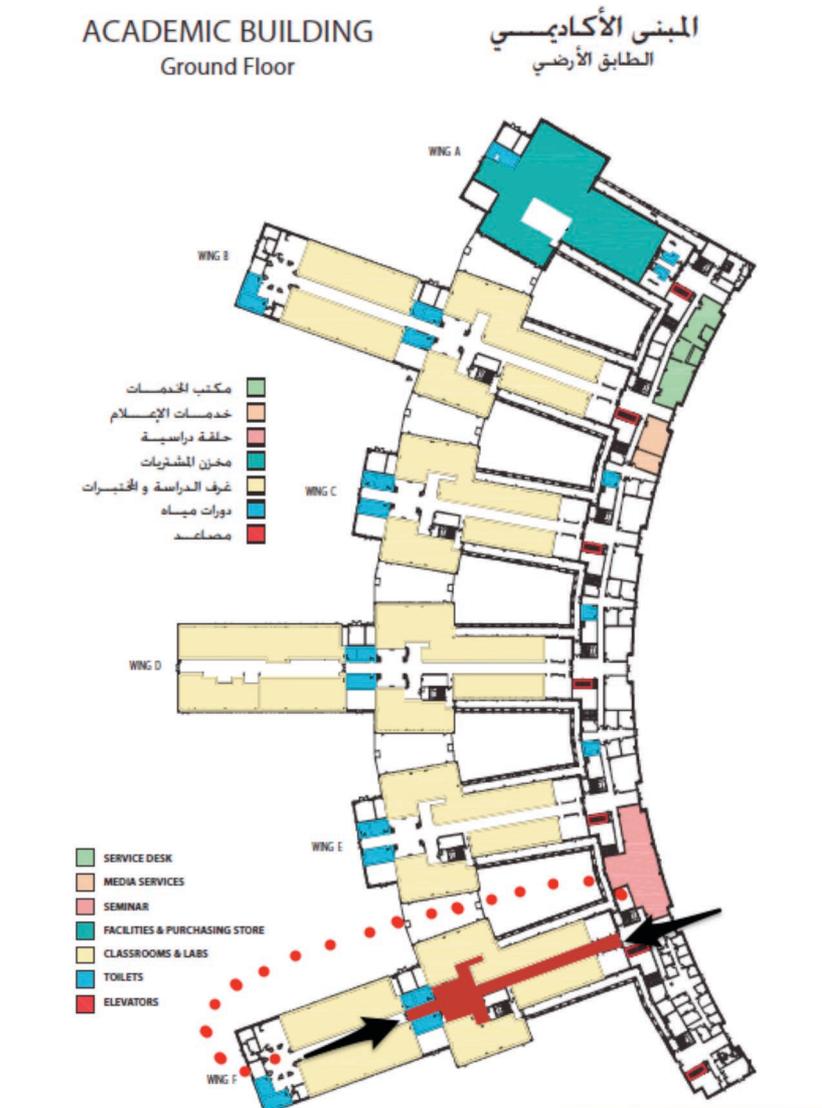


**Figure 5.57:** Female washroom door (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

The third type is what I call conditionally gendered space. This is the most interesting type as it refers to spaces that are gendered according to specific criteria or conditions. For example, specific spaces on the DXB are institutionally gendered based on national (Emirati or not) and academic (student or not) status. This type of gender segregation is only enforced on national students (Emirati males and females), whereas non-Emirati male faculty and staff have access to the female parts of the campus; even Emirati male staff can access the female side as long as they are not students. Since gender segregation only applies to Emirati students, I describe it as 'conditional', based on both nationality and academic status.

This type of conditionally gendered space is also time-bound in that specific campus spaces are closed to one gender during specific times of the day so that they can be utilised by the other gender when classes are run for that specific gender. Forsberg (2005, cited in Bryant and Livholts, 2007, p. 31) discussed how space can be 'regenderized', meaning that what is primarily considered women's space during the day (e.g. a shopping mall, parking lot or public park) becomes a male space during the evening. This parallels the gender segregation practiced at DXB; usually the women's program classes run strictly from 8:00 am till 5:00 pm, while the men's program runs from 3:00 pm till 8:00 pm. This means there is an overlap between 3:00 pm and 5:00 pm, with both males and females remaining on campus simultaneously. To ensure

gender segregation during this time overlap, all male classes are assigned to wing F only (Figure 5.58), the hallway doors to wing F are closed around 3:00 p.m., and security guards are placed at the wing entrances (Figure 5.59). Additionally, the windows of all classrooms in wing F are fogged to prevent visual contact with the other gender, and warning signs are added to any routes that lead to the men's section (Figure 5.60). Also male students use a special side entrance from a segregated male car park. By 5:00 pm, when all female students' classes usually finish, the whole campus is checked by security staff to ensure that all female students have left, before the doors are opened around 5:30 pm to allow male students to utilize the full campus space.



**Figure 5.58:** Campus map showing in red the closed area from wing F and the detour taken by the female students represented in red dots.



**Figure 5.59:** Security staff at an entrance to the male wing with a warning poster to the side (Gergana Alzeer 2013).



**Figure 5.60:** A sign on an outside door that connects one of the male classrooms in wing F to the garden (Gergana Alzeer 2013)

Thus, spaces across the campus are ‘regenderized’, to use Forsberg’s term, at specific times of the day. Such spatial practices and institutional procedures of gender segregation are part of the daily rhythms of this gendered space, as elaborately described by Maimona:

*Maimona:* When I heard of having the male students in the university, I did not mind but then I was kind of PISSED OFF. But not from the male students but because of the TREATMENT we got.

*Gergana:* Oh-h-h.

*Maimona:* I remember we had a class at 4 p.m. in the F wing, I remember the F is a long wing, so they had that place which was for the male students and the entrance eh-h-h was female, in the same wing but they have these doors locked from both sides.

*Gergana:* Okay, from both sides we have security guards, yes.

*Maimona:* But for me, my class was before that, my class was in the B wing and then I have to go to the F wing for my other class at 4:00 and the security did not let me pass that place and I had to go outside to go to the front.

*Gergana:* In the heat?

*Maimona:* Yes in the heat.

[...]

*Gergana:* so it makes you feel uncomfortable and pissed off as you said-

*Maimona:* And late to class (laughing), yeah. Especially when you have a class in a place far then you have to go to that place, so you can't go early, it's not like it is in your hand, you know.

As expressed in the conversation with Maimona and the next one with Eida, these practices were very inconvenient for many females who had to take a long detour in the outside heat as their usual direct access to the wing was closed. This happened because some classes located at the end of wing F towards the exit leading to the parking are outside the locked part of the wing, so female students trying to reach these classes or even leave campus have to go around the locked part from the outside to access them (Figure 5.58).

Nevertheless, despite this added difficulty, many students supported the concept of gender segregation when asked about it as they associated it with modesty and proper behaviour, both linked to cultural expectations of women, and the preservation of their conservative cultural identity:

*Gergana:* Okay, and now we have male students, what do you think of that? [...]

*Eida:* I think it's a-a-h...annoying (laughing) like I can..we can't go to the F-F-F. We have to come from E-E to go down then, you know it's-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) So you don't like it?

*Eida:* I don't like these one. And sometime I forget I and ah..I come to the-e F wing. Then when they, I come, I can't go out because it's..there's males inside. So I have to come ba-a-a-ck to the E and go out..So-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) So you're not against having males, but you don't like the way-

*Eida:* (overlapping) No no no, I don't see actually I-I-I..NO. I didn't meet them I didn't sees them or any-y. There's no, ya'nni.

*Gergana:* No contact?

*Eida:* No contact between us, like there's no. Actually like they did actually good job to separate the girls from the..you know.

*Gergana*: So you agree with the separation.

*Eida*: Yeah, sure. Because if there's no separation you will see there is (laughing), I dunno what will happen..you know to be more ope-e-ned.

*Gergana*: opened?

*Eida*: People Like NOW they are already open and they...you feel like they're ver-r-y-y free and like this..ah and there's man..man. There's will be like what we call..like in 'Arabi' (Arabic) I can say it's 'maskhara' (ridiculous)..like ah-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) Uh, Okay.

*Eida*: You know (laughing).

*Gergana*: Yeah, a show.

*Eida*: Like a show, and the girls will be more like want to show their self mo-o-re..makeup wearing more and these stuff. So I think it's good, good solution to separate the man from the woman.

*Gergana*: But you don't like the restriction on the movement-

*Eida*: (overlapping) Yeah, It's..that's that's very annoying [...] when ah I went to the-e -F F wing it's annoying me.

What surprised me the most was female students' reaction when male students were first admitted to the university in 2010, or maybe I should say lack of reaction. As an instructor of female students, I felt that it was an invasion of the women's space that would create a lot of inconvenience. What I hated the most was the fogged windows that restricted the view out of classes in the male wing and the increased security in the hallways. However, the female students' view about having male students on campus was calm and accepting, as exemplified by such statements as "I don't mind having the males here", "I don't see them at all", "they do not bother me". Even the fogged windows did not seem to affect them as I explained in the previous chapter (see 'Modern children of the desert'). They seemed more upset about having international female students than having local males.

Quinn (2003b) argues that we need to explore the university as a space for women as we can no longer think of it as a space dominated by men and made for men, as has traditionally been the case in western societies. Zayed

University was initially designed as a space for UAE national women; it has only recently started accepting male students on DXB, who thus seemed from my point of view to be invaders of this private space of women. The males' presence was immediately evident in class allocations, causing time changes to the female students' schedules to accommodate the male students; in addition, a separate parking and entrance was built for males only, in spite of the lack of parking space for women. Yet, the female students I interviewed seemed not to be bothered by the male presence on campus, accepting their presence as given, legitimate and an ascribed right of domination in their patriarchal society, which extended to the campus space. This acceptance of the male presence reminds me of the concept of the 'master subject'<sup>46</sup> introduced by Donna Haraway and discussed by Gillian Rose (1993, p. 6). This explains how women see themselves in relation to the view of the dominant master subject. Women living in patriarchal societies cannot exist in a vacuum, being unable to isolate themselves from their culture and the dominant society that accepts and practices master subject male domination. They therefore end up viewing themselves similarly to the image of 'woman' as constituted by patriarchal power and masculinist<sup>47</sup> disciplines (ibid. p. 4).

This concept of the master subject can also be usefully applied to the UAE's Muslim, conservative and patriarchal society. The 'master' in this case refers to the elite local male, although in reality every Emirate adult male is responsible for the women in his family (wife or wives, sisters, daughters). Consequently, ZU female students did not object to gender segregation practices or to fogging windows because, rather than perceiving this as removing part of their freedom, they saw it as part of fulfilling this hierarchy within their conservative society

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<sup>46</sup> This concept links to Rose's discussion in her book of the relational construction of identity, which dictates that we understand others in relation to the self, with the self becoming the point of reference which explains what Donna Haraway calls the 'master subject' (1987, cited in Rose, 1993, p. 6) The master in that case is a white, heterosexual, bourgeois male who views others in relation to himself and from his position of power.

<sup>47</sup> 'Masculinist' is a term that Gillian Rose has adopted from the feminist Michelle Le Doeuff (1991, cited in Rose, 1993, p. 4) in her reference to geography as a male-dominated discipline. Masculinist work can be interpreted as work that excludes women and concerns itself with men and the position of men despite claims of exhaustiveness.

while holding on to their status of what is defined in the UAE as 'women'. Students used the analogy of themselves as a 'protected jewel' that needs to be shielded and wrapped up in a 'velvet box' for the eyes of the owner only, which is how, for the majority of them, women should be protected (see 'Living indoors, in the dark and behind walls', Chapter 4.).

What mattered far more, and really annoyed them, was the inconvenience and treatment they faced from the security staff in their duty of enforcing gender segregation. Students did not mind being protected and taken care of; they did not mind behaving within cultural norms and traditions of modesty — in fact the majority supported gender segregation. However, they did want to be trusted and treated as adults, capable of behaving appropriately, in accordance with their cultural norms and traditions, which directly relates to female agency as discussed in the next section under Mobility restrictions.

As evident from all of the above, gendered space constitutes an important part of the socially lived space of Emirati female students. Gendering of space and place is determined based on the cultural model of a specific society, reflecting and being affected by the way gender is constructed in that particular society (Massey, 1994), as well as the power relations emanating from and constructing such space. The local culture of the UAE is the force behind constructing these gendered spaces and their spatial relations. As a conservative and patriarchal society, it places great emphasis on protecting and preserving the chastity, honour and reputation of women. The institutional structure of ZU reflects and enforces such patriarchal power by allowing patriarchal male guardians (father, spouse) full control over female students' mobility. The majority of females agree with and support such practices, in line with the concept of the master subject explained earlier. Female students can only leave campus if their male guardian (e.g. husband or father) allows it; in these cases, they are given what we call a 'green card'<sup>48</sup> to scan out. However, very few students have that card

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<sup>48</sup> Students with a green card are given permission by their guardian to leave campus between classes, meaning that if they have a break between classes, they can leave campus and come back again for the later classes. However, they are not allowed to leave if they have classes running. Green cards are usually given by more liberal parents and by some husbands of married students.

so the majority are expected to stay on campus till all their classes have finished. I was repeatedly told by both administrators and students that the institutional enforcement of gender segregation and restrictions on student mobility are motivated by parental demand. Indeed, several students told me that if there were not such rules, then their parents would not have allowed them to attend ZU. This position was also confirmed by one of the male students: although he acknowledged the possible benefits of co-educational environment for learning, as a father, he would not allow his daughter to attend such universities:

*Gergana:* So, what do you think of this when they have security and they close the wings and-

*Mazen:* (overlapping) it is something good.

*Gergana:* Good! you agree with that?

*Mazen:* Yeh, yeh, I am agree with that. Because I feel some student feel that it is good for them to have mixed to share ideas or something like that. But I think there is a lot of negatives ah-h-h-h things when they do that.

*Gergana:* Right.

*Mazen:* ah-h-h, I feel if my daughter will grow up and study, I will not allow her to study here because-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) There is mixing.

*Mazen:* Yeah.

*Gergana:* I understand.

*Mazen:* It is something of our traditional.

*Gergana:* Yeah, okay. But how do you feel about the way when they close the doors and do not allow you in? Does not that annoy you? Did you feel like you want to have access without having students? You're fine with that, yeah?

*Mazen:* Yeah, I am fine with that.

*Gergana:* you're fine?

*Mazen:* Yeah, because I feel that it is better for the girls and for the boys.

In short, gender segregation is socially and institutionally practised at ZU, with gendered spaces being constructed as a major type of lived space; UAE women are protected indoors, behind walls and barriers while avoiding exposure to the outside male community, as discussed in Chapter Four.

