

**Etel Adnan's *in the Heart of the Heart of another Country* 2005: A World without Borders**

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***Introduction***

Borders have been a distinctive mark in the post-colonial world, where they are seen as “something disturbing, as something dividing and separating and as something that should be avoided or overcome” (Häntschi). According to Ashcroft, “The idea of the border is clearly crucial to post-colonial studies and manifests itself in concerns with the constructed boundaries between peoples, nations and individuals” (25). During the post-colonial era, national movements have been activated to preserve these borders in order to safeguard an identity for each nation. Yet, although Borders are always meant to protect one's identity, this view has been challenged and often rejected by most postcolonial intellectuals. As Edward Said explains:

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

For many postcolonial intellectuals, borders have a negative impact, especially in the Arab world, where borders have been imposed by imperial powers after the First World War. After this war, the only meaning of ‘border’ has become the geographical concept that envisages borders as “physical and visible lines of separation between political, social and economic spaces, often charged with nationalistic energy” (“Border Concept”). However, in post colonial writings, the definition of the concept of border has amazingly expanded to include different meanings and types. As Antonio Garcia Jiménez has rightly stated:

The concept of the border is constantly changing ... every day the types of borders increase, giving way to new meanings, or shades of meaning, of the term, thus making it kaleidoscopic ... which, in our assessment, should make us reconsider the definition of the term within parameters that are not exclusively geographical.

***Objectives***

Etel Adnan (1925- ), one of the most influential contemporary Arab American writers, has lived in a world that is shaped by different types of borders: educational, ideological, political, psychological, religious, and literary. The aim of this paper is to discuss different forms of borders in Etel Adnan's memoir, *In the Heart of the Heart of another Country*. In this memoir, Adnan finds herself faced with a complex reality in which a variety of borders separate different parts of her own self from one another. Moreover, the paper will discuss Adnan's several trials to construct a borderless world and her ability to create a surrealist picture of a borderless world where the individual self could absorb the other with its conflicts and contradictions; thus, turning into a hybrid Self; i.e., a borderless world in which there are no walls to separate people but always open windows and doors to connect with the other. As Adnan says, “The elements I'm most interested in are the void, emptiness, framed spaces, passages, I mean doors and windows. Walls usually disappear from my memory, or, if they linger, turn into wavy surfaces, moving patches of pale colors” (68).

Furthermore, the paper is going to discuss how Adnan creates this surrealist borderless world, not only through images and incidents but through the language and the genre that she chooses to write in, as well: “I moved from city to city, travelled from person to person, and then I tried to define myself through writing” (29).

Throughout her book, Adnan seeks to attain the de-colonization of the inner self by portraying an inner borderless world where one can enjoy “open doors, open seas, once in a while an open heart: dwellings” (83).

Adnan’s memoir, *In the Heart of the Heart of another Country*, reflects her obsession with the concept of borders and her continuous and consistent trials not only to cross these borders, but even to get rid of them. Hence, the book is haunted with the image of borders and wires. To Adnan, “wires” are the emblem of the borders of the modern civilization, which started with WWI, as well as the beginning of colonialism: “The thread of this century is made of wire. German camps, surrounded by wire and spikes, all over Europe and in Greece ... British wires in Egypt. Israeli wires in Palestine and on the southern border of Lebanon” (11). For Adnan, these “twisted metals” that have the power to divide nations, peoples, “cast a shadow on our bliss,” and cross our “immediate horizon”(22).

### **Border Woman**

Adnan’s memoir proves her to be a good example of “ a border woman” or of what Edward Said calls an “intellectual exile” or what she herself calls an “existential exile,” banished in a world where one cannot rest anymore, where one always misses the other country” (“Schehadeh and Gibran 13”). To Adnan, “being a border woman also implies seeing the borders as ever changing spaces that are not restricted to host power relations, but as also incorporating projects of resistance and liberation” (Orozco-Mendoza). As she declares in her memoir, Adnan “enjoyed the light that was not coming from a single source but rather diffused, that was not stopped by any object but was covering it with its gentleness” (69). To Adnan, walls and borders turn houses into prisons: “one’s house is one’s prison” (94). Walls would cause her panic; they would turn a “splendid” place “into a prison, or at least, into seclusion” (86). However, “imagination” has been her way to escape such a prison: “I can still see the walls, which are touching my shoulders. I’m nearing panic, but holding, holding my breath, and my fear. The only escape left is my imagination” (92). Adnan’s personal life, as well as her political, literary, and feminist views, reflects a woman who is able to cross borders and even to eliminate them.

