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Changing Geography: Transcultural Arab Identity in the Age of the EU

Katie Logan

You know, some infallible entity is being born under our eyes. Not a revolution. A creation. The greatest creation since the Babylonian Deluge. Switzerland will move closer to Paris and Berlin, to Prague. We're changing geography, around here.
(Adnan 1993b, 28)

The narrator of Etel Adnan's 1993 *Paris, When It's Naked* witnesses the establishment of the European Union (EU), understanding it to be a material expansion of frameworks of belonging. This development reifies certain connections between people and places while obscuring other equally significant affinities. Musing on French identity, literature, and colonial history through a series of dream-like vignettes, the narrator considers what the arrival of the EU means for her as a Lebanese woman with ties to France, the Middle East and North Africa, and the United States. She imagines the EU knitting Europe together at the expense of other international histories and her own experience in Paris. France's new identification as "European," she argues, marginalizes its past colonial interventions in Algeria and its response to Algeria's ongoing political instability, as well as France's continued interactions with Arab migrants. Adnan's descriptions of enthusiasm for a European identity—framed through obsessive international commentary on the weather, television, and sports—highlight the limits of the EU's connective frameworks. Her writing argues that the Union merely shifts the categories of who belongs where rather than radically redefining the notion of belonging itself, an act that would require attention to less material and more temporary affinities. As her text unpacks and critiques the frameworks of belonging that emerge with the rise of the EU, Adnan gestures to other modes of relation with place, past, and other people. These modes of relation, which are nonhierarchical and impermanent, illustrate what I term *affinity*.

As I'll demonstrate in close readings throughout the chapter, Adnan envisions citizenship and belonging as circles with clear demarcations of inclusion and exclusion. The EU expands those circles, but an expanded circle still has limits; it still has a center. By contrast, Adnan articulates affinitive, transcultural relations. Because of its branching, multidirectional, and nonhierarchical nature, affinity has no stable center. To

be in relation, each entity must move and shift. Affinity is imperfect in its tenuousness. It leaves space for discordant connections and failures to relate. And yet, as Adnan anticipates the challenges that entities like the EU will face in addressing those who fall outside its frameworks of belonging, anticipation that has proven prescient with ongoing debates in the EU about how to accommodate migrant populations, affinity provides possibilities at the individual level for reorienting oneself toward others.

Affinitive relations, in their lateral and nonhierarchical nature, always push for destabilizing the frameworks of belonging and membership that organize political sensibilities. They also encourage an accounting for contradictions and dissonances. Affinity is not a mere alternative to belonging or citizenship. Instead, it challenges nationalist and global rhetorics of exclusionary belonging through recourse to complex and branching networks of relation. Literary articulations of affinity, in particular, depend on aesthetic and formal innovations that reconfigure texts' dependence on plot, characters, genre, and other literary categories. *Paris, When It's Naked* demonstrates a resistance to categorization that corresponds with its commitment to affinitive relations. The English of the text's publication exists in relationship to the French in which the narrator investigates the city and to an amorphous but significant relationship to Arabic. The narrator shares Adnan's trajectories and linguistic preferences, although the text never explicitly labels itself a memoir or autobiography. Instead, the text blurs the boundaries between memoir, travel narrative, prose poetry, and assemblage.¹ Its affinitive networks are also rooted in careful literary attention to physical experiences of place, which are always informed by each individual's experience of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and ability; recourse to memory; and affective responses to texts, places, people, and objects.

Adnan asserts herself as a transcultural observer of France's Europeanization. She participates actively in the space she inhabits while still critiquing the identity politics she sees emerging. I argue that *Paris, When It's Naked* models a methodology of transcultural affinity in the wake of transformational global politics. Adnan's methodology challenges readers to hold multiple identities and geographies in place simultaneously. Reading the text in the twenty-first century presents a stark contrast to the EU's response to increased migration beginning in 2011 with Syrians fleeing civil war and skyrocketing arrivals in 2013–15. In its interactions with Syrian refugees and with Arab host countries, the EU has relied primarily on fixed and rigid definitions of belonging, while displaced populations are forced to hold together multiple histories and geographies. Adnan demonstrates, however, that including multiple affinities could become the default communal response to migrating and displaced peoples. Though she writes in the early 1990s, her assertions of transcultural affinities have direct implications for the way those in the late 2010s might read and understand the EU's current approach to accommodating refugees and migrants.

Transcultural Affinities

Adnan's tendency toward destabilizing frameworks of relation through transculturalism is apparent throughout her work. In an article on Adnan's most famous novel *Sitt Marie Rose*, Olivia C. Harrison (2009) outlines how the book, a Lebanese Civil War narrative,

critiques the ossification of military, religious, and tribal factions while also refusing to form an easy alternative collective:

The novel problematizes the very notion of resistance, and with it, the risk of creating filiative ties through acts of affiliation. How can one resist without deploying the language of opposition, struggle, and enmity that forms the conceptual arsenal of war? How can one form a collective “we” of resistance without creating an opposite “them”?