### ***Restrictions on Mobility***

Gender segregation involves, and is often associated with restrictions on movement or immobility, confining each gender to specific 'gendered' spaces. At ZU, restrictions on mobility depend on whether the space is gendered absolutely, generally or conditionally. While mobility restrictions of the absolutely gendered type are often self-enforced, being culturally, socially and religiously driven (for example, women would not usually use men's washrooms), the mobility restrictions of the generally and conditionally gendered spaces are institutionally enforced, and are the most dominant and visible.

The institutionally enforced mobility restrictions include both applying the previously described gender segregation policies on the male's wing F during the men's classes, and using the university scanning system. The latter is an electronic scanning system for all incoming and outgoing students. At both university gates for female students (gates 1 and 2 — G1 and G2, Figure 1.10), there is a large rectangular hall through which students must pass to scan their university identification cards to access or leave campus. Inside each gate hall, there are three incoming and three outgoing scanners, mounted in wooden stands and linked to computers that are constantly monitored by female security staff to ensure proper scanning and control of students (Figure 5.61).

The scanning system is also automatically connected to the students' attendance records and class schedule; thus, it is a kind of surveillance system and mobility restriction that ensures female students are on campus as long as they have classes. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977, pp. 195-228) referred to how, historically, registration became crucial for surveillance of inhabitants to ensure control of the plague, and how constant surveillance in

prison was first established through Bentham's panopticon. His point of how modern society increasingly uses strategies like the panopticon to control people without violence, and concepts of surveillance are highly relevant to ZU's goals of creating effective and constant surveillance, and mobility restrictions. Thus, scanning is a registration technique that allows the university to locate and keep students in one place. Once students scan in, they are locked on campus and are not allowed to leave until all their classes have finished, which is when the scanner shows a green light that indicates they can go.



**Figure 5.61:** Three 'in' and 'out' stands for scanning in one of the gate buildings (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

From my fieldwork, it became clear that the majority of the female students hate the scanning system, with many having disagreements with the security staff while entering and leaving, which partially explained their distant, cold behaviour with the security personnel on the gate; they would completely ignore them when scanning and often will argue when asked to scan again. I witnessed several incidents of hostility towards the security staff when a student

with a green card wanted to leave but security would not allow her to because her class had not finished according to the system. It was obvious that, although students complied with the scanning system, they hated the restrictions it imposed on their freedom of movement to go in and out of campus:

*Maimona:* I hate the scanning in the university.

*Gergana:* You hate it, why?

*Maimoona:* Because it feels like..you have this green card and for example sometimes classes are cancelled and you can't go out.

*Gergana:* Yes-s.

*Maimoona:* For me, I have the green card, but still with a card if-f-f, for example class started then you can't go out before 20 minutes passed from that class.

*Gergana:* Oh okay.

*Maimoona:* And WHY, it's a waste of time? And another thing at...I had a video class and sometimes the teacher will cancel the class, she would say "today your production, so basically today you have to work on your project and go to film your..your film". So how can I go if I am not allowed to go and I need to film the space outside, if I am not allowed to go out. And even if I can go out with my green card after 20 minutes, that 20 minutes were VERY important, maybe I reach the place by that time.

The other type of mobility restriction happened inside campus as the institution enforced gender segregation. As already discussed, males and females are restricted to their gendered spaces during specific times of the day. While passing along the hallways of wing F, it was very interesting to see how the space was quickly transformed each day from a female to male space and back again. As a security guard opened the locked door of the wing for me in order to move from the female side to the male, I felt like moving from the 'yang' to the 'yin', from a space filled with black *sheilas* and *abayas* to another animated by white '*ghotras*' (the male's white head cover) and '*qandooras*' (the male's long national gown). On one occasion, a colleague of mine commented while

passing by me in the hallway of how he was moving from “the testosterone area to the progesterone one”, which was an interesting description of gendered space, where the male or the female presence was strongly sensed by those able to pass freely between these spaces. While I could go through all gates and spaces as a faculty member, both female and male students’ mobility was restricted, as illustrated by *Maimona* when describing how she tried to pass through the gate while walking with her teacher but the security guard stopped her allowing only her teacher to pass.

I remember once I was going to the class at 4:00, and I ran into one of my teachers and I was talking to her. We were walking together and I just forgot, she is a faculty member; she can pass, but I am a students and I can’t pass. So I was walking with her and without even noticing, I was close to going in, and the security was like "ah-h-h NO, NO GOING IN" (she mimicked his move with the hand like stop sign in her face); he kind of pushed me away. (See appendix 5.2 for an account of the full conversation)

For the Female students, spatial limitations and restrictions on mobility due to gendered spaces was linked to agency that “actually shapes [their] social actions” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 963). Several spoke of their annoyance at how the institution does not trust their judgment, expecting them to make mistakes and believing has to enforce such practices as if students are not mature adults:

*Gergana*: There is no other way for you to access it (class in wing F)? Couldn’t you go through the atrium?

*Maimoona*: No, no. It was closed and you have to go through the heat and walk and it’s actually taking much more time, and it feels like, for me I actually felt like...“WHAT-T-T..you don’t trust me enough" or you know, if-f-f-f...I know I know that I am not going to do something wrong but If I am going to do something wrong I won’t do it in a place like that. I feel like..that Zayed university has this ZULOs (Zayed university Learning outcomes), okay when you enter and one of it is preparing us for the work place so if you are talking about PREPARING US for the work place but you are NOT TRUSTING

US-S enough and you are not PREPARING us even to work with the guys, so how can we graduate being able to do that. And I understand why they are doing that, I UNDERSTAND THAT SOME STUDENTS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO BE WITH BOYS AND MAYBE, MAYBE I don't know, their parents would mind being in a university like that.

She also goes on sharing her feelings about the incident with the security guard: "so-o so I felt like WHAT-T-T-T! IS THIS, you know I am grown up, you don't have to treat me like this". Interviewed students resented being treated like someone who could not make the right decision; they wanted to be treated as adults, having more autonomy and spatial mobility. Consequently, some constantly tried to push back against the spatial boundaries to allow them just pass through the hallways, while trusting they will not engage with the males:

*Najla:* It's it's actually, sometimes I tell the security to open the door, I just need to pass, I don't wanna look at anyone, you know.

*Gergana:* Yeah.

*Najla:* I, I JUST HAVE MY WORK I'M GOING FORWARD STRAIGHT TO THE DOOR, I DON'T NEED TO LOOK LEFT OR RIGHT. You know a person when he has work, he's doing his job, why would you wanna interact with other like GUYS.

*Gergana:* So what does he do, he opens the door?

*Najla:* No, of course.

*Gergana:* So what did you do?

*Najla:* I have to go and walk from the outdoor, which is really bad, summer-

*Gergana:* Summer?

*Najla:* In summer like, I get headaches from that.

Even the male students felt untrusted at times and some were actually insulted, as one told me: "they kind of in a way think that just because we are men we are animals, I mean, we are all very civilized 'alhamdulillah' (thank God)

(laughing)”. Another told me: “they lock the doors like we will go and eat the girls”.

Mobility restrictions and movement control can be considered as dimensions of gendered power. I felt that the desire of female students to be allowed to pass through these restricted hallways, trusted they will do so without engaging with the males in any way that will harm their reputation was a reflection of their quest for agency and self-actualization; that is, it is an acknowledgement of their maturity to make the right choice. Allowing them more mobility actually shifts the power to the realm of women, who gain control over their movements, actions and self, emphasizing agency and differentiation of gender and power relations. This concept of agency in relation to mobility restrictions and gendered spaces echoes the literature that emphasises the agency of women’s teachers who had to leave home and the restrictions of the domestic, and go to university that allowed them more mobility and freedom (Tamboukou, 2003).

### ***Contesting and negotiating gendered spaces***

Gendered spaces are constructed based on specific power relations. Although a majority of the interviewed female students considered gendered spaces as part of the UAE’s cultural model and publicly supported gender segregation, this does not mean that they fully accepted or completely complied with such spatial practices. Rather, I concur with Bryant and Livholts’ (2007) understanding of space “as being open to contestation, negotiation, restriction and resistance” (p. 30). Female students often tried to resist the restrictions on mobility and negotiate the rules and limitations associated with gendered spaces. Being “pissed off”, annoyed or late to class were common feelings and experiences as rhythms of the gendered space, especially for students’ whose classes were in the locked wings, and had to comply with the enforced polices of gender segregation. In such spaces, I could observe more visible signs of resistance at different levels, starting from the vast majority’s feelings of annoyance and inconvenience at having to take a detour in the outside heat, to the many vocalising and expressing their inconvenience, and finally the physical resistance of the few.

During my fieldwork, it became clear that, although the majority still supported gender segregation, at least in principle, increasingly more female students were showing signs of resistance to such practices, or at least the way such practices were enforced by the institution. In contrast with the neutral and indifferent attitude of the obedient majority's behaviour, the first level of signs of resistance manifested itself by some expressing their annoyance and inconvenience through their body language, such as frowning, rolling their eyes, sighing or waving hands in frustration, which was usually accompanied by an angry comment ("What is this!"). Going beyond body language to a higher level, many students also started publically venting their anger by complaining about the inconvenience, arguing that such practices were disadvantaging their education as it needed to prepare them to work in a mixed environment as clearly expressed earlier by Maimona. Often, these arguments were accompanied by expressions of frustration; many students believe that "times have changed" so they are fed up with gender segregation practices:

*'khalas ya'nni'* (It is enough, I mean), times have changed, *ya'nni*.

Some parents get really angry, I don't see why, *ya'nni*, you trust your daughter. Somewhere, *ya'nni*, if she goes to the mall it's the same thing, I feel like, *ya'nni*, it's a university, after this you are gonna work with men so, *ya'nni*, it should be professional cause honestly some girls overdo it. I agree they over do it when there is all girls over here, so I don't know what they will do if there are guys over here. *'Bas'* (but) I feel like, *ya'nni*, if a guy passes *'mob lazim fi'* (does not have to be) security guards with him..*ya'nni, ya'nni..ya'nni'* we are mature enough to *'shusmaa ya'nni'* (how can I say it?) we are not gonna jump on him. [translation author's own]

Other female students; however, were less assertive, staying on the safe side with statements like: "for me it doesn't matter to be like in a-a-a in a mixed area, because eventually a-a-a every female is going to like a-a in the future..deal with it [...]. It, it..I think it will happen eventually". Others were still confused, trying to weigh the benefits of mixing with male students against breaking their cultural norms.

The same type of argument for resisting restrictive practices was also raised by one of the interviewed male students. From his perspective, these gendered spaces were not only an inconvenience that restricted their spatial mobility, but also a disadvantage for limiting their educational experience:

*Suleiman:* [...] it is a bit annoying when you come sometimes, I come to the college early and you want to go to the library and you can't because it opened 5:30 onwards, I don't think a good thing.

*Gergana:* So it is only open from 3:30?

*Suleiman:* No from 5:30. Sometimes I am free from 3:00 until 5:00.

*Gergana:* So you feel that going to the library at 5:30 and not when you have time before that is a bit annoying? What are some of the other things that you feel are annoying?

*Suleiman:* One of the things that I don't like, but..don't take it the wrong way, I hope that the girls and the boys were in the same classrooms.

*Gergana:* Right-

*Suleiman:* (overlapping) Work together.

*Gergana:* Co-ed environment?

*Suleiman:* Not for the wrong reasons.

*Gergana:* I understand.

Other signs of escalated resistance were more aggressive acts like shouting at the security guards or calling them names, pushing against the doors to force their way in (see earlier conversation with O'Neil under 'Proxemics', pp. 162-163), and in one case even escaping from the campus by climbing over the university's perimeter wall.

When female students could not get their way by complaining, shouting, arguing or even physically intimidating the security staff, they tried negotiating, exhausting all possible means available to shift the balance of power and win more mobility. They used all sorts of excuses with the security staff, whether to access the male area or leave campus without scanning. Statements like the following were very common: "My brother is out there and I just want to have a

word with him”, “I forgot my bag inside”, “I have an appointment with my professor inside”, or “I left my notebook and would like to get it from the car, I will come back immediately”. A Filipino female security guard told me about how she was treated by female students and how they tried to convince her to let them leave campus by referring to their friendship with her:

*Nada:* Some say good morning, other look at you, “no problem, she can't listening, she can't hear”, but some students, also they are good. Some students also mam, they can't smiling, sometimes they are thinking we are same like housemaids, shouting like that.

[...]

*Gergana:* Do you have any students who are nice to you? like friends, like talk to you every day?

*Nada:* That is why mam, we have to as a security mam, we have to, because some students, okay, they want to go, (mimicking voice) “oh-h my friend why you don't allow me to go out”, I told them sometimes mam “yes, you are my friend, my friend, but not above my job, I am straight, you can't allow, even if you are my friend”.

In the same interview, the guard recalled how a student even tried to bribe her to let her leave campus:

*Nada:* So sometimes students, some students calling me, so I ask “where you get my mobile number?” (mimicking voice) “My friend”, “Who is my friend”.

*Gergana:* Really? okay.

*Nada:* So, basically my experience, one student, she offered me five hundred mam, she want to go outside. I told her “my dear, you are mistake, you do give me your ID number and give me your name” and then I told her “my dear I can't change my job”. Yes, mam, I told here like this, “I can't change my job, change my job for your five hundred, maybe this five hundred *'khalas'* (finish) I am going home”, but my job is important for me and for my family.

I am aware that similar incidents probably happened with other security guards who did not share their stories with me, as many were worried about their jobs. It is certainly unfortunate that the students direct most of their acts of resistance towards the security guards who are only following orders.

Contesting gendered spaces, resisting gender segregated practices and trying to renegotiate their power position by increasing their own mobility was also directly linked to female students' sense of agency. As already outlined, gendered spaces are constructed on specific power relations; in addition to increased mobility, objects of sensory space can also be a dimension of gendered power (Seremetakis, 1996, cited in Bryant and Livholts, 2007, p. 38). This includes using *bakhour* and strong scents to leave a mark while establishing possession or power over a place. It also includes the placement of certain gendered artefacts on the walls of a gendered space. A male student referred to his feelings of alienation on campus even when he had access to the whole area after the departure of the female students, as he was constantly confronted by their art work and "pink" advertisements on the walls, creating a position of power and domination of such spaces, marking it as a generally gendered female space:

*Gergana*: How do you feel about this place here and the fact that it has originally been built for female students and now you are using it? How do you feel about that?

*Saif*: That everything here related to females (laughing).

*Gergana*: This is how you feel.

(Both laughing)

*Gergana*: What everything, give me examples?

*Saif*: Like the colour of the wall.

*Gergana*: Ah-h-h-h (laughing). They are female colours?

*Saif*: Yeah, when we-

*Gergana*: (overlapping) can you give me an example, what colours you believe are female colours?