### **Her life and the Concept of Border:**

Adnan’s personal life, as presented in her memoir, illustrates the idea of her being a crossing-border woman. Born in Syria, raised in Lebanon, a student of philosophy in France, and later a resident of the United States, she was destined to get used to crossing different types of borders. Moreover, as a child, Adnan was brought up in a micro universe to a Syrian Moslem father who lives in Lebanon and works for the Ottoman Army, and an Armenian Christian mother. As she once said, “I was immersed in an environment in which I was radiating my own electricity and where physical boundaries were made flexible” (69). Adnan’s concept of ‘borders’ is fundamentally based on her experience of growing up in two adjacent countries separated by geographical borders: Syria and Lebanon.

Born shortly after World War I, Adnan has had a special interest in borders. A new era began after this war where “the concept of boundaries and borders has been crucial in the imperial occupation and domination of indigenous space” (Ashcroft 25). After WWI, many Arab countries underwent dramatic social and political changes with the redefinition of existing national borders. New invented borders were drawn to divide territories which had been previously unified. According to Kenneth Madsen and Ton van Naerssen:

In the non-Western world, especially in the developing countries of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, questions of territorialization, bordering and identity construction still strongly related to the colonial past and processes of nation-building. The colonial powers often drew lines on the map crossing ethnic, religious, and language communities or larger social groups with common identities. (65)

Adnan’s hometown was not an exception. The drawn borders split the young girl and her family in Lebanon from her father’s hometown in Syria. In her article, “To Write in a Foreign Language,” Adnan reflects on how this new border drawing has changed her life: “I was born in a world totally different from the one my parents knew. The Allies had occupied the Arab East and had divided it; the French kept for themselves a region they sub-divided into Syria and Lebanon.” Living in the borderlands between Syria and Lebanon exposed Adnan and her family to many hardships they had to endure along the border. Throughout her writings, she complains about that separation fence constructed between Syria and Lebanon, which confined the movement of her family across the border. Describing her suffering as a result of that border, she says, “We took, my father and I, the Beirut-Damascus train. A twelve hour ride for seventy miles, in order to buy apples” (17).

The border fence does not just separate Syria and Lebanon geographically, but sociologically and psychologically; thus, it has affected the psychological makeup of Adnan herself. Crossing the geographical borders, one cannot claim that borders are completely erased. Adnan does not only revolt against the electrified fences and wires between countries but even more against the psychological and symbolic "wires" that separate people everywhere. The fabrics of her community add to this resentful sense towards borders. Adnan was brought up in a multilingual and multicultural community, where "almost everybody knew at least a bit of another language besides their own" ("To Write in a Foreign Language"). Brought up in an Arab community, while educated in a French-speaking one, Adnan has met throughout her life with diverse peoples, cultures, and languages that have together formed her complex psychological makeup.

In Adnan's modern wasteland, "wires have become models for all the invisible lines that separate people, nations, continents" (77). These wires imprison man and deprive him of freedom "to move, hunt, and gather" (77). In one of Adnan's meditations on wires, she explicates the human misery that lies behind these borders, which reflect man's bloody history of wars, fighting, and exclusion. Being confined by such mortifying borders, man is not different from miserable cattle and sheep:

When years later I came to California and found myself driving constantly by beautiful but fenced ranches I reacted with anguish, unable to shake off the war associated with these deadly lines of twisted metal, when at the cataclysm's end everybody and everything looked alike, the displaced, the survivors of the camps, victims and conquerors, civilians and soldiers ... a flood of misery broken loose. (28)

These heavily wired borders created by colonial powers remain a challenge to Adnan. She is yearning to see the dividing borders disappear altogether. And, indeed, this is what happens in her writings.