(2)

In her reading, Harrison criticizes simplistic analyses of *Sitt Marie Rose* that see the text's protagonist rejecting her Christian Syrian-Lebanese family's collective in favor of a community built on her commitment to Palestinian refugees. Harrison counterargues that Adnan does not substitute communities. Instead, Adnan continues to question what the roles of “we” and “them” are, undermining the sense that Marie has simply replaced a “filiation” with “affiliation.” Harrison uses Edward Said's (1983) distinction between “filiation” and “affiliation”; he defines filiation as “the closed and tightly knit family structure that secures generational hierarchical relationships to one another,” while ties of affiliation allow “men and women [to] create social bonds between each other that would substitute for those ties that connect members of the same family across generations” (qtd. in Harrison, 1).

Certainly, Adnan's biography and publication history suggest multiple possible points of geographic, linguistic, and social affiliation. Born in Lebanon in 1925 to a Greek mother and Syrian Ottoman father, she studied in both France and the United States (<http://www.eteladnan.com/>). She returned to Lebanon in the 1970s and departed again for California at the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War. She divides her time between Paris and Sausalito, California, with her partner Simone Fattal, an artist and publisher whom Adnan met in Beirut in the early 1970s (Roffino and Tome 2014).² These elements of her biography identify Adnan as a transcultural writer, one who forms “multifaceted fluid identities resulting from diverse cultural encounters” (Nordin, Hansen and Llena 2013, ix).

Like its author, *Paris, When It's Naked* also identifies a range of potential affiliations. The text, a series of vignettes about a Lebanese émigré's daily life in Paris, was published in 1993 by Post-Apollo, a small press run by Fattal.³ *Paris, When It's Naked* reflects the challenges of writing in English about a French setting while recollecting a past in Lebanon and following new global developments in the EU. While she speaks French and Arabic, Adnan describes herself as most comfortable writing in English, the first language in which she published poetry: “I don't have this sense of belonging [in French] that I have in English. By now there's a lifetime of history behind my writing in English” (Robertson 2014). A “sense of belonging” does not necessarily correspond to fixed belonging in a specific place, however. In *Of Cities and Women: Letters to Fawwaz*, also published in 1993, Adnan writes that “I feel that I haven't settled anywhere, really, that I'm rather living in the world, all over, in newspapers, in railway stations, cafes, airports The books that I'm writing are houses that I build for myself” (111). Although Adnan frames her decision to write in English as a personal one that does not minimize her relationships with other places, the decision

and the text's publication in California define the text's audience as predominantly English speaking and American.

While Adnan's professional and personal trajectories chart a history of rejecting singular modes of filiation and could be read as an ongoing endeavor to produce multiple affiliations that, in Said's words, "substitute" for family ties, Harrison's reading of *Sitt Marie Rose* demonstrates that Adnan engages in significant poststructural work that undermines both filiation and affiliation as organizing principles. Adnan does not merely substitute one form of community for another; instead, she consistently questions and pressurizes the methods through which one might come to identify with a particular community. In *Paris, When It's Naked* particularly, Adnan intensifies this work by practicing affinity: an articulation of connection that is even more tenuous and affectively saturated than those explored in *Sitt Marie Rose*. Affiliation in Said's framing leads to "social bonds," albeit bonds outside traditional frameworks of family or clan. Affinity, on the other hand, results in no bonds but rather in temporary moments of adjacent activity and feeling. Affinity also reframes Harrison's discussion of social organizing to encompass relations among people, places, and even objects. Rather than suggesting the alternative community that should form in the wake of the EU's formation—a global community, for example, or a French-North African collective that assesses the aftereffects of colonialism—Adnan orients herself toward a methodology of affinity, seeking ways to describe how individuals come into relation with the places where they live, the texts they read, and the people they encounter.

Affinity reconfigures the means through which individuals relate, most notably the media and technology that circulate the weather and sports reports that Adnan's narrator watches:

Information and propaganda have become so entangled that those who specialize in them acquire severe reality problems. The wheel keeps turning. People from the Third World are better at seeing through this fog; for them it's a matter of survival. Citizens from dominant countries fool themselves by thinking that they don't need to know: that's the beginning of their downfall. As for me, most of what I want to know is not "news," not really. I want to see a whale in the ocean and be told how one can travel to the middle of the Indian Ocean, exactly when, for how much, and how to be sure to be able to come near the animal, or swim alongside his body I would also want to find out the whereabouts of the young English soldier I loved, in Beirut, during the Second World War. Newspapers are of no help in such cases. (Adnan 1993, 60)⁴

Identifying her methodology as a "Third World" approach to news that sees through propaganda, the narrator categorizes the information she's looking for as simultaneously personal, political, and rooted in the real. She focuses not on big speeches or landmark decisions—the "news"—but instead on the events and experiences that make one an historical subject. She experiences the Second World War, for example, by falling in love with a British soldier. That love is rooted in the history of global politics and conflict that brought the soldier to the narrator's home. The narrator's desire for information attests to history's unknowable and uncontrollable nature. Readers do not know why

the soldier left Beirut any more than she now knows whether he is alive or dead, living in rural England or propagating neocolonial business practices globally. The narrator does not presume to control or defeat history, only to exist alongside it, a methodology that distances her from the nations hoping to preempt a third world war with the EU. Finally, the narrator looks for information that, however surreal sounding, is real with details that can be experienced and confirmed. Her envisioning of the specific geography and physicality that would allow one to see a whale seems far removed from the illusions of safety and fear produced by larger political bodies. Affinity in this context is not ephemeral because of its abstract qualities but rather because of the temporary and highly specific nature of each relation. Swimming alongside a whale is not a permanent activity, nor is it one that will reveal every aspect of the whale. Instead, the state of being alongside is one of practicing an affinity that will not last but that will transform both parties.