*Saif*: Like pink.

*Gergana*: Where is the pink?

*Saif*. (laughing) Over there in wing D, there is something, and a poster for the girls

*Gergana*: Okay.

*Saif*. They design something like *abaya*.

In this section I have discussed various types of gendered spaces at ZU, and the spatial restrictions and institutional surveillance exercised over students' spatial mobility. I also presented the agency of female students' individual attempts to contest the imposed boundaries and negotiate new ones within institutional, cultural and gender constraints. My analysis indicates that as the possible construction of power relations emerged, spatial positionality and mobility became a tool for exercising that power.

### **Final notes on the lived space**

After observing and analysing the field, I noticed that the spatial practices of learners can be understood through the rhythms of the lived space: personal routines, rituals and cycles of spatial practices associated with each of the lived spaces, whether cold or hot, although with more focus on hot spaces (me, us, academic, spaces of contradictions, virtual, cultural, clandestine and gendered spaces). Observing the students' daily routines, whether sitting alone or in groups while studying, chatting and socializing, helped me identify the categories of me, us, virtual and academic space. Seeing cultural rituals, whether national (the National day celebration) or religious (praying, wodo'), helped me understand the cultural space. Coming across some of the secret practices of smokers and others revealed the clandestine spaces, while learning about the contradictory feelings and social practices of the atrium revealed spaces of contradictions. Attending to all of these rhythms, which Lefebvre initially called "repetitions in times and in space" (2004, p. 6), helped me recognize and establish these types of the lived space. The following table is a domain analysis of the different rhythms associated with each type of lived space (Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1: Rhythms of the different types of lived space**

<p><b>Kinds of rhythms and spatial practices of the lived space.</b></p>	<p>What types of rhythm constituted the different spatial practices within the students lived spaces?</p> <p>Rhythms of lived spaces</p> <p><b>1. Rhythms of ‘cold’ spaces</b></p> <p>1.1. Rhythms of them spaces</p> <p>1.1.1. Rarely attending them</p> <p>1.1.2. Accessing them only when needed</p> <p>1.1.3. Constantly avoiding these spaces</p> <p>1.2. Rhythms of the spaces of irrelevance</p> <p>1.2.1. Passing by</p> <p>1.2.2. Sitting briefly and less frequently</p> <p><b>2. Rhythms of hot spaces</b></p> <p>2.1. Rhythms of me spaces:</p> <p>2.1.1. Studying alone</p> <p>2.1.2. Sitting apart</p> <p>2.1.3. Eating and/or drinking</p> <p>2.1.4. Resting or re-energizing</p> <p>2.1.5. Engaging with mobile devices, surfing the net</p> <p>2.1.6. Reflecting and introspecting</p> <p>2.1.7. Sleeping</p> <p>2.2. Rhythms of us spaces</p> <p>2.2.1. Studying together</p> <p>2.2.2. Socializing within the collective</p> <p>2.2.2.1. Eating and/or drinking</p> <p>2.2.2.2. Celebrating birthdays</p> <p>2.2.2.3. Chatting</p> <p>2.2.2.4. Sleeping</p> <p>2.2.2.5. Chatting and connecting virtually</p> <p>2.2.2.6. Talking over the phone</p> <p>2.2.2.7. Studying</p> <p>2.3. Rhythms of academic spaces</p> <p>2.3.1. Attending classes</p> <p>2.3.2. Communicating with peers on academic content</p> <p>2.3.3. Asking the teacher</p> <p>2.3.4. Going to the teacher’s office hours</p> <p>2.3.5. Self-study</p> <p>2.3.6. Mentoring others</p> <p>2.3.7. Attending study groups</p> <p>2.3.8. Researching</p> <p>2.3.9. Working on a project</p> <p>2.4. Rhythms of cultural spaces</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.4.1. Attending national and cultural celebrations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.4.1.1. Creating a booth</li> <li>2.4.1.2. Participating in events</li> <li>2.4.1.3. Utilizing the available booths and facilities</li> </ul> </li> <li>2.4.2. Praying in the mosque</li> <li>2.4.3. Performing 'wodo' before prayers</li> <li>2.4.4. Reciting the Quran during breaks</li> <li>2.4.5. Counting prayer beads</li>   <li>2.5. Rhythms of virtual spaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.5.1. Chatting with others online</li> <li>2.5.2. Talking over the phone</li> <li>2.5.3. Researching by surfing the net</li> <li>2.5.4. Accessing academic content material online</li> <li>2.5.5. Emailing others</li> </ul> </li>   <li>2.6. Rhythms of business spaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.6.1. Buying food and beverages</li> <li>2.6.2. Buying library supplies and books</li> <li>2.6.3. Attending salon services</li> <li>2.6.4. Selling own products online</li> <li>2.6.5. Buying phone cards from cleaners</li> <li>2.6.6. Tipping cleaners for carrying bags</li> </ul> </li>   <li>2.7. Rhythms of clandestine spaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.7.1. Smoking</li> <li>2.7.2. Engaging in inappropriate social behaviour</li> </ul> </li>   <li>2.8. Rhythms of spaces of contradictions — Atrium <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.8.1. Eating and/or drinking</li> <li>2.8.2. Celebrating birthdays</li> <li>2.8.3. Studying</li> <li>2.8.4. Chatting</li> <li>2.8.5. Laughing loudly</li> <li>2.8.6. Gossiping</li> <li>2.8.7. Observing and criticizing others</li> <li>2.8.8. Using mobile devices for calling or chatting</li> </ul> </li>   <li>2.9. Rhythms of gendered spaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.9.1. Students constantly avoiding the other gender's private spaces like washrooms or prayer rooms</li> <li>2.9.2. Changing exit routes to avoid gendered spaces</li> <li>2.9.3. Staying confined within own gendered spaces</li> <li>2.9.4. Security ensuring gender segregation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.9.4.1. Sitting at the exits and entrances of gendered spaces</li> <li>2.9.4.2. Security patrolling gendered spaces</li> <li>2.9.4.3. Security accompanying opposite gender through gendered spaces</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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	<p>2.9.5. Females occasionally contesting and trying to break free from these gendered spaces</p> <p>2.9.5.1. Arguing with security</p> <p>2.9.5.2. Hiding</p> <p>2.9.5.3. Climbing perimeter wal</p> <p>2.9.5.4. Negotiating</p> <p> </p>
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From the above discussion and analysis, I discovered a number of important characteristics of the lived space in the university, especially regarding hot spaces. Lived spaces seem to be hybrid, dynamic and borderless; there is a multiplicity of these spaces that are highly linked and intertwined without absoluteness or exclusiveness. This situation evokes Massey's argument (1994, pp. 3-4) about simultaneous multiplicity of spaces existing, connecting, and intersecting in relations of alignment or antagonism with one another, which in turn reflects the multiplicity of social relations that construct these spaces:

The spatial then [...] can be seen as constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales from the global reach of finance and telecommunication, through the geography of tentacles of national political power, to the social relations within the town, the settlement, the household and the workplace. (ibid. p. 4)

Thus, in ZU, each space could simultaneously be me, us, virtual or another type of lived space. Such spaces are dynamic as they are organically transformed into one another while keeping their own identity according to spatial practices and rhythms that construct them. They have no clear borders as they all intersect with and transform into one another; in fact, Massey (1994, p. 169) cautions us against setting fixed identities for a space. For example, me space can often include or transform itself into virtual, academic or other spaces, while virtual space can include me, academic, us or other space. This hybrid, dynamic and borderless nature is what allows such multiplicity of spaces to evolve, constituting a vivid and enhanced experience for users of the space.

In the interviews, when it comes to teaching and learning — acquisition of academic and non-academic knowledge — the students' spatial experience

was often directly linked to the pedagogy or topic explored in a class. Interviewed faculty both directly and indirectly emphasised the need for hybrid, dynamic, borderless spaces in congruence with their own pedagogy; while some wanted more us spaces within the classroom for group work, others focused on me space in a lecture format classes, while others preferred a combination (see the section on 'Academic space' and its link to pedagogy). Therefore, the existence of such hybrid spaces with the ability to transform themselves or incorporate multiple others plays a key role in enhancing students' learning experience in terms of traditional academic knowledge and skills and non-academic knowledge — social and political knowledge and skills — acquired through socializations and practices. This is only possible through a better understanding of the spatial rhythms, social construction and spatial appropriation as well as the possibilities and confines (affordances) of campus lived space.

## **Conclusions**

As should now be evident from the analysis presented in this chapter, several types of female student space emerged within the triad of perceived, conceived, and lived space, as presented in Table 5.2 (see Figure 5.1 for a schematic representation of these spaces). Exploring the students' spaces under the triad, and attending to the rhythms of perceived, conceived and lived that help construct these spaces, contributed greatly to my understanding of the spatio-learning experiences of Emirati female learners and the role of space in learning. I found that the spatio-learning experience was not a compartmentalized process happening only within a classroom or other specific zone; rather, it is a network of experiences within and beyond the ZU campus physical spaces. Thus, better understanding of students' spaces and spatio-learning experiences possibly leads to enhanced learning experience and acquired knowledge (academic and non-academic), which construct and are constructed by the intertwined perceived, conceived and lived campus spaces.

**Table 5.2.** Domain analysis of types of space within and beyond the triad.

<p><b>Types of female space</b></p>	<p>What types of Emirati females students' spaces emerged from the field work within the triad?</p> <p><b>3. Perceived</b></p> <p>3.1. Physical structures</p> <p>3.1.1. Exterior</p> <p>3.1.1.1. Landscape (gardens)</p> <p>3.1.1.2. Form and shape (the shell of the building)</p> <p>3.1.2. Interior</p> <p>3.1.2.1. Proxemics</p> <p>3.1.2.1.1. Positionality</p> <p>3.1.2.1.2. Crowdedness</p> <p>3.1.2.2. Physical stimuli</p> <p>3.1.2.2.1. Noise</p> <p>3.1.2.2.1.1. Screeners versus no screeners</p> <p>3.1.2.2.2. Light</p> <p>3.1.2.2.2.1. Natural (sun)</p> <p>3.1.2.2.2.2. Artificial (lamps)</p> <p>3.1.2.2.3. Temperature</p> <p>3.1.2.3. Furniture</p> <p>3.1.2.3.1. Layout</p> <p>3.1.2.3.2. Ergonomics</p> <p>3.1.2.4. Colour</p> <p>3.1.2.5. View to outside</p> <p>3.1.2.5.1. Windows</p> <p>3.1.2.5.2. Doors to outside and balconies</p> <p>3.1.2.6. Technological equipment</p> <p>3.1.2.7. Artefacts</p> <p>3.1.2.7.1. Signs</p> <p>3.1.2.7.2. Pictures</p> <p>3.1.2.7.3. Posters</p> <p>3.1.2.7.4. Advertising banners and brochures</p> <p>3.2. Female bodies</p> <p>3.2.1. Materiality of female bodies</p> <p>3.2.1.1. Clothes</p> <p>3.2.1.2. Accessories</p> <p>3.2.1.3. Hair and make-up</p> <p>3.2.1.4. Smell</p> <p>3.2.2. Physical movement</p> <p>3.2.2.1. Of the body (shaking head, moving legs and hands)</p> <p>3.2.2.2. With the body (walking around,</p>
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manoeuvring, etc.)

3.2.3. Rhythms of female bodies

3.2.3.1. Academic

3.2.3.2. Religious

3.2.3.3. Bodily

3.2.3.4. Habitual

3.2.3.5. Socio-cultural

3.2.3.6. Institutional

3.2.3.7. Mobility related

**4. Conceived**

4.1. Abstract

4.2. Imagined

4.3. Discursive

**5. Lived spaces**

5.1. Cold

3.1.1. them spaces

3.1.1.1. administrative building and  
convention centre

3.1.1.2. faculty offices and lounges

3.1.1.3. cleaners and security personnel  
rooms and spaces

3.1.2. Spaces of irrelevance

3.2. Hot spaces

3.2.1. me

3.2.1.1. Study

3.2.1.2. Run-away

3.2.1.3. Rest and energize

3.2.1.4. Study

3.2.1.5. Chat virtually

3.2.1.6. Reflection and introspection

3.2.1.7. Other

3.2.2. us

3.2.2.1. academic us spaces

3.2.2.1.1. study groups

3.2.2.1.2. group work projects

3.2.2.2. spaces of the collective

3.2.2.2.1. physical spaces

3.2.2.2.2. virtual spaces

3.2.3. academic

3.2.3.1. conventional

3.2.3.2. non-conventional

3.2.4. cultural

3.2.4.1. national

3.2.4.2. religious

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.2.5. virtual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.2.5.1. academic (course material sites and class study sites like Blackboard)</li> <li>3.2.5.2. us (social networking sites)</li> <li>3.2.5.3. me (google and other database research sites)</li> </ul> </li>   <li>3.2.6. business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.2.6.1. official <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.2.6.1.1. campus cafeterias and food services</li> <li>3.2.6.1.2. Magrudy's bookstore</li> <li>3.2.6.1.3. Circle K (convenience store)</li> <li>3.2.6.1.4. Refinery (salon and spa)</li> <li>3.2.6.1.5. Plus One (cosmetics and perfume store)</li> </ul> </li> <li>3.2.6.2. non-official <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.2.6.2.1. behind lockers</li> <li>3.2.6.2.2. at the gates</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li>   <li>3.2.7. clandestine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.2.7.1.1. smokers</li> <li>3.2.7.1.2. other</li> </ul> </li>   <li>3.2.8. spaces of contradiction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.2.8.1.1. atrium</li> <li>3.2.8.1.2. possible others</li> </ul> </li>   <li>3.2.9. Gendered <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.2.9.1.1. generally</li> <li>3.2.9.1.2. absolutely</li> <li>3.2.9.1.3. conditionally</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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Among the perceived, conceived and lived space, Lefebvre considered the conceived space as the most dominating historically of the three (1991). However, in practice, and in terms of ZU students' spatio-learning experiences my fieldwork gave more primacy to the perceived and lived spaces. The materiality of the perceived seemed the most prevalent aspect over the conceived and even the lived sometimes. The students' conscious awareness of space was very much limited to the physical reality of the perceived due to its practicality and materiality, as well as closer association with the students' daily spatial practices, while their appropriation, emotions and social construction of spaces were associated with the lived. None of the students ever exhibited conscious awareness, knowledge or understanding of the conceived space,

which is not surprising, given its nature as abstract form of the institutional space. However, as extensively discussed by Lefebvre, in everyday life “The lived, conceived and perceived realm should be interconnected so that the ‘subject’, the individual member of a given social group may move from one to another without confusion- so much is a logical necessity” (1991, p. 40); they cannot exist separately, which thereby makes the social (lived) a combination of the perceived and conceived.