## **Education**

According to Adnan, it is not only politics that constructs borders between people but also educational and religious dogmas have their role in building frontiers and camps. That might explain why education is one of the recurrent subjects in the memoir. In Adnan's world, schools do not allow people to think but teach them to obey. Adnan laments this kind of education and wonders: "Why is there sadness in the idea of education? We are creating new coercive dogmas and new idols" (51). Adnan deplores the fact that this kind of damaging education is not to be seen only in the Middle East, but even in modern "prosperous countries [education] is [a] devastating power for man's free will" (78).

In Lebanon, Adnan's experience in her "French Convent" school heightened her inner conflict with borders, which is clearly reflected in her writings. She was educated in a school where French was the main language and where speaking Arabic was forbidden. For Adnan, this is the cruelest kind of segregation. It creates a huge border between those who could speak French and those who could not. Speaking French separates "a whole generation of educated boys and girls from poorer kids" who spoke only Arabic. Bitterly deploring this sad fact, Adnan says:

Arabic was equated with backwardness and shame. Years later I learned that the same thing was happening all over the French empire ... The method used to teach French to the children was in itself a kind of a psychological conditioning against which nobody objected ... Anybody heard in class or in recreation speaking Arabic was punished ... Speaking Arabic was equated with the notion of sin. ("To Write in a Foreign Language")

This brutal linguistic separation created by the colonial system of education had its negative effect on the society. Within her community, the cultural border imposed by colonial powers reflected an almost clear-cut language divide. This was particularly true of the French-Arabic divide in both Syria and Lebanon.

However, the young Adnan provides some hopeful exception to the gloomy existent reality as she adopts a more positive attitude to change than her contemporaries by constantly expressing the need to absolutely eliminate such barriers. During her university years and afterwards, Adnan manages to form her intellectual life on borders not inside them. Her continuous travel as well as her creative writings helps her to overcome barriers, to cross cultural borders, and, hence, to increase the likelihood of making bridges across languages and cultures within her own writings.

Travels and crossing borders have added to the richness of Adnan's intellectual life. She has always had a hankering desire to travel to different countries: "when a window has been opened I feel the urge to travel" (70). "My body takes over and moves like a planet on its own" (17). Adnan's experience of crossing borders continued after finishing her school education. She travelled to study philosophy at the Sorbonne, Paris, and then moved to the University of California, after which, she soon shifted to Harvard. Her travelling experience deepened her interest in other cultures, which left a strong impact on her writings. In the United States, she encountered even more cultural and intellectual differences than she saw in France. Adnan's travel to those countries was, undoubtedly, a sort of crossing borders, both geographically and intellectually. Her travelling triggered "an engagement with the other or others in a liminal space materially, psychologically, or culturally in between" (Friedman 143).

However, the least complex part of Adnan's travel was her physical crossing of borders. On the other hand, her real problem lay in the cultural and psychological borders that she had to cross. While in France, and as a way to challenge her French-oriented education, Adnan chooses "to paint in Arabic" and not to belong "to a language-oriented culture but to an open form of expression" ("To Write in a Foreign Language"). Having done that, Adnan experiences an intellectual border crossing of cultures and languages that helps her to conquer the abhorrent feelings of separation and otherness.

Moreover, Adnan's study in philosophy has had its impact on her understanding of the concept of intellectual border. Her resistance to boundaries is clear in her views of science and philosophy. She believes that borders between fields of study and branches of knowledge have to be less rigid and more permeable or better even, they should be erased altogether. Although at her school in California, scholars dealt with philosophy and poetry as completely different fields of study, Adnan does not consider them as being different. She believes that the boundaries between poetry and philosophy should not exist, and that philosophy is born from poetry. In this she is similar to Lars Iyer who states that: "Philosophy, born from poetry, discovered and lost a discontinuous way of thinking (of thinking *as* discontinuity) at the moment of its birth, at the crossing point between poetry and itself." Hence, following in the footsteps of Hölderlin and Heidegger, Adnan "considers that philosophy finds its greatest expression in poetry" ("To write in a foreign language").