Adnan's narrator reacts against the "severe reality problems" that Western news generates by focusing on reality's tangible, personal, and yet temporary elements. Her approach becomes an alternative epistemology, one that "see[s] through the fog." In Paris, this epistemology requires her to recognize that she can never completely control her thinking or walking in such a dynamic space:

Paris is so huge, so full of people, that my thoughts get entangled in its electric wires and never reach their destination. Its tall buildings, aligned with no space between them save the streets, create an invincible screen to our feelings and dreams. You cannot fly in this city, you have to negotiate every move with it. That's not always as despairing as it sounds.

(60)

Adnan's descriptions of moving through and thinking in Paris deprioritize destination and focus on the processes of moving and thinking themselves. Her language suggests constant obstacles, claustrophobic encounters, and the weighty exhaustion of navigating crowded space and thinking thoughts filtered by the city. By concluding the section with "that's not always as despairing as it sounds," though, Adnan encourages readers to think of the exhaustive work outlined above as the essential action of affinity—a constant entanglement and subsequent reassessment of one's relationship to space and other people. Her proposal stands in stark contrast to the EU, which would prefer to "fly" unburdened by offering citizens unfettered movement among member nations. There is no Schengen Zone within the streets of Paris for Adnan's narrator. Instead, she has to reform her thoughts based on the wires they encounter.

The continual reassessment of one's place exponentially proliferates the ways in which one might experience momentary relation. One complex example of affinity ties together geographic, literary, linguistic, and affective components. On the Metro, the narrator ponders other riders: "There are many young women among the passengers, some of them having never read *Le Spleen de Paris*. Of course, Baudelaire loved London" (1). In one brief observation, the narrator offers multiple types of affinity. Location and participation form one category; the women reside in Paris and are at ease with the Metro. At the same time, they do not have

access to one of the narrator's most significant Parisian affinities. *Le Spleen de Paris* is our Lebanese-born narrator's quintessential Parisian text, so much so that she enacts it herself during long observational walks through city; the text is one of the ways that she and Paris come into relation with each other. The younger women, however, have found a way to connect to Paris that does not involve that affinity. The narrator complicates things still further by acknowledging that Baudelaire, her model Parisian poet, "loved London." Even the texts and authors considered rooted in and necessary to a particular place form attachments elsewhere. The narrator infers that Baudelaire's love of London gives the young women on the train permission to engage Paris through different affinities. Rather than using Baudelaire to distinguish "true" Parisians from others, she recognizes the dangerous gesture toward a "national" poet. Her choice to observe the young women on the train is also significant; as a female navigator of urban space herself, she notes the ways in which women are often subject to different rules about belonging. In her early references to Baudelaire and her protagonist's walking of Paris, Adnan evokes the *flâneuse*, a female observational walker whose historical and cultural significance is hotly contested (Wolff 1985; Parsons 2000). In *Of Cities and Women: Letters to Fawwaz*, Adnan herself notes that city space is often positioned as masculine: "The idea of Nature in Western or Arabic thought has been tied to that of the feminine The opposition city/nature was similar to the opposition man/woman" (16–17). To walk as a woman means constantly negotiating one's relationship to space, a negotiation that results in continued opportunities for affinity.

The narrator's affiliative relations inform her experience of both Paris and the Middle East. She imagines herself pulled back toward the region where she was born through an uncanny sense of pain that extends beyond empathy. At first, her worries seem connected to her former home in Lebanon. She recalls from previous years that when "Tell Zataar was under siege I was unable to sleep," a concern that could easily develop from worries about the safety of family and friends or about home (63).⁵ However, her feeling of being involved in troubling, faraway situations goes beyond news items and her family history to immediate and visceral experiences of events elsewhere: "A sandstorm in the Sahara throws its grains into my eyes. A political prisoner in Syria begs for my attention" (43). These descriptions emphasize the slippage between the narrator and Adnan herself, and between news and literature. Though the narrator, who shares many of Adnan's affinities but remains stubbornly unidentified, could hear about these issues through traditional news media, her description enforces their immediacy, their intimacy, and their very physical impact. While news sources might report on Tell Zataar or the situation of political prisoners in Syria, this narrator emphasizes micro-connections that make the events temporarily audible and palpable, even to someone living in Paris.

While the creative and imaginative affinities between the narrator and faraway people and places could be the effect of her own background in the Middle East, Adnan demonstrates that anyone can train herself to become aware of multiple affinities. In particular, the narrator encourages Parisians to recognize that their view of the city is mediated: "You can see Paris with French eyes, fear the influx of the poor from all the continents, see a whole social equilibrium be disrupted. You can

also see the immigrant as a human being who happens to be here, now" (42). She suggests that viewers have a choice in the way they perceive space and the people who surround them. Adnan establishes that affinity is not produced by residency in a particular space or by moving from one location to another. Instead, it is about the approach to those spaces, the way someone might allow oneself to fall in love, to be enchanted, while also remaining critical. Her claims speak to the present moment, reminding an EU now contending with migration concerns that each nation and citizen in the Union can be understood and accepted as an entity with multiple, often contradictory, affinities.