## Chapter 6. Towards a better understanding of female students' spatiality

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### **Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, I conclude by bringing the previous chapters together, summarizing and reflecting on my key findings. I first briefly reiterate my aims, research questions, methodological approach and focus, then summarise the key findings of the two thematic chapters (4 and 5) in response to the research questions, highlighting the study's originality and its theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions to knowledge. This is followed by recommendations to enhance the spatio-learning experiences at Zayed University. Lastly, I end the chapter with an overall reflection and suggestions for future research.

This research project started as a response to my intellectual curiosity about the unique way Emirati female students used and appropriated the university campus space, stemming from my long-life interest in space and learning as an interdisciplinary educator with architectural background doing social research on space (see Chapter 3 introduction). Then the project evolved into a systematic interdisciplinary study that examined the intersectional relationship between space, gender and learning in order to unravel the complex cultural formations and dimensions informing the spatial realities of Emirati female learners (see Figure 1.7, Chapter 1). This type of intersectional relationship represents a new way of addressing and utilizing intersectionality as an analytical tool since initially developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Jordan-Zachery, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2010). My study pushes the boundaries of this analysis further by adding more dimensions beyond social categories, including the material aspect of space and its intersectional relationship with gender and learning, along with complex emergent personal, social, cultural and academic/institutional dimensions. My way of utilizing intersectionality as a term and analysis framework is obviously different from a classical feminist approach, which is usually associated with highlighting inequality and systems of oppression or social justice, as discussed under 'Discussion' in Chapter Four.

In my research, intersectionality accounts for the relational complexity of different domains, aspects, roles and themes of female spatiality. It represents the intersectional nature of my research's interdisciplinarity, spanning domains of space, gender and learning with all their intersecting personal, social, cultural and institutional dimensions. However, intersectionality here goes beyond this aspect of interdisciplinarity to explain the intersectional relationship between the four mega themes and their subthemes, demonstrating how each theme is connected to and inclusive of many others. It also links to and clarifies the multiple non-fixed intersecting identities of spaces emerging from hot and cold spaces, where spaces intersect and intertwine, transforming into and being inclusive of one another according to the multiple intersecting social relations that construct them. Hence, me space can transform into us, academic or clandestine space. Interdisciplinarity also helps me make sense of the multiple, competing roles I assumed during my research with their complex intersecting nature of being a teacher, researcher, architect, social scientist, colleague, friend, mother and western-eastern woman, as elaborated under 'Reflexive account' in Chapter Three. These ways of utilizing intersectionality have helped me better understand and address the overall complexity of the various structures, themes, roles, domains and cultural formations associated with female spatiality discovered through my fieldwork. Indeed, I believe intersectionality was one key to understanding, analysing and representing female spatiality. Additionally, since I studied female students' learning experience within the UAE, where the majority of female students are Emirati women in Emirati culture, my study also offers a novel continuation of the original discourse on intersectionality concerning women and ethnicity started by bell hooks (1981, cited in Yuval-Davis, 2010) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, cited in Yuval-Davis, 2010).

This study also addressed a lack of scholarship on female spatiality in higher education, especially concerning Emirati females, while responding to increasing calls for more in-depth explorations across disciplinary boundaries (Taylor, 2009; Gruenewald, 2009), which Massey (1999, p. 5) considers "one of the most stimulating intellectual developments in recent years". My main aims were, first, to understand Emirati female students' spatial experiences in a

national environment where higher education for young Emirati women is relatively new, and second, to enhance their experiences if possible by exploring the role of space in a single gender learning context. To do so I have drawn on social theories of space — specifically the social construction of space and Lefebvre's (1991) triad of perceived, conceived and lived — as my theoretical framework for exploring students' spatial experiences and a structure for organising and understanding their spaces while trying to answer my research questions: What is the role of space in learning for Emirati female students? How can space support and enhance students' learning experiences? What is the learning context of Emirati students in relation to its spatial (including physical facilities), cultural and gender dimensions? What are the interactions between space, gender and learning? What are the kinds of spaces experienced by Emirati female learners? What elements or dimensions constitute the spatial experiences of Emirati female learners (and how are they constituted)? How can the context and structure of space be re designed to enhance learning?

To answer these questions, I conducted a unique ethnographic (instrumental case study) qualitative inquiry following a constructivist/interpretivist methodological approach that ontologically and epistemologically matches the inductive, exploratory and interpretive nature of researching female learners' spatiality. My ethnographic case study involved studying ZU as the site of a specific issue, namely female students' spatio-learning experiences. I applied multiple levels of data gathering and analysis to satisfy the multidimensionality (personal, social, cultural and academic) of the students' spatial experience. This required simultaneously performing multiple roles during on-campus fieldwork (observing, interviewing, teaching or auditing classes) and also utilizing my unique position as both insider and outsider. I also adopted what I called a 'multi-zonal' approach by exploring students' spatiality as a connected network of experiences across all campus zones without focusing on particular spaces, thereby acknowledging the dynamic, organic and borderless nature of their spatial experiences. I found that the spatio-learning experience is not a compartmentalized process only within a classroom or other specific zones; rather, it is a network of experiences within and beyond the campus. My multi-

level data-gathering techniques included in-depth interviews, both static and mobile, casual conversations, observations, class audits, explorations of local literature and photo elicitation. Philosophical theories that guided my choices and application of research paradigms and design frames, data collection, reflexivity and ethical considerations, together constituted a methodological map for my research. This map can also be valuable for a wide range of researchers across education, social sciences and interdisciplinary studies who are interested in teaching and learning for women in a single-gender context (Alzeer, 2014).

My interesting research findings exceeded my initial expectations. From my thematic analysis, including some analysis of spatial positionality, I heuristically grouped my data under four 'mega themes' of students' spatiality: 'Understanding spaces', 'Students' spaces within and beyond the triad', 'Engaging with and appropriating space', and 'Negotiating and contesting space'. Although I discussed only two of the mega themes in this dissertation due to the richness of data and the word limitation, I presented all four to show their richness complexity, and reciprocal constitutive interrelationship (see Figure 4.1, Chapter 4). Due to this interrelationship, major aspects of the two mega themes that I did not independently discuss were largely covered under the sections on 'Gendered spaces' (Chapter 4) and 'Perceived space' (Chapter 5).

I began the analysis of my findings in Chapter Four by introducing the four mega themes to offer an overall view of all the emerging spatial themes from my fieldwork; for the rest of the chapter, I explicitly discussed the mega theme 'Engaging with and appropriating space', including its multiple subthemes. I provided an original in-depth discussion of how material space, learning and cultural formations intersect to inform Emirati female learners' spatiality through the unique ways they engage with and appropriate campus spaces. I found that these ways were directly linked and strongly influenced by their identity and socio-cultural status in a patriarchal, tribal, traditionally conservative, yet newly rich and modernised society wherein women are cherished, protected and hidden from strangers through spatial segregation. Emirati women tend to stay 'inside' behind spatial barriers (high walls surrounding their homes, tinted car

windows, dimmed classroom lights, layers of clothing, or even behind their own desks and bags in the classroom) to avoid exposure, in conformity to their cultural norms, religious beliefs and contemporary — post-independence and post-affluence — Emirati social practices. Lower visibility and exposure has reflected higher social status and wealth, especially after the discovery of oil, leading to the increased wealth of Emiratis. Thus rich, elite families are usually overly protective of ‘their’ women, pampering and protecting them by ensuring they are sheltered and well taken care off while being less exposed. In addition to respecting their society’s conservative nature, this practice symbolically represents their traditionally-rooted belief that women of well-off families need not work outside in the heat. This helps explain Emirati females’ preference for darker shaded areas indoors and constant efforts to maintain a whiter skin as a symbol of beauty and reflection of wealth. Such spatial practices are also a response to Emiratis’ being a minority in their own country and fearing the loss of their identity, which increases the men’s wish to protect ‘their’ women from expatriates and foreign communities. This is deeply reflected in female students’ collective spatial movements and gatherings, represented mostly in their groupings as part of a ‘collective’ and practices of territoriality and spatial possessiveness both inside and outside class. By analysing these findings in Chapter Four, I respond to my research questions on context and cultural dimensions: What is the learning context of Emirati students in relation to its spatial (including physical facilities), cultural and gender dimensions? What elements or dimensions constitute the spatial experiences of Emirati female learners (and how are they constituted)?

The students’ spatial themes were influenced by their socio-cultural context, which relates both to modernity and traditional desert life. I therefore categorized the drives underlying students’ spatial practices in three ways: first, aspects of their newly modernised and relatively young state; second, their Bedouin ancestry and desert-related roots; and third, a hybrid combination of both modernity and desert traditions since they were attracted to modernity while remaining anchored by their culture and traditions. Thus, I named my main subtheme ‘Modern children of the desert’ to represent the female students’ unique identity, while the secondary subthemes categorised spatial

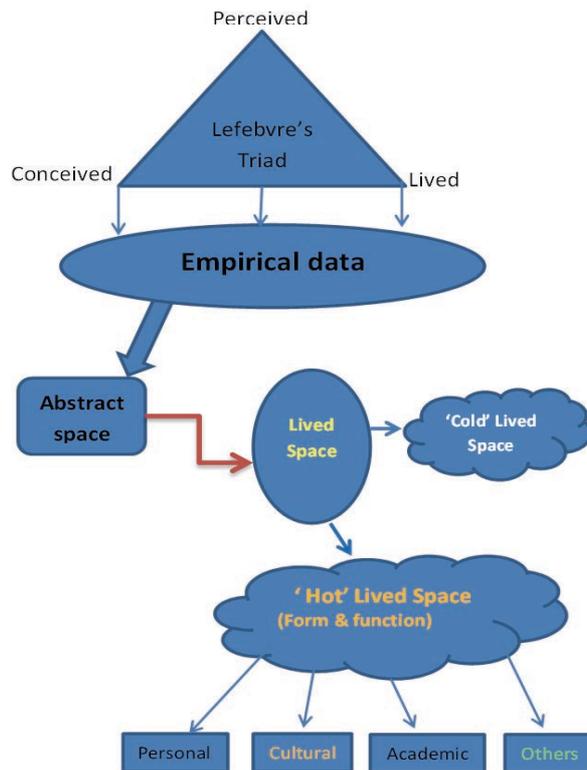
practices as either 'modernity related' (e.g. preferences for the dark, the inside and living behind walls), 'desert related' (e.g. sitting on the floor and being part of the collective) or 'modern-desert related' (e.g. cocooning, territoriality). Figure 4.2 (Chapter 4) schematically represents all mega themes and subthemes, while Table 4.1 (Chapter 4) shows their domain analysis. By discussing my findings and thematic categorization in Chapter Four, I reached a better understanding of students' preferences and spatial needs (What are the Emirati females spatial needs?), and their appropriation of campus spaces, such as their need for 'cocooning' and establishing the private within the public campus space, being in groups as part of a collective, and sitting on the floor in a *majlis* style.

In Chapter Five, under the mega theme 'Students' spaces within and beyond the triad' I present the bulk of my findings and analysis. I chose to theoretically and structurally organise my findings of the students' highly intertwined spaces under Lefebvre's triad of 'perceived', 'conceived' and 'lived' (1991). This represents a new application of Lefebvre's abstract conceptualization of the triad to real spaces emerging from the field. It also contributes to the social literature on space as I present the different types of spaces and their unique rhythms as they emerged within the perceived, conceived and lived spaces. Although Lefebvre's triad offered an organisational and theoretical structure, it did not restrict my findings as I moved beyond the triad to present new emerging spaces. Under the 'perceived' (spatial practice), I presented a detailed account of students' spatial practices in the material sensory world that ensure production and social reproduction (ibid). This perceived space, as it stems from my research, is inclusive of physical reality and is represented in two ways. First, it appears through students' bodies, including the material extensions of their bodies (clothes, bags, perfumes) and their physical movements, represented by their unique rhythms (bodily, mobility and spatial manoeuvring, religious, habitual, socio-cultural, institutional and academic). These rhythms have their own temporal cycles that allow such rhythms of spatial practices to occur in time and space, whether on a micro (daily and weekly cycle), macro (semester) or mega scale (the whole academic life). Second, the perceived space appears through the campus physical structures,

including its interiors (colour, furniture, proxemics, artefacts, technological equipment), exteriors (form and shape, landscape) and physical stimuli (noise, light, temperature) as perceived and reported by the students (see Figure 5.1, Chapter 5).

Under the conceived (representations of space), I presented the abstract conceptualization and mental construction of campus spaces, represented in abstract schematics and maps displayed on the walls, or emerging discursively through discussions with campus planners and policy makers, some faculty and a few students (see 'Conceived space', Chapter 5). As an abstract, imagined and discursive space (Lefebvre, 1991), however, this seemed to be the least prevalent in my fieldwork; students barely referred to such space compared to the dominance of the perceived in their conversations. This was possibly due to its materiality, which contrasts with Lefebvre's assertion of the historical dominance of conceived space.

The third and largest section includes the 'lived' (spaces of representations), which is the social space of real life everyday practices with all its codes, symbols and significations, and the one associated with emotions and living experiences. I moved beyond Lefebvre's conceptualization of the lived to include my own sub-categorization by creating two new types of spaces that emerged from observing the various rhythms of the lived spaces. I named these 'cold' and 'hot' spaces with their own sub-categorizations, as in Figure 6.1.



**Figure 6.1:** Schematic representation of the emergence of hot and cold spaces with all the dimensions involved on personal, social, cultural and academic levels (Gergana Alzeer 2013).

Cold spaces are associated with neutral or low spatial practice intensity and very low emotional engagement; these I categorized as 'spaces of irrelevance' and 'them' spaces. The majority of student spaces were hot spaces associated with intense emotions or spatial practices and vivid real-life experiences. These included various types: me (run-away, study, chat virtually, rest and energize, reflect and introspect), us (spaces of the collective, whether physical or virtual), academic (conventional, non-conventional), cultural (religious, national), business (official, non-official, clandestine), virtual (us, me, academic), spaces of contradictions, and gendered spaces (generally, absolutely, and conditionally). I found lived spaces, especially the hot ones, to be dynamic, relational, borderless and highly interrelated. They are also hybrid spaces, tending to trespass into one another, or take each others' form; they are also constitutive of one another, embodying a multiplicity of spaces, as discussed in Chapter Five.