### **Adnan and the feminist concept of Border**

The relationship between feminism and borders has long been emphasized by feminist writers. For example, according to *María Pilar Aquino*, "The term *borderlands* not only refers to the liminal areas that mark a divide between nations but has also become widespread metaphors for doing feminist work" (121). Adnan is one of these feminists who are against borders and who try hard to transcend them. As a feminist of border, Adnan takes into account the need felt by some third world feminists to move beyond the traditional radical feminism; on the one hand, and to get away from creating reasons of difference, on the other. As Mohanty points out, "our most expansive and inclusive visions of feminism need to be attentive to borders while learning to transcend them" (2). In addition to her experience with the physical, geographical, and linguistic borders, Adnan reveals in her memoir her profound interest in tackling the borders of gender. Her book reflects the unpleasant conditions of women in both Arab and American cultures.

As a feminist writer, Adnan does not approve of the borders imposed upon women, especially in the East. For example, implanting borders between genders in Lebanon is a product of the discriminatory, educational and social patriarchal system:

Children are taught that little boys are superior to little girls. Yes. When Hassan beats Nedjma, Nedjma is beaten by her father for having been beaten, and this, ad infinitum ... And nobody ever tells them, oh never! That a rat is as human as a cat. (8)

Adnan views Arab women as the most easily exploited ones both physically as well as sexually. Since she is a part of this Arab world, Adnan penetrates its inner dynamics and sees glaringly the revolting oppressions to which women are exposed within that culture. "Arab women form a people of their own. A poorly run secret society"(11). In her first visit to Beirut, Adnan sees only cars and men in the streets, "as for the women, there aren't any. They all consider themselves as being the other half of their men."(3). For Adnan, Arab women think themselves to be open to the universe, but they are really engulfed in the darkness of their illusion: "

They stand alone, face-to-face. The room is dark. The darkness removes the edges of the studio. So it is similar to being in the universe" (12). These women, especially the Lebanese, cherish an illusion that they have pushed open the borders that engulf them, that they are free, and open to the universe, but, unfortunately, this has nothing to do with the reality of their lives; they are merely deceiving themselves.

As Adnan's feminism tries mainly to bridge the gap between Arab men and women, she articulates her feminism in non-traditional ways and forms. Her border feminism speaks much more directly to the relations between Arab women and men. Unlike many other feminists, Adnan thinks that women, particularly in the East, need to be allowed more freedom; they need to push gender borders that make them always the "other"; yet, they are, indeed, only "poorly" trying.

However, Adnan is careful not to stereotype Arab women. She brings forth a powerful example of the Arab woman who is able to "push the borders" and unite the fragments of her world. For Adnan, Om Kalthoum, for example, represents the Arabs' "will to be." She represents the existential 'Being' of the Arabs. With Om Kalthoum, "all frustrations (are) transfigured in a kind of bliss ... She took on herself to tell the world that the Arab world existed." Om Kalthoum, for Adnan, is a good example for an existential authentic being, who is able to erase borders: "In the divisions that break a world and make it explode, she was the unity we had" (12-13).

Moreover, Adnan is aware of the imposed oppression determined by her bicultural heritages, not only the heritage of her culture of origin, but also that of the culture of the American society to which she is supposed to belong, but which treats women of an ethnic origin as though they only belong to the underestimated society of colored Americans. While she stands firmly against the oppressive control of the patriarchal Arab culture, she struggles just as passionately against the limitations and oppressions imposed by the hegemonic American culture upon women, especially those of ethnic origin. Thus, Adnan does not only criticize prejudice and unfair classification and discrimination in the East, but in the Western world as well where women have been segregated, especially if they are of an ethnic minority. "Women of color get paid less in their own countries than white slaves. All this can be easily computed, save the tears, the heartbreaks, the deterioration" (23).

According to Adnan, Western women still suffer identity confusion due to the rigid borders that people put between themselves and others. As a feminist of border, Adnan is "comfortable with new affiliations that subvert old ways of being, rejecting the homophobic, sexist, racist, imperialist, and nationalist" (Saldivar-Hull). In her book, Adnan tells us how the gendered borders between a boy and his sister in America brought about a misery for this girl so much so that the young girl chose to change her gender believing that the other gender is more powerful and more privileged; the girl's obsession with the 'other' gender ended up by her surrendering her own identity to that of the "other."