For Adnan, embracing affinity requires holding oneself open to multiple locations and multiple feelings, a balance the narrator practices while navigating Paris on foot. She sees herself as "walking simultaneously on many tracks: standing on Aleppo's Citadel, I'm also standing by this red light, getting wet, and I'm walking the streets of Beirut where a snow storm is raging" (98).⁶ The narrator envisions herself in multiple spaces so powerfully that she can be attentive to the panoramic view in one space and the weather in another. Because of the wetness she feels from the Parisian rain, her body roots her in space even as she extends her sensibilities elsewhere. Affectively, the speaker also recalibrates her feelings about Paris, a constant process that forces her to exist in the discomfort of knowing that some affinities contradict each other:

Paris is beautiful. But in that word beautiful there are centuries of lives, of wars, of work, of faith, of deaths ... it's harder for me to say so, it's also more poignant. It tears me apart. Paris is the heart of lingering colonial power, and that knowledge goes to bed with me every night. When I walk in this city I plunge into an abyss, I lose myself in contemplation, I experience ecstasy, and an ecstasy which I know to be also a defeat.

(7)

The speaker points to a destruction of the self, a sense of the overwhelming pain, loss, exhaustion, and exertion that her movement through Paris demands. She does not propose the contradiction between her love for Paris' beauty and her knowledge of its violence as a solvable problem. Every day, every night, and every walk requires a new commitment and willingness to open oneself up to painful histories. Affinitive relations are only possible in this attention to often painful dissonance.

Affinity and Geopolitical Order

Adnan's most significant contribution to transculturalism comes through her careful descriptions of the complex and often ambivalent feelings that arise for someone affiliated with multiple cultural backgrounds. Nordin, Hansen, and Llena (2013, xiii) describe how "in the current transnational, globalized context, migrants do not necessarily sever their ties to their home country, but rather maintain them along with a sense of allegiance to their place and community of origins, while incorporating new allegiances to the receiving society and culture into their sense of identity." While

the description emphasizes the challenges of multiple allegiances, it sanitizes the guilt and pain—and also the intense love—that accompany the allegiances' development. *Paris, When It's Naked* is unabashed in its love for French culture and the Parisian streets. It is also unrelenting in its criticism that that culture emerges through and because of colonial histories that oppressed Adnan's fellow Arabs; she calls Paris "an imperial capital" and describes the French as people "who can break houses with impunity" (9, 10). Transculturalism highlights Adnan's commitment to multiple cultural interstices without erasing their challenges. *Paris, When It's Naked's* narrator is transcultural both through her multiple geographic affiliations and through her ambivalent relationship to Paris—she loves the city while remaining critical of its history and politics.

By modeling amorphous, temporary, and constantly shifting affinities, Adnan pushes against the fixed forms of knowledge, citizenship, and cultural affiliation governing the borders of the EU. Adnan's understanding of affinity is related to the ability to see suffering and the painful aftereffects of history. Affective experience is important to affinity because, the narrator explains, "feelings are antennae, and they open up spaces there in front, not unlike snowmobiles in snowed-in territories" (11). If the EU establishes affiliations that are fixed and immobile, Adnan's speaker depicts herself as a trailblazer. She promotes an affinitive methodology that would allow the contemporary EU to recognize the suffering and physical presence of refugees seeking asylum today. Without recourse to the affective and fluid affinities Adnan illustrates, for example, the EU of the 2010s is unable to ward off the threats presented by reactionary nationalisms responding to increased migration.

While the narrator of *Paris, When It's Naked* obliquely references multiple geopolitical developments, including contemporaneous violence in Algeria, the aftereffects of civil war in Lebanon, and the recent collapse of the Soviet Union, the formation of the EU primarily draws her attention. The text responds specifically to the Treaty on European Union, which was signed in the Netherlands on February 7, 1992.⁷ The treaty established the EU's modern incarnation, following previous forms beginning with the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951.⁸ The treaty's language is notable not only in its call for economic unity—its primary goal—but also in its aims to foster European identity. Although the treaty leads to the Euro's development, as it proposes a common form of currency, it drops "economic" from the European Economic Community, focusing instead on a "European Community" at large, a union bound by more than just a shared financial future. The introductory resolutions (EU 1992, 3) frame participating countries as "desiring to deepen the solidarity between their peoples while respecting their history, their culture and their traditions." The resolution leads to the establishment of Union citizenship in Article 8, which states that "every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union" (15). The treaty indicates European identity's importance to the Union, although it also claims that European identity supplements rather than replaces national identity. It scaffolds what is already in existence and grants additional rights and privileges of citizenship—including, most notably, the ability to move freely through the Union's now extended borders—to those who already have those rights in their home countries.