I found that the interconnectivity and intertwined relationship between Lefebvre's perceived, conceived and lived manifested itself in the relationship

between imagined, symbolic and material spaces, and in relation to their affordances on campus. Affordances belong to the realm of perceived and lived as they represent the material aspect of space and its real lived experience of what it can afford in terms of spatial and environmental possibilities or limitations;<sup>49</sup> however, they also link to the imagined aspect of the conceived. Imagined spaces belong to the realm of the conceived, involving the way students imagined the university in its abstract notion, including their expectations of how the campus looked like and the possibilities (affordances) it offered. This was clearly expressed by one student whose imagined image of campus involved and expected having tables similar to those appearing in Hollywood movies.<sup>50</sup> Symbolic spaces, on the other hand, belong to the realm of the lived, specifically its hot spaces, as female students imagined and constructed their own spaces within the hot lived space with all its symbolic meanings and significations. The students' utilization and appropriation of any space (cocoon) within the university's public spaces were imbued with imaginative and symbolic meaning as the functions of such spaces have changed from the initial intention, offering unlimited possibilities for escape, shelter and privacy. Users transform these spaces into me, us, academic, business or clandestine spaces, according to the multiple social relationships and practices along with their symbolic meanings that construct such spaces 'heterotopically'. Affordances play a major role in achieving this since such spaces cannot be transformed into what students construct as hot lived spaces if they are materially limited and do not afford or fulfil the students' spatial needs. For example, they should be secluded and dark with access to electrical sockets and allowing sitting on the floor. It is the spatial limitations and possibilities that enrich and contribute to the hot lived spaces that become truly inclusive of the imagined conceived and the practiced perceived.

Although hot spaces are confined within the boundaries and affordances of the campus, they truly are spaces of freedom and liberation, spaces of agency and transformation constructed through the students' social relations and spatial

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<sup>49</sup> See discussion on the theory of affordances under 'Engaging with space — spatial appropriation', Chapter Four, page 88.

<sup>50</sup> See conversation with Maimona in Chapter Five under 'Furniture'.

practices, and imbued with their needs, wishes and symbolic significations. The university space thereby becomes a symbolic space, a representation of a whole lived experience where students meet friends, socialize, celebrate occasions, eat, nap, practice their religion, discuss academic topics, learn, transform, challenge and explore who they are to develop. Such practices and affordances are very limited outside campus, where students' mobility tends to be restricted to their own or relatives' homes, and certain public areas like shopping malls, where they are usually expected to be accompanied by chaperons or other family members. Indeed, many students are not even allowed to visit their friends' homes. Within the university, on the other hand, their chosen cocoons embodying me, us, business, gendered, clandestine, and academic spaces allow for individuality and socialization, studying, doing business or even engaging in hidden practices. More importantly, female students have control over such spaces, as discussed under 'Hot spaces' in Chapter Five. Thus, despite what the campus seems not to offer through spatial segregation and limitations on mobility, it offers in terms of agency and freedom within the students' constructed spaces and their material affordances. As a space of agency and freedom, females could practice many aspects of their life that they could not usually outside: they could socialize with friends and be part of the collective, learn and develop, do business, challenge security, even engage in sexualized or other forbidden acts and much more. It was thus a symbolic hot space of empowerment and relative freedom encompassing a multiplicity of spaces constructed from multiple social relations and spatial practices, with all the imagined and symbolic significations usually associated with such hot spaces. In short, while the university was a space of limited mobility as generally, absolutely and conditionally gendered, as discussed under 'Gendered spaces' in Chapter Five, it was also constructed as a space of freedom, possibilities and transformation, where the students' conceived space intersected with its symbolic lived and material aspects, thereby allowing for unlimited spaces, practices and possibilities. Thus, the university represented the students' 'future', as Amna<sup>51</sup> put it when asked about what the classrooms represent to her. A future imbued with possibilities that will allow them to move out and fly away, and establish themselves outside and beyond their current status and limitations, allowing for new possibilities and new selves. Such

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<sup>51</sup> Refer to conversation with Amna under 'Academic space', Chapter Five.

entangled perceived (practiced), imagined (conceived) and hot lived (social) spaces with all their meanings, significations, symbolism, imagination, and affordances truly embody female learners' spatiality.

From my analysis of students' spatiality (Chapters 4 and 5), I found that the spatial is truly conceived in the concept of space–time and as a constituent of social relations on all scales. My research findings actually confirmed many of the characteristics of space in the literature on social theories of space; it also contributed to many of these theoretical conceptualizations of space by clarifying and offering concrete cases from the field in contrast to the abstract concepts discussed in the literature. Such concepts include spatial multiplicity, relationality, and the particular dynamic and borderless nature of the lived. Other interesting findings running like a thread across all my themes included female students' preference and need for the private (cocoons) as their own spaces within the public, emphasizing the blurred borders they create between the private and public. This finding also contributes to existing feminist discussions of the public-private dichotomy (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Other findings that resonate with and extend the discussion of Western feminist theory within an Emirati context include the socio-cultural nature of Emirati patriarchal society, which clearly influenced female learners' spatiality, whether in terms of their spatial needs, and the way they appropriated or even negotiated their spaces. As discussed through the concept of master subject under 'Gendered spaces' in Chapter Five, Emirati females saw themselves in the way that women are defined in such a patriarchal society, thus accepting the male presence on their campus as an ascribed right, with the majority supporting gender segregation practices and mobility restrictions, at least in principle. Such patriarchal power, which is infused and motivated by Emirati socio-cultural and religious values, emphasizes the need for protecting women and preserving their chastity in a community where Emiratis are minority surrounded by expatriates and exposed to rapid modernization.<sup>52</sup> This has shaped and influenced female students' spatial needs and appropriation of space, including their preference for private, indoor, less exposed and darker

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<sup>52</sup> See discussion under 'Modern children of the desert, Chapter Four.

spaces. However, female agency, as represented in their attempts to resist or negotiate their spaces, as well as appropriating them heterotopically, reveals new attempts to establish more control over gendered spaces while trying to gain more power, and possibly shift or reduce such patriarchal power. Therefore, as discussed earlier, the university space, despite its limited mobility, is constructed, appropriated and lived 'heterotopically' as a space of privacy and freedom, as well as a space of possibilities allowing for new possible selves. The social relations they forge in this space through their spatial practices simultaneously construct and are constructed by a multiplicity of spaces on campus (me, us, academic, clandestine and so on).

This research has improved my understanding of Emirati females' needs and related spatial practices. For example, I was surprised that the average length of my mobile interviews was substantially less than for static, indicating that ZU female students are not walkers or wanderers, preferring to sit and talk. Other characteristics and spatial needs that emerged from the field work included the following: preferences for indoor spaces, especially secluded and darker private areas versus an aversion to spatial exposure; moving in groups as a collective; strong attachment to particular objects like mobile phones and bags, which they use as physical barriers; spatial territoriality; sitting on floors in *majlis* style; love of coloured clothes, bags and accessories; living and moving between compartmentalised spaces — e.g. from home to university to the mall and back home.

Such a rich account of students' spatiality, encompassing their spaces, spatial needs, preferences and spatial practices, offers valuable insights into their spatio-learning experiences on campus, whether inside or outside classrooms. These insights suggest that and show how space can be better designed and utilized to cater to Emirati female learners' unique spatial needs within a single-gender learning context, responding therefore to the question: how can the context and structure of space be re-designed to enhance learning? My findings also offer information on the best ways to utilize or appropriate students' academic and non-academic spaces to meet their needs, ensure comfort and alignment with their unique cultural formations, and provide enhanced learning

experiences through better learning conditions. Thus, responding to the questions: what is the role of space in learning for Emirati female students? How can space support and enhance students' learning experiences? These findings in turn helped me draft and present my recommendations for a better spatio-educational experience to enhance Emirati female students' learning in the current institution, as discussed in the next section.

A brief summary of the above-discussed novel elements of my investigation includes the following: first, the study's unique main focus is spatial dimensions in higher education. Second, it offers insights into female learning experiences derived from addressing space in higher education. Third, my study presents a unique and interdisciplinary synergetic approach to space, gender and learning, which cuts across and synthesizes these three domains with all their emergent dimensions. Fourth, it offers valuable insights into the choice and application of ethnographic techniques in a learning context within its original overarching methodological framework. Fifth, the study demonstrates a new way of addressing and utilizing intersectionality that goes beyond social categories to potentially include material space and its emerging dimensions on personal, social, cultural and academic levels. Sixth, the study presents a novel adaptation and field application of Lefebvre's abstract spatial triad of the perceived, conceived and lived, including my new categorization of the lived space into 'hot' and 'cold', together with their sub-categorizations that emerged from the field. Seventh, my fieldwork findings practically and theoretically confirm several spatial characteristics described in social theories on space, including its multiple, relational, dynamic and borderless nature. Lastly, the study offers valuable insights into Emirati culture and its formations, specifically in relation to gender and space, and a better understanding of Emirati females' characteristics and spatial needs. These insights enabled me to make well-grounded recommendations, as in the next section, about better designing and utilising space to address the spatial needs of Emirati female learners, and potentially other learners, to enhance their learning experiences.

## **Spatial recommendations and possible applications<sup>53</sup>**

I believe certain findings from this research can be deployed institutionally to enhance students' learning experiences. These recommendations can be implemented at both individual–academic and administrative–institutional levels: for instance, faculty members can adopt some of my spatial recommendations to enhance their own classroom experience. While institutionally the university, specifically the Campus Physical Development Office or even academic departments, can adapt the university classrooms and public spaces to address students' spatial needs and limitations, as explained in the recommendations below. I am confident that better understanding of students' spatiality can enable better institutional and academic planning, by truly placing students' learning and experience at the centre. I believe this is where environment (space) can genuinely become “the third teacher”, as psychologist and teacher Loris Malaguzzi (Thethirdspace.com, 2011) once put it: “there are three teachers of children: adults, other children, and their physical environment” (Malaguzzi, cited in Boushey and Moser, 2014, para. 1). Therefore acknowledging the environmental influence on our learning, emotions and behaviour, and a better utilization of ZU campus space by applying the following spatial recommendation allows, I believe, for a better and more enhanced learning experiences because students will feel more comfortable and susceptible to learning in an environment designed to directly respond to their needs and preference whether personal, social, cultural, academic, and institutional.

It is important to clarify, however, that the following recommendations are only one way of interpreting this study's findings, representing my own particular understanding of how to improve a learning environment. Thus, I acknowledge there could be other trajectories for understanding the spatio-learning experiences, and other ways to enhance learning experiences. My recommendations are also a way of offering something in return to the institution and the student population that graciously allowed me to observe, interview and conduct my research. Most of the ideas below are guided by the

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<sup>53</sup> This section represents a brief account of these spatial recommendations, for an expanded account see Appendix 6.1.

emerging themes from Chapters Four and Five, and directly respond to the research questions: What are the Emirati learners' spatial needs? What are their emerging spaces? How can space be better designed to enhance learning?

One of the most important spatial recommendations is to establish, within the current campus affordances, more secluded, private and darker spaces (cocoon) for female students as spaces of their own across both public and private spaces. These spaces (cocoon) both inside and outside classrooms need to preferably be carpeted to allow for their preferred cultural practice of sitting on the floor individually or in groups, as in a *majlis*, which in turn aligns with the students spatio-cultural needs and preferences. To implement these recommendations, the institute can benefit from the students' current uses of spaces they have already appropriated to suit their needs, like water cooler niches, behind lockers and secluded atrium and hallway corners.

To accommodate female students' aversion to spatial exposure in overly bright, open spaces such as the atrium, such spaces should be architecturally modified to create more secluded, darker private corners within the larger open space through, for example, low-level partitions or seating enclosures. Similarly, faculty can refrain from putting students in classroom seating or group arrangements such as open circles that leave them exposed and not behind desks. Instead faculty should learn students' seating preferences or give them options. To accommodate student preferences for darker classrooms and other spaces, light dimmers can be installed in classrooms, while particular spots outside classrooms can be painted in darker colours along with false ceilings to reduce top-down lighting and provide even darker and more secluded cocoons.

I would also recommend investing in more flexible and moveable furniture and interior arrangements that would allow students more freedom to redesign their own spaces inside and outside classrooms, becoming the architects of their own spaces. These features would also enable faculty to rearrange their educational spaces (e.g. classrooms), transforming them to match their own

pedagogical approach for enhanced learning experiences. Campus furniture and accessories should also be designed for greater comfort and functionality, including ergonomic desks and chairs that allow students to sit comfortably at length to focus on learning, with attachments like drawers, baskets or hangers for their bags and other property. Functionality also calls for more power sockets across campus, especially in cocoons, so they can charge laptops, tablets and mobiles.

I also recommend enhancing classrooms' affordances by installing large boards or using special paint to convert all walls into billboards, allowing students to personalize their academic spaces through posting their work. Similarly, the institution also needs to better utilise all its interior wall-space in and outside classrooms for displaying academic and creative work, thereby extending students' learning experience across campus beyond dedicated academic spaces. These additions and modifications for acknowledge alternative learning spaces would support an enhanced and lifelong learning experience, by confirming that the learning experience is not limited to any specific place or group of people, but is a network of experiences extending across spaces and places.

Moreover, both the university's interior and exterior should better reflect the students' identities and culture through the use of specific artefacts and elements such as tents and *majlis* areas for sitting and socializing, and the few existing palm trees and pictures of Sheikh Zayed.

Finally, the institution needs to be more assertive in identifying and implementing creative, culturally acceptable technical solutions to allow students more spatial mobility, which is currently restricted by gender segregation practices, especially around gendered spaces.

For an expanded and more detailed account of the above spatial recommendations, see Appendix 6.1.

Most of the above recommendations require architectural or interior adjustments with the female students' preferences and spatial needs in mind. These can be implemented by the campus designers and responsible departments, like ZU's CPDO. Many of these recommendations also overlap and link to one another: for example, a space created for students to sit and socialize (me or us spaces) should preferably be private, relatively dark, secluded, with power sockets and carpeted for floor sitting. Additionally, these recommendations, which stem from my position as an educator and trained architect doing social research, clearly reflect the material aspect of space. In this, I have managed to conceptualize, research and extend space beyond Lefebvre's (and other social scientists') abstract or social conceptualizations into real life applications associated with the life experiences of the 'materially' lived.

Although the above recommendations are tailored to my current institution, I believe they could benefit other gender-segregated academic institutions, particularly in the Gulf, and may also be cross-culturally relevant to any female higher education context.

Overall, this PhD has been a long and interesting journey filled both with joy and pain at an academic and personal level, as my multiple roles have simultaneously enriched and challenged my journey. I believe the utilisation of the concept of intersectionality as an analytical tool has extended beyond the complexity of the research's domain content to also represent the complexity and interrelations of the many positions I assumed in this study, which in turn adds to the study's uniqueness and the difficulties encountered. These intersecting roles included being an insider, outsider, teacher/educator, researcher, observer, student, mother, friend, colleague, architect, social scientist, and western educated person from a mixed ethnic background (eastern and western) (see 'Reflexive account' and 'Rhetorical and spatial analysis of positionality', Chapter 3). These intersecting roles are commensurate with my interpretivist/constructivist approach, in which my voice and that of the participants played a very important role in constructing and analysing my findings. This is also congruent with my adopted hermeneutics of

restoration approach in analysing the data. That is, I aimed to restore the meaning of the message and take it as presented by the participants whom I considered experts of their own experiences.