Adnan observes the way that the EU's formation extends citizenship without redefining it. As a predominantly economic body that gestures toward cultural affiliation, it retains citizenship as the community's foundation at the expense of other forms of relation. Extending citizenship makes claims about who belongs in the EU's borders and formalizes the communal relations between various places and groups. As the EU develops, for example, the narrator muses on the way that individual nations' currency, politics, sporting events, and even weather reports will merge. Through an obsessive focus on the television, Adnan describes weather reports and Olympics coverage, noting that "European unity is a panacea, and the average Frenchman wants to know how high the snow is in Russia" (1). Both increased media capabilities and European unity make even the smallest detail about life in another country significant. Identifying the EU as a "panacea," a curer of all ills, the narrator has no need to identify which specific ills the EU might cure. She suggests, however, that attention on weather elsewhere leads France to forget its own. While the French watch reports on Russian and German weather, Paris experiences rain, and the narrator imagines that "Europe brings out its umbrellas" (1). In the attention to weather events, the narrator suggests that the Union binds participants into caring about Europe's weather patterns, a focus that even extends to nonmember countries like Russia. Of course, weather is about as local a phenomenon as possible—the snow in Russia cannot directly impact the French, nor do Russians require umbrellas to fend off French rain.

By imagining the umbrellas of Europe emerging, then, Adnan's narrator performs two seemingly contradictory acts. In the first, Adnan's overemphasis on weather illustrates the limits of unity by stretching solidarity to its logical conclusion; there's ridiculousness embedded in the notion that a Russian would open an umbrella simply because of rain more than 1700 miles away. And yet, at the same time, weather for Adnan suggests a micro-political approach to the EU that contests the economic and social categories the Union incentivizes. Unlike the development of the Euro, the experience of weather here is intimate and physical. The emergence of umbrellas across the continent suggests a possible embodied affinity engendered by the EU and yet resisting the Union's dominant organizing categories.

As Adnan attempts to destabilize the organizing principles of the EU, she retains an awareness of how the body threatens the way noncitizens can develop and assert affinity with a range of places and people. Just as the EU layers European citizenship and identity over that of citizens already affiliated with EU nations, migration can also demand a layering and subsequent erasure of national identity. For example, in Germany, the European nation that received the most asylum applications in 2015, government agencies in conjunction with cultural and communication companies developed a mobile app called *Ankommen* for migrants needing access to information about German language, employment, and culture. *Quartz Daily* notes that "developers added information on, for example, freedom of religion in Germany, while an article on gender equality was added after a mass assault against women in Cologne" (Wong 2016). Not simply a virtual welcome wagon, the app reflects German anxieties about incoming populations as threats who will not understand concepts like religious freedom or equal rights. *Ankommen* equates assimilation and erasure of cultural difference with increased safety.

Though such technology was not available in the early 1990s, the emergence of the EU instigated increased limits on displaced populations' access to both their cultures of origin and the cultures they encounter in diaspora. In research on contemporary Arabic literature about Europe, Johanna Sellman (2013) argues that the EU's rise and extension of citizenship constrained migrants' and refugees' abilities to be in relation with multiple places and histories:

European migration policies have gradually displaced the rights framework that is central to the Geneva Refugee Convention The post-Cold War migrant becomes a category to be managed, restricted, re-directed, and contained, according to an economic logic.

(48)

Unlike the Geneva Convention's parameters, which asserted the rights of migrant and refugee populations, Europe in the EU era reified citizenship in such a way as to close off additional avenues of relation. Rather than allowing migrants to enter and transform the community, the policies of the EU prioritize containment.

Writing in 1993, Adnan is attuned to these shifts and uses the changes in citizenship and national identity to anticipate changes for noncitizen populations in EU communities expressing affinity with other places and pasts. For her, the EU's formation takes on apocalyptic undertones, arriving as it does just before the new millennia. Asking "How can we get ready for a century? It's not a party after all," the narrator suggests that the EU emerges in part to counteract the anxieties generated by Y2K and to account for shifting continental politics during the Soviet Union's dissolution (11). She begins to think of the EU as an anticipatory body and points to the contradictions in its goals: "European unity is being made to avoid that third World War. Of course, one never knows, it may very well bring about what it was meant to avoid" (12). Eerily adopting the language of prophetic and self-fulfilling destiny, Adnan describes the EU as an initiative intended to ensure safety and stability but that may enact its own destruction and threats. Both the EU's goals and its challenges are rooted in questions about belonging, namely, What threats can be defused through inclusion? In her anticipatory language, Adnan indicates that extending belonging to defuse some threats necessarily excludes affirmative relations with others—other people, other cultures, and other historical interactions.

Paris, When It's Naked demonstrates how the Union not only excludes but makes invisible people both within the borders of particular countries and in specific countries themselves. It also describes how Union membership minimizes the significance of other historical narratives and affinities. In a passing line, the narrator mentions the diversity of theater appearing in Paris: "Most of the plays are in foreign languages, European of course" (22). The presence of French, Italian, German, and Spanish gives the theater scene an aura of multiculturalism. It's a given, however, that these languages will be part of a European exchange; linguistic and cultural traditions of the Arab world, Asia, Africa, and the Americas go unrecognized and unrepresented. It's through these cultural, political, and even gastronomical developments that some countries—and the people who hail from them—begin "dropping out of History" (34). With the EU's arrival, France has an opportunity to reconfigure its globality, nominally

distancing itself from its ongoing relationship with former colonies in favor of an internationalism that prioritizes the cosmopolitan and the illusion of mutual exchange and diversity.

Adnan's assessment of exclusion reads as a warning for the twenty-first century when the EU's structure makes it difficult for Syrians and other displaced populations to seek refuge in the region. She is also prescient in her awareness that official responses to expanding belonging will eventually become reactionary and nationalistic in tone. Adnan predicts that both expanding and contracting definitions of identity and citizenship will only provide an illusory sense of stability and security. If citizenship is extended rather than rearticulated as affinity, she suggests, nationalist groups will choose to reestablish firm boundaries and to withdraw from the Union's open borders, as has proven true with the 2016 Brexit vote in the United Kingdom, the reconfiguring of Schengen Zone border policies in the summer of 2015, and the ongoing rise of populist parties in France, Austria, and the Netherlands, among others.

Anticipating Union and Exclusion

Adnan's efforts to predict the EU's future stem from a desire to explore which cultural, geographical, and economic elements now link its citizens and how those elements reinforce the noncitizens' exclusion. Because of her own multifaceted position, Adnan is less interested in critiquing the EU than in assessing what types of relations it offers and precludes. Her analysis of the EU gives rise to an anticipatory, borderline prophetic project that connects in style if not content to conversations about migration and resettlement in the 2010s.⁹

The narrator of *Paris, When It's Naked* refuses to participate in the expanding and contracting narratives of citizenship espoused by EU policies, preferring instead to explore ever-branching communal and personal affinities. She traces her own ambivalent connections to her current hometown of Paris by envisioning herself as connected to a global history of suffering and holding France accountable for lingering colonial liabilities, while also describing in loving detail her ability to walk through Parisian streets. Adnan examines the past in order to articulate the affiliative relations that might be possible in the future. By doing so, she participates in a literature of futurity. The term

marks the potential of literature to widen the language and to expand the pool of idioms we employ in making sense of what has occurred while imagining whom we may become ... futurity is tied to questions of liability and responsibility, to attentiveness to one's own lingering pains and to the sorrows and agonies of others. Futurity marks literature's ability to raise, via engagement with the past, political, and ethical dilemmas crucial for the human future.

(Eshel 2013, 5)

Amir Eshel, who coined the term, describes "futurity" as introspective historical narration rather than futurism or science fiction. He describes contemporary German and Israeli writers developing new vocabularies and narrative structures not to better

understand their histories but rather to expand the ways communities can and should discuss those histories in the future. Even a backward-looking text can be oriented toward the future.

Unlike the German writers in Amir Eshel's study, who write about the Second World War and the Third Reich at a remove of several decades, Adnan writes through her contemporary moment—the book was published just a few months after the EU's official formation—so her futurity reads like prophecy. She demonstrates, along with her fellow “Europeans,” an anxiety about the future of the region and international politics. At the same time, Adnan's work falls under Eshel's definition because it aims to re-write the vocabularies already in place for discussing belonging. While the EU appears to promise the potential for new forms of belonging, the narrator suggests that a vocabulary other than that of belonging is needed. She explains that “I'm witnessing, and so are the cleaning lady and the Prime Minister of France, a nation-state's agony, and the merging of all national rivers into the European Ocean” (92–3). Initially, “witnessing” history might appear to erase the divides between the three individuals, people in France with different financial, political, and social statuses. They share not just the geography of France but the experience of being historical participants, people currently watching history unfold together. The shared experience, though, is illusory; because of political power, the prime minister will always experience unification differently than Adnan or a cleaning woman. Even the title “prime minister” suggests an importance to the project that the cleaning lady cannot access. It would be a mistake, though, to suggest that Adnan uses this example merely to critique the EU. Instead, recourse to affinity allows her to emphasize the tenuous relationship that does exist among the three witnesses. They are not together, but they are beside each other—not a collective but individuals in relation.

Affinity's willingness to see social divides and attempts at relation as co-extant problematizes the dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion on which notions of belonging rely, a dichotomy Adnan's narrator identifies particularly in the dilemma facing national or international projects incorporating migrant workers: “A lot of immigrants work in factories and create a major problem: how to make them work without having them breathe our air, live in our cities, or look at our wives and husbands?” (59). The national or international body looks for outsiders who will contribute labor without taking up space, who will inhabit the collective invisibly. While the cleaning woman in the previous example does not become equal with the prime minister through affinitive relation, affinity emphasizes her presence. Unlike those who seek to make migrants work without “breath[ing] our air,” the narrator uses articulations of affinity to make those who perform labor visible, even in a framework that would erase them.

Adnan also highlights the history of French colonialism, occupation, and brutality in North Africa, the location from which many of the laborers she observes migrate. Adnan notes France's uncomfortable relationship to its Algerian involvement in particular even before the Union. “This Algerian turmoil,” she writes, “made of France a nation with two faces” (10). She describes the history “haunt[ing] France ... like veiled women,” forcing it to confront the violence and control inflicted on the country's inhabitants. France had global economic and political ties prior to the EU. By becoming European, though, France can minimize its colonial identity. Rather than branching out to colonial outposts, it now branches to other European nations.