This discussion also brings me to what I might have done differently. At some point in my analysis, I would have liked to look further into the narratives of individual students, adopting a more psychoanalytical approach to interpret some of my findings by following the hermeneutics of demystification in comparison with my current approach. Another option would have been adopting a more psychoanalytical approach to interpret hidden meanings in the many photos I used in my research; as it is, the photos are just illustrations of the obvious supporting my thematic analysis. I also initially collected data in a mixed methods (Alzeer, 2014), not just qualitative approach, although quantitative data constituted just a minor aspect with a few questions from the annually administered university survey to both entering and graduating students about the physical environment and their spatial experiences. However, I eventually only analysed my qualitative data due to its abundance and richness, and time limitations. I still have the quantitative data, which I would like to analyse and use to supplement the qualitative data on a macro scale for future publications. I also obtained very rich and unique ethnographic data from both of the classes I audited, which I would like to analyse as separate case studies. Additionally, I noticed the great potential for retelling the students' stories or spatial experiences through the use of objects, as discussed briefly in Chapter Four. However, this was also beyond the scope of my study. In fact, word and time limitations were the decisive factors for many restrictions, including my decision to analyse only two of the four mega themes, with the other two postponed for future publications. There were even several other themes that could have been included, but which I could not consider here. Nevertheless, I will return to these in future projects and writings.

There were also several things I hoped I could have done differently. For example, I had hoped to do a multi-sited ethnography by observing and interviewing Emirati females across the UAE's three federal universities or at least including ZU's Abu Dhabi campus. Unfortunately, being a full-time

instructor in the Dubai campus made this difficult to pursue, quite apart from the lengthy travelling it would have involved. I was also planning to extend my fieldwork beyond the campus's physical borders to investigate spatial experience outside campus (e.g. at home, in the malls or while coming to university) to gain a more holistic understanding of female students' overall spatial experiences and daily rhythms inside and outside campus. I also wanted to further explore the linguistic landscape on campus as an element of space, specifically Lefebvre's (1991) 'conceived' space. Other possible areas of research include an in-depth investigation of the way male students experience space to gain comparative insights into the role of space in learning across genders.

Nonetheless, my work has contributed original empirical findings on the spatio-learning experience of Emirati females and filled several academic knowledge gaps regarding women's educational experiences in higher education. As an interdisciplinary study, my work provides a theoretical and methodological foundation for further research across disciplinary borders, and for further investigating the role of space in learning. The limitations discussed above also suggest several other trajectories for future research. Indeed, there are many possibilities for further exploration, especially in collaboration with colleagues across disciplines, and for comparative research into spatial experiences in other cultures. In short, for me, this is a journey that has only just begun.

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## Appendices

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### Appendix 1.1

#### **An expanded description of Zayed University Dubai campus (DXB)**

When the new Dubai campus was opened in 2006, it looked, to me like a giant high-tech ship in the middle of the desert, especially with its bright curved metallic facade and the cone rising above it like a funnel (Figure 1.8).

The Academic City area surrounding Dubai campus was not developed yet. Since then, the area has developed substantially, with many other academic institutions, private companies, green roundabouts and residential areas emerging. However, the distances between these structures is still great enough to offer privacy and seclusion as well as easy access. The rapid transformation of the area is a true reflection of Dubai as a city of change and rapid modernization, where new areas are constantly being built and quickly populated. It reminds me of a statement I read in a magazine when I first came to Dubai: “the only constant thing about Dubai is change”. In this part of the world, it is truly amazing how desert is transformed into an oasis within a year or two.

Like most of the major projects in the UAE, the new ZU Dubai campus was designed by a well-known western architectural company. It was the award-winning international design firm of Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum, Inc., in coordination with the local architects of Shankland Cox (see conversation with the Director of Campus Physical Development Office (CPDO), Chapter Five ). The campus site plan is centred on an open, spacious, beautifully landscaped rectangular courtyard, around which four rectangular buildings (1, 2, 3 and 4) are arranged (Figures 1.9 and 1.10). The courtyard includes water channels leading to a small waterfall, large green areas, a small amphitheatre, and tables and chairs to eat at and sit in outdoors when weather permits (Figures 1.11 and 1.12). Three of the buildings around the courtyard form a u-shape, which includes a convention centre and conference area (building no. 2, Figure 1.10), the administration (building no. 1, Figure 1.10), and the cafeteria (building no. 3,

Figure 1.10). The fourth building (no. 4, Figure 1.10) facing the courtyard includes a library on the first floor and connections to the rest of the campus through the ground-level atrium space: the academic wings A-F and faculty offices. The Atrium is a large, open indoor public space.

Geometrically and design-wise, when seen from above, the campus site seems to emerge from a combination of selected segments of many growing and invisible circles and projected straight lines (radiuses of these circles) that radiate from the same imaginary centre in the open courtyard, which in turn, I believe, is the centre of the small outdoor auditorium. The atrium plan (Figures 1.9, 1.10) takes the shape of a bow, with one straight side that links to the rectangular building and one curved line representing a segment from the circumference of one of the invisible radiating circles (Figures 1.9, 1.10 and 1.13).

The six academic wings (A-F, Figures 1.10 and 1.13), include classrooms on the ground and first floors, and faculty offices on the first and second levels. The academic wings look like six projected straight lines (radiuses), so some see the campus site plan as a palm with six extended fingers representing the academic wings, which end with access to the parking lots outside campus. There is also a separate rectangular gym building beyond the side of A-wing (Figure 1.10).

Initially, there were four access points to the campus: gate 1 (from B-wing, see G1 in Figure 1.10); gate 2 (from F-wing, see G2 in Figure 1.10); the ceremonial gate, offering direct access to the convention centre, and administration (see G3 in Figure 1.10); and the service gate, close to the gym and A-wing (see G4 in Figure 1.10). Female students can access campus only through gates 1 and 2 as only these have a scanning system to ensure security and gender segregation for students entering or leaving campus. In 2010, with the arrival of male students, a new and separate gate was created on the side of wing F, and a new parking lot was constructed for the male students only. The whole campus is surrounded by a two-meter-high wall that allows access only through

the designated access points (gates) to ensure security and control as well as complete gender segregation. Although its facilities were initially established for female students, they are now split spatially and temporally to accommodate Emirati male students while ensuring full gender segregation. Since the campus opened, there have been constant developments to accommodate increasing numbers of students, including males and international students.

Functionally, Dubai campus is similar to any other academic institution. It includes classrooms, labs, studios, faculty offices, lounges, hallways, stairs, elevators, washrooms, prayer rooms, cafeterias, a library, indoor and outdoor public spaces, spaces for the administration, a gym, and services, including a book store, beauty salon and convenience store, as well as service spaces (kitchens, maintenance rooms, storage rooms and so on).

## Appendix 3.1

### Ethics clearance forms

The following are the two ethics clearance forms obtained from: Zayed University and the University of East London for the research.

	<b>Research Ethics Committee (REC) Proof of Ethical Clearance</b>
Chair of the Research Ethics Committee Zayed University	
Gergana Al Zeer Instructor Zayed University, University College Dubai, United Arab Emirates	
Date	21 March 2012
Ethics Application Number	ZU12-010-F
Research Title	<i>The Role of Space in Learning: Spatio-educational experiences of female students within Emirati higher education</i>
Submitted Form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full Application for Ethical Clearance <input type="checkbox"/> Exemption from Full Application
Valid until	20 March 2013

Dear Gergana,

Thank you for submitting the above mentioned research proposal to the Research Ethics Committee at Zayed University. The following submitted documents were reviewed:

1. Full Application for Ethical Clearance
2. Consent forms for interviews and focus groups (English/Arabic)
3. Research questions
4. Invitation letter
5. CITI completion report

The project was discussed at the Research Ethics Committee meetings held on 27 February 2012 and 21 March 2012, and I am pleased to advise you that we have granted

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full Ethical Clearance	<input type="checkbox"/> Exemption from Full Ethical Clearance
--	--

The following Committee members and Office of Research representatives were present at the meeting on 27 February 2012 when your study was discussed:

- Dr Mohammed Lahkim**, Chair, Director, Institute for Community Engagement (ICE)
- Dr David Palfreyman**, Associate Professor, University College
- Dr Mercedes Sheen**, Assistant Professor, College of Arts and Sciences, Natural Science and Public Health
- Dr Wendy James**, Associate Professor, College of Business Sciences
- Dr Michael Allen**, Assistant Provost for Faculty Affairs and Research (Ex-Officio)
- Birgitta Feldges**, Research Specialist (Recorder, Office of Research)

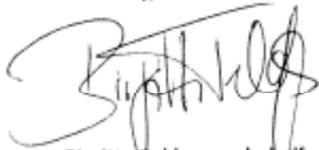
Notes from Committee	n/a
----------------------	-----

Approval is given on the understanding that the Principal Investigator reports the following to the Office of Research at Zayed University:

- Any amendments or significant change that occur in connection to the study which may alter the ethical consideration, such as
  - \* any serious or unexpected adverse events, and
  - \* any unforeseen events that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project
- Any proposed changes to the research protocol or the conduct of the research
- Premature suspension or termination of the study

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you success with this study.

Sincerely,



Birgitta Feldges on behalf of  
**Mohammed Lahkim, Ph.D.**  
Chair, Research Ethics Committee  
Zayed University



25 July 2012

Dear Gergana,

<b>Project Title:</b>	<i>The Role of Space in Learning: Spatio-Educational Experiences of Female Students within Emirati Higher Education</i>
<b>Researcher(s):</b>	<i>Gergana Zaidan</i>
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	<i>Ho Ching Law</i>

I am writing to confirm approval of your application to University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) following successful amendments requested at the meeting on **Wednesday 4 July 2012**.

Should any significant adverse events or considerable changes occur in connection with this research project that may consequently alter relevant ethical considerations, this must be reported immediately to UREC. Subsequent to such changes an Ethical Amendment Form should be completed and submitted to UREC.

#### Approved Research Site

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research Site	Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator
<i>UEL Fieldwork</i>	<i>Ho Ching Law</i>

Approval is given on the understanding that the [UEL Code of Good Practice in Research](#) is adhered to.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

Merlin Harries  
University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)  
Quality Assurance and Enhancement  
Telephone: 0208-223-2009  
Email: [researchethics@uel.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

## **Appendix 3.2**

### **Pool of Interview questions**

The following are questions for female students that can be modified for male students, faculty members, staff and other users of ZU campus space, or even other tertiary institutions. The interview questions focus on past, present and future experiences of the space within the overarching umbrella of research aims and research questions. They start with a general exploration of the learning experience, then move to more focused inquiries of learning in regards to space and the spatio-educational experience, then end with questions about the interviewees' future in relation to their current experience at the institution.

The temporal junctures that I am going to explore include:

- 1- First day at the university (past)
- 2- The beginning of their learning experience (past)
- 3- The arrival of male students (past)
- 4- Their current learning experience (here and now)
- 5- Their view, aspirations and expectations of the future in regards to their learning experience (future)

### ***Entry questions***

- Could you take me through (tell me about) the journey of your learning here at ZU starting from your first day on campus right to this moment?
  - Could you please expand...guide me through?

### ***Past related questions***

- Could you tell me about your first day when you first came to the university?
  - What was your first impression of the university? And what is the thing that stayed with you from that first day on campus?
- What was your first memory of ZU?
- Tell me about your most satisfactory learning experience at ZU so far?

- Where were you? How did you feel about that place?
- What was the seating arrangement? How did you feel about the place?
- Could you tell me about the moment you felt the most dissatisfied/ unhappy with your experience with the university, the most significant one that stayed with you?
- Tell me about an incident when you became very conscious about the space or the physical environment here?
- Can you go back to the moment you have heard that there will be male students joining campus, how did you feel about it and what did you think about it?

***Here and now: present related questions***

- Can you (map) walk me through your usual route at ZU campus starting from the moment you enter the campus from parking?
- Can you tell me how you usually spend your day here on campus?
- Tell me about the kind of daily activities you usually practice here on campus on what you consider a normal day for you here at ZU?
- Can you take me through your normal learning day here on campus?
- Take me around your campus (mobile interviews)?
- Tell me about your preferred activities on campus?
- Can you tell me about your preferred learning activity?
- Can you share with me one learning experience that you are particularly proud of?
- Tell me about your favourite class? Least favourite?
- Tell me ('take me to' if in a walking interviews) about your favourite place/s on campus?
- Apart from learning in class, can you tell me about a learning experience that you might have had outside the classroom?

- Can you tell me about a learning activity that you (students) have really enjoyed and learned from? And one you did not?
- Can you think about an experience/example where you believe you have learned a lot (or the most)? And one where you did not learn?
- What do you believe helps you learn the most?
- Can you tell me what you believe influences your learning here at ZU?
- Can you show (tell) me (which) places that you believe might have influenced your learning?
- In what ways do you think space might influence your learning ('teaching' if asking faculty members)?
- Do you think about space (e.g. class arrangements, setting, room, light...and so on) when planning or preparing for class? (for faculty members)
- Which spaces you believe you have control over to use and utilize and which ones you do not?
- Which (show me the) places and spaces you believe represent you the most, as Emirati female students?
- Can you tell me what you usually do on the National Day celebrations or when we have ZU carnival?
  - How do you spend most of your time on those special occasions such as National Day or ZU Carnival? Where do you mostly go and what do you do?
- What does this campus mean to you?
- How do you feel about this campus here?
- In which places on campus ('Take me to the places where' if in a walking interview) you feel the most at home (in peace) on campus?
- How do you feel about the place you are in now during the interview?
- **Photo elicitation** – [show photos of campus spaces]: Tell me what you think when I show you these pictures?
- What do you think of having of male students at ZU?

- Does the presence of male students ('female students' if interviewing male students) here on campus have any influence on your learning experience? How?
- Do you think there are differences in how men and women use the space at this university? Give me some examples (a question mainly to faculty and staff??)
- Where do you go when you want a space of your own? Space to study...learn? Space to socialize?
- What do you think of this office space?
- What did you think of this interview we just had?

#### ***Future related questions***

- How do you believe learning here could be improved?
- How would you describe your *IDEAL* learning environment?
- Can you describe your preferred classroom environment?
- In what ways can the class be arranged better to facilitate learning?
- Tell me how you believe this place can be rearranged/ redesigned to represent your sense of self as an Emirati female (male if a male student)?
- What are some of the things you would like to see around campus?
- Can that space (shape, arrangement of furniture) be arranged differently? If so, how would you like to arrange it? Please describe it or if you like draw it for me — [give pencil and paper].
- If you were the designer (architect), how would you design that space (e.g. classroom, canteen, etc. in the context of the conversation)?