While France continues to align itself with Europe, Adnan bears witness to the ongoing resonances of the colonial period in Algeria and the brewing civil war in the country.¹⁰ Watching what she calls “news from the Empire,” the narrator receives updates about President Chadli Bendjedid’s decision to resign:

[He made] room for a military takeover against the Islamic parties which won handily their recent elections, because that’s also Paris’ wish. How can such a huge difference between cultures be tolerated by a dominant power? ... French women can bear to know that women in Algeria are starving, but they can’t stand the knowledge that these Algerian women say their prayers at home while their French counterparts go to mass So in the night, sitting close to my T.V. set, I see tragedy getting ready to unfold. It’s too late for phoning anybody, and what can anybody tell me which is not already told?

(8–9)

The speaker draws a direct connection between France’s colonial presence in Algeria and its current pressuring of the military to push back against popularly elected Islamic parties. She emphasizes the anticipatory nature of her text with the language of unfolding “tragedy” and things “already told,” and the hypocrisy of French women whose feminist sensibilities collaborate with neoliberal rationales to perpetuate war and conflict abroad. The moment echoes Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood’s (2002, 341, 345) analysis of American women participating in the Feminist Majority Movement to “rescue” Afghan women from the Taliban in the early 2000s:

In the crusade to liberate Afghan women from the tyranny of Taliban rule, there seemed to be no limit of the violence to which Americans were willing to subject the Afghans, women and men alike Why were conditions of war, militarization, and starvation considered to be less injurious to women than the lack of education, employment, and, most notably, in the media campaign, Western dress styles?

In both Adnan’s description of French women responding to Algerian women’s “oppression” and Hirschkind and Mahmood’s assessment of the Feminist Majority, campaigns that masquerade as concerns about women’s rights in fact reinforce the boundaries between a here and a there, an us and a them, often dictated by religious differences. These then justify continued violence and marginalization.

By contrast, Adnan’s development of affinitive relations closes some of the distance between people. Because affinity is nonhierarchical and mutual (objects or people experience affinity for one another), affinity cannot be enacted by one party onto another party (as opposed to the “liberating” that Americans provided Afghan women). While the narrator experiences contradiction related to both her geographical location in Paris and her sense of solidarity with Algerians, she advocates for an ongoing practice of affinity. She proclaims herself connected to Algeria because “I got up one morning out of a long sleep, and found myself lying next to them, engulfed by their proximity” (10). The experience of being “engulfed by proximity,” Adnan argues, is foundational for practicing transcultural affinity. By getting close to the television, by sitting in the moment of hypocrisy and tragedy,

Adnan's narrator practices the work of sitting alongside that identifies the other as inhabiting the same space and having the same agency as oneself. Her concerns and efforts here anticipate continued challenges of relating across the boundaries of the EU, challenges that were thrown into relief in the early 2010s with increasing arrivals from the Middle East and North Africa.

Implications for Current Approaches to Migration

The EU can only remain unburdened insofar as its definitions of belonging, hospitality, inclusion, and affiliation are not challenged—challenges contemporary readers have witnessed in spades in recent years as refugees seeking asylum in the EU have prompted member nations to reevaluate the Schengen Zone borders (Rankin 2016). The Union's attempts to appease its members by solidifying the zone's external border demonstrate how Middle Eastern countries continue to “drop out of the history” that the EU writes. Adnan demonstrates that expanding belonging in the EU context—even from the moment of its conception—would not be capable of encompassing a massive influx of refugees. From her perspective as an outsider—albeit a privileged one—the EU is still set up to deal with refugee crises as a nation would. Its borders extend without becoming more malleable and creative. Adnan's early observations note the hairline fractures in the system that crack once a group of newcomers challenges its inclusivity and unification.

Reading *Paris, When It's Naked* from a twenty-five-year remove—in a moment marked by unprecedented numbers of migrants and displaced persons seeking refuge globally—is in itself an exercise in futurity. Contemporary readers are encouraged to consider what a text about a privileged migrant navigating the EU's formation as an outsider but lover of Paris has to teach us about how we approach migration and belonging today. In October of 2016, for example, UK prime minister Theresa May delivered closing remarks at her Conservative Party's annual conference. In those remarks, she criticized the notion of global citizenship, presumably linking it to the EU's current refugee policies and prioritizing a return to a localized politics:

Today, too many people in positions of power behave as though they have more in common with international elites than with the people down the road, the people they employ, the people they pass on the street. But if you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what the very word citizenship means.

(qtd. in Bullen 2016)

May's comments reflect the logic that led to the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU. She showcases the country's anxieties that the poor and rural in the country are being ignored in favor of both connections abroad and attention to international refugee populations. May argues that the EU's version of a global citizenship—which it has attempted but failed to extend in the wake of increased migration from the Middle East and North Africa—evacuates citizenship of its meaning. She sees the term as

having been stretched too far and offers an ultimatum for reclaiming it: either reaffirm the citizenship of your nation or give up the benefits of citizenship altogether.

As May's rhetoric echoes through discussions about the EU's continued existence, *Paris, When It's Naked* reminds readers that citizenship need not be an either-or proposition, especially when it encounters the displaced and asylum seekers among us. In fact, the text is adamant that the "people [we] pass on the street" are often migrants themselves; many of the people May worries about ignoring are in fact migrant workers from the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia.

Anti-global rhetoric targets populations that have been forced into nomadic, global modes of belonging. Adnan's narrator is a more affluent and privileged example than most of the Syrians seeking refuge from the country's civil war, but she too has fled a war-torn country and looks to belong to spaces through a framework other than national or even international citizenship. In contrast to May, though, who sees the "citizen of the world" ignoring the people in her backyard, the narrator's globality is precisely what allows her to be a more committed resident of Paris—she can see into the dark spaces of the national history with open eyes. She becomes a "stranger more French than the French" not by rejecting her stranger-ness but by exploring what her distance allows her to see and understand (99). Because *Paris, When It's Naked* looks to articulate affinity rather than extending citizenship as the EU has done, it does not fall victim to May's slippery slope—citizenship here cannot be stretched until it has no meaning because affinity's meaning is constantly shifting and adapting so that participants hold themselves accountable to multiple people, places, and histories.

The reactionary politics emerging in the contemporary moment come from the sense that belonging can be either expanded or retracted—we either open our borders or build a wall, remain in the EU or leave it, gaze outward dreamily or tend to our own gardens. In those binary scenarios, leaders like Theresa May, Donald Trump, and Marine Le Pen choose the most exclusionary form of that decision. By contrast, and even after more than two decades of circulation, *Paris, When It's Naked* proposes an imaginatively oriented affinitive methodology. Writing like Adnan's prompts readers to see the links between narratives that borders attempt to separate, thereby realizing that Europeans, Americans, and other would-be hosts are already implicated in the forces that have displaced contemporary refugees and migrants. The text invites readers to imagine what could have happened if the Union had more willingly contended with members' colonial histories or reflected on the communities it would exclude from its formation. Would the Union now have systems in place to host refugees more effectively? There is no way to know for sure, but current political developments suggest that the EU has witnessed the rise of nationalist and exclusionary policies it sought to prevent.

Writing about the enormous challenges currently facing the EU, Giles Merritt (2016, xiii) argues that "we must acknowledge the profound structural handicaps that have developed—some through our own neglect, others through ineluctable global changes." Adnan's futurity contributes a literary, imaginative component to analyses like Merritt's, suggesting that often the sheer act of imagining possible alternative outcomes is a form of political activism and transformation. And while the text invites alternative imaginings, it itself does not seek a clear alternative to national belonging so

much as it undermines current structures' fixity. Her engagement with affinity allows her to articulate branching, sideways, and nonhierarchical relations even in the midst of her current geopolitical climate. The narrator's experiences open up a broader range of ways in which people, places, and objects might encounter each other in urban, national, or even international spaces. Creative explorations of the past remind us that history was not always destined for the outcomes we now witness. Continued imaginative acts also expand our ability to talk about and interact with the designated "Other" populations, whether they migrate or are displaced. By envisioning shared and constantly changing histories more clearly, we begin to imagine the possibilities tied to a different sort of future.

Notes

- 1 In its catalogue, Post-Apollo terms *Paris, When It's Naked* a work of poetry.
- 2 Though the couple does not collaborate directly, Adnan notes in a joint interview that "you can't really know your influences, but you can't live with a person 40 years and have no give and take" (Roffino and Tome 2014). In the same interview, Adnan and Fattal reflect on their own continually fluctuating relationships to feminism and gender identity.
- 3 For more on the Post-Apollo Press' development and its role in Etel Adnan's work, see Fattal's interview with Karl Roesler (2000).
- 4 Because I will be quoting from *Paris, When It's Naked* frequently, future in-text citations will feature only the page number.
- 5 The siege and massacre at Tal el-Zaatar took place in the summer of 1976. According to the Civil Society Knowledge Centre (2019), Christian militias killed somewhere between 1,000 and 1,500 Palestinians on the day Tal el-Zaatar fell. An additional 11,000 to 15,000 were evacuated from the camp.
- 6 It is here that Adnan's prescience fails, although the contemporary reader feels the weight of the present; the views of Aleppo that Adnan envisions are now no longer possible. The Aleppo Project traces the war's effect on the city, noting that "all six sites classified as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO have been damaged badly or completely destroyed" (Strickland 2016). The staggering statistics still pale in comparison to the loss of life and suffering as sieges and bombardments of the city continue without reliable evacuation.
- 7 The Treaty on European Union—or the Maastricht Treaty—was signed by representatives from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, and the United Kingdom (Council of the European Communities 1992).
- 8 The ECSC had six members: Belgium, West Germany, Luxembourg, France, Italy, and the Netherlands. Later incarnations of the union included the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community ("A Brief History of the EU" 2010).
- 9 Though I focus in this chapter on Adnan's anticipatory work, she is by no means the only author to engage in prophetic analysis of Europe. Milan Kundera (1984) writes that "all of this century's great Central European works of art, even up to our own day, can be understood as long meditations on the possible end of European

humanity ... a world without memory, of a world that comes after historic time.”

Before the formation of the EU, he suggests that Central European nations are most representative of the “vulnerability” that will come to define European states, and he wonders “what realm of supreme values will be capable of uniting Europe.”

- 10 *Paris, When It's Naked* was written toward the beginning of the Algerian Civil War (1991–2002). For more on women's literature that engages that war and its aftermath directly, see Daoudi (2016), Flood (2017), and Mehta (2014).

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