#### ***Probing questions***

Following and in between the above interview questions, at specific moments, I intercepted and asked probing questions that were more space-related:

- What is space for you, what does it mean to you? Can you try to define it?
- Where were you when this happened?
- Where were you when you felt this way?
- What were you doing in these spaces?
- How do you use this space?
- What does this space mean to you?
- Why was it arranged this way? What do you think? Was it part of the culture?
- In what way/s was the culture represented by this space (structure, colour, furniture arrangement, etc.)?
- How spacious was it? Was it too large, too small or overcrowded?
- What was the atmosphere like? Was it too bright, too dark or just right?
- What did you use it (the space) for?
- How did you use it (the space) in your learning?
- What was there that struck you most (what drew your attention)?
- Did all these help your learning, and in what way?
- How did you feel? Did it (the space) feel closed in or open?
- How did it make you feel as a student? As a woman?
- How did you enjoy your studies/learning in that space? Could you describe your experience?
- Do you find that the arrangement represents you as Emirati female students?
- How was the class set up?
- What can be arranged to make your experience improved?
- What do you see around you?
- Could you describe the space around you at that moment?

- What did you see? Can you describe the colour, the texture and the structure...? What were the arrangements (e.g. furniture, table, chairs)?
- What were the wall colours in that room?
- Were there any pictures in that place on the wall?
- Were you sitting or standing up?
- What were you wearing? What were others wearing?
- Was it crowded there?
- What was the seating arrangement in that class?
- What was your impression and what did you feel about this place?
- Which of those spaces do/did you have control over?
- Do you feel you have control over that space and that you can use it the way you want?
- Do you remember the place and its surroundings when this happened?
- What was the most dominant colour that is fresh in your mind?
- Do you recall if there were any paintings on the wall?
- Have you used that space before; do you know if it exists?
- Where on campus do you spend most of your time?
- What kinds of activities are performed there/ in this space?

## Appendix 3.3

### Table of adopted abbreviated instructions for transcribing my interviews

Table 30.4 ALTERNATIVE ABBREVIATED INSTRUCTIONS FOR TRANSCRIBERS	
<p>It is important for qualitative research that transcripts be verbatim accounts of what transpired in the interview; that is, they should not be edited or otherwise "tidied up" to make them "sound better."</p>	
Pauses	Denote short pauses during talking by a series of dots ( . . . ), the length of which depends on the amount of time elapsed (e.g., two dots for less than half a second, three dots for one second, four dots for one and a half seconds). Denote longer pauses with the word pause in parentheses. Use "(pause)" for two- to three-second breaks and "(long pause)" to indicate pauses of four or more seconds.
Laughing, coughing, etc.	Indicate in parentheses; for example, "(coughs)," "(sigh)," "(sneeze)." Use "(laughing)" to denote one person, "(laughter)" to denote several laughing.
Interruptions	Indicate when someone's speech is broken off midsentence by including a hyphen (-) at the point where the interruption occurs (e.g., "What do you-").
Overlapping speech	Use a hyphen to indicate when one speaker interjects into the speech of another, include the speech of the other with "(overlapping)," then return to where the original speaker was interrupted (if he or she continues). For example:  R: He said that was impos- I: (overlapping) Who, Bob? R: No, Larry.
Garbled speech	Flag words that are not clear with square brackets and question mark, if guessing what was said (e.g., "At that, Harry just [doubled? glossed?] over").  Use x's to denote passages that cannot be deciphered at all (number of x's should denote approximate number of words that cannot be deciphered). For example, "Gina went xxxxx xxxxx xxxxx, and then [came? went?] home."
Emphasis	Use caps to denote strong emphasis; for example, "He did WHAT?" (Do not use boldface or underlining because such formatting is often lost when text files are imported into qualitative analysis software programs.)
Held sounds	Repeat the sounds that are held, separated by hyphens. If they are emphasized, capitalize them as well. For example, "No-o-o-o, not exactly" or "I was VER-r-r-y-y-y happy."
Paraphrasing others	When an interviewee assumes a voice that indicates he or she is parodying what someone else said or is expressing an inner voice in the interviewee's head, use quotation marks and/or indicate with "(mimicking voice)." For example:  R: Then you know what he came out with? He said (mimicking voice) "I'll be damned if I'm going to let YOU push ME around." And I thought to myself: "I'll show you!" But then a little voice inside said "Better watch out for Linda." Sure enough, in she came with that "I'm in control now" air of hers.

Source: Poland, B. (2002) Transcription Quality, in Gubrium J and Holstein J. (eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research*. London: Sage, p. 641, table.

## Appendix 3.4

### Work and observation schedule

Week A	Sunday	Mon	Tue.	Wed.	Thurs
8-9	Office hours & prep	Reading and observing	Office hours & prep	Reading and observing	Observe: Gates 1 & 2
9-10	Teaching- Col 150-534 F-GF-039	Observe selectively	Teaching- Col 150-534 F-GF-039	Observe selectively	Teaching- Col 150-534 F-GF-039
10-11	Teaching Col 150-514 F-GF-039	Audit Senior project BC-L1-005	Teaching Col 150-514 F-GF-039	Audit Senior project BC-L1-005	Teaching Col 150-514 F-GF-039
11-12	Audit-Hss200 Inner Academic Ring L1-015		Audit-Hss200 Inner Academic Ring L1-015		Audit-Hss200 Inner Academic Ring L1-015
12-1	12-12:30 Record obsrv.	12-12:30 Record obsrv.	12-12:30 Record obsrv.	12-12:30 Record obsrv.	12-12:30 Record obsrv.
	12:30-1:30 Lunch	2:30-1:30 Lunch	12:30-1:30 Lunch	12:30-1:30 Lunch	12:30-1:30 Lunch
1-2	Class prep	1:30-2:30 Observe: cafeterias, atrium, library, under the library staircase, Pals centre, gym gardens, hallways toilets, Du lab Students' social rooms Room.	Class prep.	1:30-2:30 Observe: cafeterias, atrium, library, under the library staircase, Pals centre, gym gardens, hallways toilets, Du lab Students' social rooms Room.	Class prep
2-3	Teaching Col 150-523 F-GF-038	Office hours 2:30-4:30 Library/office	Teaching Col 150-523 F-GF-038	Office hours 2:30-4:30 Library/office	Teaching Col 150-523 F-GF-038
3-4	Teaching Col 150-531 F-GF-038		Teaching Col 150-531 F-GF-038		Teaching Col 150-531 F-GF-038
4-5	Observe selectively	Observe: Gate 1 & parking	Observe selectively	Observe: Gate 2 & parking	Observe selectively

**Observations (obsrv), Audited classes, Classes I teach, Office hours in my office & library**

**Daily observations:** Hallways, Toilets, Elevators, Library, Classrooms, Atrium, Cafeteria, Gardens, Parking Lots and Gate Entrances

**Weekly observations:** GYM, Bookstore, Admin building. Pals

**Biweekly-Monthly observations:** Du Lab, Refinery spa.

## Appendix 5.1

### Interview extract on non-conventional teaching spaces

The following are extracts from an interview with a communication faculty professor about his utilization of alternative teaching spaces as non-conventional academic spaces, which are discussed under the section 'Academic spaces', Chapter Five.

*Jerry:* From the faculty side of it..faculty-y (pause) and this's of course a generalization, but they like classroom, it is safe. The classroom is easy, you go in, you shut the door...

*Gergana:* True.

*Jerry:* I'm not, i-it's eh (pause) I think as faculty-y..in general are..are rather insecure about what we do.. And the idea that we might be under the scrutiny-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) Uhm.

*Jerry:* Of other people..I think that's really a daunting thing because....you know am I teaching well-I-I? Are the activities I'm doing..., are they something that-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) True.

*Jerry:* That others recognize? And so we like CLASSROOMS.

*Gergana:* Yeah.

*Jerry:* We close the door, and it's my domain.What happens in the classroom stays in classroom.

*Gergana:* Yeah.

*Jerry:* So th-the problem is I guess..alternative learning spaces will be useful and..and sometimes I break out of my classrooms. And I mean I tend to move classrooms as.. so on the register they hate me because I'll just..I'll go to them and ask "Okay, Can I change rooms?" halfway through or every-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) (laughing)

*Jerry:* Four times a year, I might. Four times a semester I might change the room of the class (pause).

*Gergana:* And.. How do you think that influences your learning? Or affect-

*John:* (overlapping) I-I think it changes the context. Because the eh depending on the CLASS.. So if it's public speaking class, changing the context towards .. taking place, it it changes the environment for the students. They have to get used to a new place. I moved my class into hallways, I've used the atrium-m. I-I just move it arou-und.. And I think , for me-e as an instructor, It CHANGES the the way you teach a little bit (pause) but for the students, it also-o forces THEM to-o disconnect FROM the physical environment of learning and realize it doesn't matter where you learning, it matters WHAT you learning (pause) and I think, too often, we get TIED to even if it psychologically tied to (pause) where it is we're DOING the learning.

*Gergana:* Uhm

*Jerry:* And so this idea that okay, I can have a class in a hallway (pause) and it's still as valid as having class in a CLASSROOM, we mean obviously there are reasons why you want to do it in the hallways. So, I think that An-and the fact that (pause) in taking these courses to different places in the university, which I think could be really useful, that it..It's not set up to accommodate that

*Gergana:* Uhm.

*Jerry:* So-o (pause) why couldn't we have..break out areas in the hallways? The-these big long hallways we have, Like up here-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) we don't, that we don't u-use.

*Jerry:* We don't use-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) They're not utili-i-zed even.

*Jerry:* No-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) For social gatherings, I I was hoping they'll put something there.

*Jerry:* Or-r you know someone might say (mimicking voice) "not me" but then we have all these classes, these offices on the other side.

*Gergana:* Yeah.

*Jerry:* Of the halls here, we use some of them, but not all of them..  
So you-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) O-okay.

*Jerry:* So you COULD BREAK.. almost open them up, so-o you might...imagine if you took out where these windows are, and opened them up.

*Gergana:* Uhm.

*Jerry:* So that yes it's it's a learning space. But it's also public space.

*Gergana:* Yeah.

*Jerry:* So you can go.. in and out. Almost like a-a-a that will be kind of interesting. And I think that's-s..thinking differently. But it also that involves little things-s so-o when you mo-o-ve you're...creating alternative environments requires creating (pause) facilitating , so-o does it have plugs? Does it have (pause) ah..white boards? It doesn't have to have white boards. Like..like I saw white board like this, but it could have whiteboard paint, Which-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) Yeah.

*Jerry:* They se-e-ll...so white board the paint in the wall, so people can come in and use it as a hall-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) As a classroom also.

*Jerry:* Yeah, so it does have the..the ability to be a class, but it could be alternative space. So I think that's one of the areas where we missed out with our new campus.

*Gergana:* Uhm

*Jerry:* And it's-s (long pause) e-eh, that that's..that's a big challenge; It's figuring out "Okay, how can we now retrofit? How can we..on ad-hoc basis use the environment to create other living tools and then-

*Gergana:* (overlapping) Uhm.

*Jerry:* But I said it also requires. When I taught in the in the..in the-e (pause) in the-e in the atrium. I've taught outside (pause) where-e we have that little theatre by the water fountainby the cafeteria.

*Gergana:* Oh yeah, outside in the courtyard

*Jerry:* Yeah, I've taught in the courtyard.

*Gergana*: Oh yeah? You did that-

*Jerry*: (overlapping) and s-s-tudents classes at there, but the problem IS, and this's why I'll imagine many teachers wouldn't wanna teach there, is if you teach in the courtyard you're in direct view of the administration of the university.

## Appendix 5.2

### Interview extract on gender segregation practices at ZU

The following conversation with *Maimona* offers a rich account of the concept of gender segregation as viewed by both UAE students and parents, the way it has been enforced, how it makes the students feel, and its direct link to their sense of agency that “actually shapes [their] social actions” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 963):

*Maimona*: When I heard of having the male students in the university, I did not mind but then I was kind of PISSED OFF. But not from the male students but because of the TREATMENT we got.

*Gergana*: Oh-h-h.

*Maimona*: I remember we had a class at 4 pm in the F wing, I remember the F is a long wing, so they had that place which was for the male students and the entrance eh-h was female, in the same wing but they have these doors locked from both sides.

*Gergana*: Okay, from both sides that we have security guards, yes.

*Maimona*: But for me my class was, before that my class was in the B wing and then I have to go to the F wing for my other class at 4:00 and the security did not let me pass that place and I had to go outside to go to the front.

*Gergana*: In the heat?

*Maimona*: Yes in the heat.

*Gergana*: There is no other way for you to access it, you could not go through the atrium?

*Maimona*: No, no.

*Gergana*: Oh-h-h-

*Maimona*: (overlapping) It was closed and you have to go through the heat and walk and it's actually taking much more time, and it feels like, for me I actually felt like..WHAT-T-T.."you don't trust me enough" or you know, if-f-f-f...I know I know that I am not going to do something wrong but IF I am going to do something wrong I won't do it in a place like that, I feel like..that Zayed University has this ZULOs

*(Zayed University Learning Outcomes)*, okay when you enter and one of it is preparing us for the work place so if you are talking about PREPARING US for the work place but you are NOT TRUSTING US-S-S enough and you are not PREPARING us even to work with the guys, so how can we graduate being able to do that. And I understand why they are doing that, I UNDERSTAND THAT SOME STUDENTS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO BE WITH BOYS AND MAYBE, MAYBE I don't know, their parents would mind being in a university like that.

*Gergana*: Okay.

*Maimona*: But I also think that maybe for the students that HAVE to pass the F wing, you should let them GO. And I remember once I was going to the class at 4:00, and I ran into one of my teachers and I was talking to her, we were walking together and I just forgot. She is a faculty member, she can pass, but I am a students and I can't pass, so I was walking with her and without even noticing, I was close to going in. And the security was like "ah-h-h NO, NO GOING IN" *(she mimicked his move with the hand like stop sign in her face)* he kind of pushed me away.

*Gergana*: Wao-o-o.

*Maimona*: So-o so I felt like WHAT-T-T-T..IS THIS, you know I am grown up, you don't have to treat me like this.

*Gergana*: Yeah, very interesting. For me it was honestly annoying, because in some of the classes I teach, I always liked the windows and the views, you really enjoy seeing and having a vision, and now for some of these classes that seem to have access to the male classes they fogged the glass-

*Maimona*: *(overlapping)* Yeah, YEAH-

*Gergana*: *(overlapping)* They covered it all. So I was not happy about it, but I am not sure about you, did you feel the same way?

*Maimona*: I felt the same day, the first days it was not even curtains, so that you feel, okay its normal they have curtains, No, it was PAPERS, papers like that and I felt like oh my God it's not. For me I think it reflects on you because, for us maybe we understand.. okay,

that males are not suppose to be mixed with females maybe for some students

But MAYBE for the other foreigner professors THEY THINK "WHY THEY DON'T TRUST THEIR PEOPLE, THEY DON'T THINK THAT GIRLS ARE responsible", I don't know how they think but you know it had to be like someone will say this kind of stuff.

*Gergana*: so it makes you feel uncomfortable and pissed off as you said-

*Maimona*: (overlapping) And late to class (laughing)

*Maimona*: And late to class, yeah. Especially when you have a class in a place far then you have to go to that place, so you can't go early, it's not like it is in your hand, you know.

## **Appendix 6.1**

### **Spatial recommendation**

The following represents an expanded account of spatial recommendations to enhance students' spatio-learning experiences, specifically applicable to Zayed University's Dubai campus. They emerged from the better understanding of students' spatial needs resulting from my fieldwork. These ideas can be realised on the Dubai campus at two levels. First, they can be communicated to the Campus Physical Development Office, which oversees campus design and physical facilities. Second, they can be introduced to existing faculty and staff through the colleges' and office of research's seminars, and during new faculty orientation to help new western faculty joining the university better understand our students and their spatial needs.

These recommendations include the following:

- While Emirati females live in a particular culture and context, they share a need for spaces of their own with many others, including western females, as established by Tamboukou (2003) and Woolf (1945) (see discussion under 'Cocooning' in Chapter 4). They need their own private spaces and secluded corners on campus, whether individually (me space) or in groups (us space). Therefore, it would better suit students' cultural needs, and be more conducive to learning and creativity, to establish various private corners around the university public spaces where female students can sit alone to study individually or in groups to socialize as part of the collective. Indeed, students are already trying hard to appropriate campus space by creating such places themselves. For example, in planning to redesign the library, the university should add to the existing limited number of private study rooms, which are almost always fully booked because they are preferred by students. Such rooms can provide a private space for students during their long hours on campus while waiting for the permitted leaving time to study individually or in groups, sitting on their floor carpets or even praying. Creating more cocoon spaces as private spaces within the public open space for students to occupy will satisfy a need that was expressed

verbally and practised spatially throughout my field work (see cocooning in Chapter 4).

- As Emirati female students do not like spatial exposure and very bright areas, spaces like the atrium (see 'Spaces of contradictions', Chapter 5) should be reinvented (redecorated and redesigned) to create more private enclosed sitting areas surrounded by partitions, while the brightness of the atrium could possibly be reduced by repainting the roofing material to reduce the strength of incoming light. Additionally, faculty could acknowledge students' aversion to exposure by refraining from placing students in open seating arrangements that leave them exposed. Specifically, students generally hate the half-circle arrangement unless they are seated behind desks or sitting on the floor as in a *majlis* with their bags in front of them. I believe if faculty are aware of this, they can become more creative in how they arrange students, or they can ask students about their preferred seating arrangements to give them choices, depending on the affordances of the space.
- The institute needs to allocate and provide students with preferably carpeted areas both inside and outside the classroom, particularly in their own cocoons, to facilitate their preferred cultural practice of sitting on the floor, both individually and in groups, as in a *majlis* style. If space allows, many students prefer to do group work on classroom floors. Currently some classrooms located around the ring area are both spacious enough and carpeted, so they provide an opportunity to engage students in group activities while allowing them the option of sitting on the floor. Additionally, the university needs to provide various low types of seating arrangements, such as pillows or more of the bean bags that have been recently introduced in the atrium and in other areas, specifically in secluded corners and niches within the larger public space. This would allow more students to sit on or near the floor while avoiding the cold tiles that many students currently sit on. I would specifically recommend using the sides of the academic hallways, where some students already sit on the floor waiting for class. There could be a combination of benches and carpets giving students freedom of choice, especially given that these hallways are spacious

enough to accommodate such spatial practices. Finally, carpets should be added to all the small cocoons that students currently prefer and occupy, such as empty cooler places, atrium corners and the locker areas where students already bring their own carpets or drag bean bags.

- The institution also needs to accommodate students' preference for sitting in dimmed classrooms and darker areas, especially within me and us spaces, whether individually or in groups. I believe this can be easily arranged by ensuring classrooms have dimmer switches. Such switches should also be used, wherever possible, to control lighting fixtures around campus public areas, including hallways and private secluded corners already utilized by students. Finally, as suggested earlier, the atrium roof covering should be treated to reduce brightness by tinting or partially covering parts of the ceiling. Extra covering could even be added to create some shared tent-like darker areas. I believe the campus architects and the Campus Physical Development Unit could provide several creative ideas and solutions to better implement these recommendations.
- A major recommendation is to give students the freedom and support to appropriate their own spaces according to their needs, within institutional limitations and spatial affordances. Students both like and need flexible mobile furniture in and outside classrooms. Thus, they enjoy having the lightweight bean bags recently provided by the CPDO. Students drag them around campus, appropriating and creating their own preferred corners and cocoons. Often I would come across one or more students sitting on bean bags behind hallway doors, next to power sockets or in other cocoons (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** A student creating her own cocoon by dragging the bean bag and setting it behind a hallway door, 2014

Flexible furniture allows students to become the architects of their own space. Since they know better what suits their needs, this approach could empower them to meet those needs instead of having decisions made for them. Observing how students appropriate campus space provided so many insights into their needs and preferences. Providing them with the tools to design their own spaces will definitely transform their spatio-learning experiences and take the institution to a different level where space, students and pedagogy intertwine to strengthen the learning experience. This could start with minor actions by the university, like providing small carpets for students to borrow, allowing them to form their own spaces, as many already bring their own carpets and store them above the lockers.

Currently, there are few opportunities for flexibility because, for example, atrium furniture is quite heavy for them. Yet, I noticed that students seize the opportunity to sit on it when cleaners move it inside the hallways to empty the atrium for special events and occasions. This reiterates my point that flexible, mobile furniture can be liberating for both students and institutions. The same applies to classrooms, where both students and faculty like to choose how to rearrange the classroom setting. However, the existing furniture is quite heavy so many faculty have to ask cleaners to move furniture in advance. Thus, classroom furniture needs to be lightweight and flexible enough to serve the pedagogical needs of both students and teachers, allowing improved student learning, partly as a result of more creativity in the teacher's delivery of content.

In fact, this recommended flexibility represents the new direction in designing academic institutions, although very few attempts have extended to university spaces, as the focus is more on primary and secondary schools (Strange and Banning, 2001). Currently at DXB, some classrooms are arranged as auditoriums with fixed furniture. I found it very difficult to conduct group work there, and many students simply gathered in the rearmost corners, squeezing themselves in to sit on the floor for group class work. In contrast, art studios are the most flexible, with various types of furniture, including a couch in one of the classes I audited (see red couch in figure 5.25, Chapter 5). For this reason, many students tend to spend a longer time in studio classes, and teachers are able to exercise more creativity in utilizing the studio space. Nevertheless they still felt that their studios are not well equipped with flexible furniture. Some teachers even suggested having interlocking furniture pieces that can easily be rearranged into different shapes. I also noticed that, even in the studio, they lacked carpeted areas or spaces for floor sitting. Consequently, many students used the red couches as a floor-level seating arrangement (Figure 4.16, Chapter 4). Having such flexibility would support the multiplicity of students' existing lived spaces and possibly create new ones in response to other needs that I might not have identified in my research. Thus, I consider this recommendation as responding to one of the most urgent needs to transform any educational space.

- Campus furniture should be designed for comfort and functionality. Students prefer to have comfortable, ergonomic desks and chairs in the classrooms; they prefer fabric to plastic chairs, which they find uncomfortable to sit on for long periods. As many complained, if they are not comfortable they cannot focus in class (see conversation with Maha under 'Furniture', Chapter 5). Additionally, students often spoke of their need for tables that can accommodate bags, laptops and all the other objects/things students carry. Emirati female students usually carry many things, as they spend a long day on campus, and many lockers are distant from their classes. Thus, it would be more practical for students if classroom desks and chairs included a hanger or small basket underneath, or a drawer to hold students' clutter while in class. Functionality and comfort also relates to other cultural preferences. For example, students wish to have power sockets distributed across campus, especially in the cocoons and small secluded areas that they occupy because they constantly need to charge laptops, mobiles and tablets; often, having a power socket converts a space preferred by students into a me or us space, especially if secluded, such as the several water cooler spaces that have been transformed into cocoons.
- The institution also needs to enhance the classroom affordances to allow students to personalize and leave their imprint on the classrooms they occupy throughout the semester, even if they have to shift between up to five rooms during the day. Currently, classrooms offer limited scope for personalizing the walls. Classrooms usually include one or two display boards but, teachers need to plan ahead to bring tape or pins to allow students to show their work. Therefore, I recommend more display boards be installed on all classroom walls, as in studio classes, which already have them extending from wall to wall, allowing students and faculty to display work from the previous classes. This personalises the space and enhances student learning experiences by inspiring and motivating other students from seeing their peers' work.
- Following from the previous recommendation, the university needs to better utilize all interior walls and spaces inside and outside the classrooms to support student learning experiences and achieve the university's mission.

Currently, there is no proper planning so most classroom walls are bare with one or two posters randomly displayed. The College of Arts and Creative Enterprise is the only one taking advantage of the university walls and public spaces to constantly display their students' work, which has both aesthetic and educational value. This was clearly expressed by one of the interviewed teachers from the College of Art and Creative Enterprise, who believes that despite the college's attempts, students still need more visual stimulation to inspire them:

Something like that simple for design student, I think it is definitely missing. And also inspiration-wise, I wish that they are more surrounded by art and design colours and shapes and works that can produce well. So, whatever, they are looking at is actually creating their visual culture for them to recognise and be able to like am-m-m sort of use it as a foundation but somehow, like almost a hospital like you know, smell to like structure to..is very stigmatic and visually and then..I mean ah-h-h yeh. Basically, I hope...there are many things are missing, sorry.

Other colleges and campus users need to take advantage of that opportunity, and display more student work to communicate their mission beyond classrooms and university catalogues. This will truly extend students' learning beyond the classroom into alternative connected learning spaces, thereby linking their spatio-learning experiences inside and outside class. This would also acknowledge the fact that learning experiences are not fixed or limited to a specific space or place but represent a network of experiences extending across spaces and places.

- I further recommend ensuring that the campus's interior and exterior better reflect the students' identities and culture. Many students commented that, except for their presence and appearance (clothes), the campus space does not represent Emirati culture. There have been a few limited attempts to include decorative palm trees in the atrium, while pictures of Sheikh Zayed hang on one of the interior walls, which students often referred to in their interviews. However, in general, students see the campus as modern and foreign to their culture. I also learned from my fieldwork about the benefit of

including photos of UAE leaders, especially Sheik Zayed, inside classrooms (see conversation with Randa under 'Modern children of the desert', Chapter 4). Students want to see more aspects of their culture integrated and displayed across all campus spaces, inside and outside classrooms, to enhance their sense of local identity and to truly represent the university's name.

- The institution also needs to find and implement creative, technical, culturally acceptable solutions to allow students more spatial mobility, which is restricted by gender segregation practices, especially around gendered spaces. This currently disadvantages both males and females. If gender segregation practices are to continue, students' voices need to be heard, so they should be asked to suggest more creative solutions about rearranging the campus space. For example, the outdoor path to the university gate past wing F, which is closed to females when males classes are running, should be shaded, covered or even enclosed and air-conditioned in summer. Ideally, new academic wings should be built to accommodate male students, or class timings for males and females could be rearranged to avoid overlap. However, I do realize that this might be difficult and that the university is doing its best to accommodate both genders while ensuring gender segregation. Although co-education is a very sensitive topic in the UAE, I believe a top-level institutional decision needs to be made as to whether to allow it. Although it is currently considered by a majority of Emiratis as culturally inappropriate, many students support it. Another option would be to build a separate campus for men. With the increasing number of both male and female students, I believe the current institutional practices of gender segregation may not be spatially sustainable (see gendered space in Chapter 5).

## Glossary of terms

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**Abaya:** Traditional long, mostly black body cover worn by women in the UAE. It is also considered their national dress.

**Al-dohur:** Noon time (in the text referring to Muslim prayers at noon).

**Al-eser:** the afternoon (in the text referring to the afternoon Muslim prayer).

**Aljalsat:** (singular: Aljalseh) The action of sitting in groups; in the dissertation context it was mentioned in reference to traditional seating-*majlis* areas.

**Bakhour:** Essence, scent.

**Boyat:** The local word for lesbians or females acting and looking more like boys.

**Burqo:** A traditional face mask worn mostly by older women.

**Eid:** Muslim religious celebration and holiday.

**Ghotra:** The UAE's male's white head cover.

**Iftar:** The action of breaking a fast at sunset during the month of Ramadan for Muslims.

**Kuttab:** (plural '*katatib*') was a form of religious school that taught Arabic, Qura'an reading, and some mathematics (Talhami, 2004, p. 5). Students were taught in the teacher's house, inside a room, the courtyard or even outside under a tree (Heard-Bey, 2011, p. 156; khelifa, 2010, p. 20). This educational system was known as the 'Mutawa'a system' and was led by individual religious teachers (khelifa, 2010, p. 20). In some cases the mutawa'a (teacher) was the imam in the mosque maintained by the 'Wagf'. The teachers were paid privately by local families, sometimes in food, domestic animals and clothing (Heard-Bey, 2011, p.156).

**Mabkhara:** A decorated vessel to hold burning coal with *bakhour* on the top to release the essence.

**Majlis:** A traditional Bedouin or other Arabic group sitting area for family and guests, it is mostly on the floor.

**Niqqb:** Face veil.

**Qandoora:** The UAE male's long national gown.

***Qur'an:*** The Muslim holy book.

***Ramadan:*** A holy month for Muslim people during which they fast and increase the frequency of religious practices.

***Rbee'ah:*** The local Emirati word for a female friend (plural ***rebee'at***)

***Sadaka:*** Preferred Islamic practice of offering material support to the poor in the form of money, clothes, food and so on.

***Sejadeh:*** Small rug or carpet.

***Sheila:*** Mostly black traditional head cover used by women in the UAE

***Soujoud:*** The action of kneeling in Muslim prayer with forehead touching the ground.

***Subha:*** Prayer beads.

***Wodo:*** The action of washing for prayer.

***Ya'nni:*** A local word commonly used by the female students during the conversations as a filler that means 'I mean' or 'you know'.

***Zakat:*** An obligatory Islamic practice that involves giving a minor share of one's wealth in the form of money to the poor.

End of Dissertation