Once she was crying and beating her older brother with her fists, and he told her that if she were a boy he would have smashed her with one blow. "Then I will become one," she said'... and the former young lady became an unhappy young man. (79)

In short, Adnan's book carries the message that women need to be allowed to widely cross many culture borders - including those of class, ethnicity, and nationality. Her feminism is a global feminist vision crossing all borders and is born out of women's struggle against multiple oppressions. It is a worldwide feminism aiming at constructing "a new identity in both cultures based on a dialectical relationship of cooperation and resistance" (Allan 5).

### **Religion and the Concept of Border**

In Adnan's point of view, religious borders, too, are bases for classifying people. In an interview with Aftima Saba, Adnan complains that being a Muslim or a Christian is not a problem for her; but it is people who make a problem out of it:

I did not make out of the fact that I was born in a Muslim and Christian family a problem, and it was never a cause of personal pain. Some individuals make a lot of problems out of these realities; they may side with one side over the other. Personally I never made it a problem; it is usually the others who make it a problem. (*Aljadid* Interviews)

Adnan rejects all types of religious segregation and she is afraid that this will always bring out wars "when one expects them the least."

As she puts it: "It seems that the gods are still playing that old game of lighting fires all over the eastern Mediterranean. Lately, they took sides in the latest war in Lebanon and complicated matters enormously" (74-75).

Church, a recurrent keyword in Adnan's book, is a symbol of religious dogma which binds man's freedom: "When I see a church on every street I wonder how it will be possible to think freely here"(84). It is not the spiritual significance of the church that annoys Adnan, but the structure, the walls of the building: "If you take the altar, the candles, the pictures and the people away, you will be left with the knowledge of an unnamable disaster"(80). These dogmas are dangerous as long as they restrict man's freedom and do not serve him. In this connection, Adnan says, "since churches, mosques or synagogues don't provide shelter for the homeless I developed a dislike for them. Students of creative writing ought to write Dante, asking him to enlarge his hell and make room for these obsolete structures" (22).

Adnan's experience with religion is an experience of crossing borders and fighting segregation. Two events in Adnan's life draw her attention to the chaos that results from religious differences. The first one happened when her father was on his death-bed, the priests baptized him thinking he would not go to paradise unless he becomes one of them and ceases to be the 'other. "They baptized him in a hurry, and then they got scared. In those days the whole city of Beirut could have been burned in a religious war. So, they let his body have a Muslim funeral" (18). The second event occurred during the Lebanese Civil War when Adnan's home city, Beirut, was "burned." The Lebanese young men during the Civil War fought each other for religious reasons in what they considered as a religious war. In her book, Adnan pathetically depicts the psychological collapse of one of her friends because of this war:

At the war's beginning he was still handsome. He formed a militia and distributed roles, rifles, special assignments. Some of his men hit their targets, others died, flat on the ground, their arms open. He, my friend, went on killing, and "liberating" until all sides were defeated. He returned home, two fingers missing, living alone, not having had the time to get married, and a crucifix over his bed, a tiny kitchen behind his living room. His dying room. (34-35)

Adnan's friend's experience showed the ugly face of wars based on religious differences. For Adnan, this religious segregation can bring nothing but chaos and death for all parties. Understanding religious differences is an initial step, and people of different religions need to engage in religious dialogues in order to develop tolerance and international religious co-existence. In order to live in peace, people need to cross the dangerous border of religious differences.

### **Her Identity and the Concept of border**

According to Kenneth D. Madsen and Ton van Naerssen, "borders are an integral part of identities and, since people continuously construct their identity, they are also continuously engaged in bordering processes" (72). This is clearly applicable to Adnan. As an Arab-American, the concept of border in Adnan's writing is greatly constructed by the duality of her identity: "I am both an American and an Arab and these identities are sometimes at odds with each other, not every day, not even often, but once in a great while. I become a mountain that some terrifying earthquake has split" (Saba 71). However, unlike many Arab Americans, Adnan welcomes this kind of duality in her identity as a fertile source for poetic inspiration, which in turn is a "cleansing process." Hence, she manages to transform this dual identity into a universal one:

Do I feel exiled? Yes, I do. But it goes back so far, it lasted so long, that it became my own nature, and I can't say I suffer too often from it. There are moments when I am even happy about it. A poet is, above all, human nature at its purest. That's why a poet is as human as a cat or a cherry tree is a cherry tree. ("To write in a foreign language")

According to Adnan, all types of modern borders deceive man and implant in him a confused limited sense of identity in an animalized way. Although Adnan always feels "sorry for the caged birds"(4), she admits that humans are "animals" who cage themselves in a limited space of confused identity. For her, man's main crisis is being "caged," locked in a narrow space and limited identity. This kind of partition of man's self is impressively expressed in two of the key words in her book: "wires" and "houses." Both of them are symbols of man's imprisonment and alienation.

Moreover, one of the reasons of this identity confusion is the ensuing wars between countries. In other words, identity confusion happens when wars strengthen barbed wires that separate nations. In a postcolonial hint, and in a telling metaphor, Adnan compares barbed wires to the human DNA analysis, which if "twisted wrongly" produces confused identities: "Do countries rise from hidden forms and can it be that, when the forms are twisted wrongly, there are wars, massacres, collective hallucinations?"(46) The answer to this raised question is in the positive throughout Adnan's works. Adnan thinks that "war, which liberates and kills those it liberated, joined us forever" (Saba). The war scene is very pervasive in Adnan's writing. Adnan specifies a whole chapter in her book, "To be in a Time of War," for the American war against Iraq. In this part Adnan uses all that she can to express the chaos, meaninglessness, absurdity and imprisonment that man experiences in a world that is divided into "us" and the "other." The chapter is written in short infinitive sentences to reflect the unavoidable absurd life that man leads in time of war:

To say nothing, do nothing, mark time, to bend, to straighten up, to blame oneself, to stand, to go toward the window, to change one's mind in the process, to return to one's chair, to stand again, to go to the bathroom, to close the door, to then open the door, to go to the kitchen, to not eat or drink, to return to the table, to be bored. (99)

The sense of guilt and all other absurd actions in this scene reflect neurotic confusion, helplessness, irritability, and identity confusion; through this part, Adnan fluctuates between the two sides of the border within a very short time unable either to erase the border or to cross it.

In addition, Adnan believes that - besides being bordered, imprisoned, and classified by politics and wars - modern man lives a chaotic life trying to bind himself to a limited identity and classifies everyone else as "the other." "Ultimately, of all the betrayals, the most damaging to the mind and to the heart is the betrayal of one's self" (xvi). Adnan contemplates the complex relation between the self and the other. For Adnan, the self and the other should not be separated. In her book, she presents the other as an integrated part of the self regardless of who this other is: an enemy or a friend. For her there are no borders between the self and the other who "lives all around us and inhabits the body" (16). Sometimes, they are friends; at other times, they are enemies; yet in both cases, they exist "through" each other; they need each other; and wish the death of each other. If the other is your enemy, you still need to make a place for him "It is a very difficult situation, but I think we should do it for survival" (Saba).

This identity confusion is reflected in two accounts in Adnan's book, the first is that of Jamal Naufal, who meets his "double" in the Arabian Desert; Jamal meets another Jamal Naufal, who looks just like him, has the same date of birth, works with the same company and has even reserved the same hotel room; however, they are scared of each other: "they avoided looking at each other, each fearing to turn into some sort of a mirror facing a mirror" (88). Each of them is afraid to admit that the other Jamal is not really "the other;" each of them has "acute awareness" of his identity. The second account is that of Charles. Charles; too, has an identity confusion, but of a different sort. He does not like his name so he keeps changing it several times; these changes makes him unable to fit in: "When people started addressing him in Greek, he felt embarrassed; he couldn't go to Russia for a similar reason. He also thought that the United States was big enough in which to disappear" (45). Yet, he does not like it when people look at him as an immigrant (not as an American). However, his identity confusion gets worse when people confuse him for his German-American neighbor who has just immigrated to the United States and has the same "American" name, Charles. This identity confusion never left Charles even after his death; in order to give him some kind of identity, all the names that he chose for himself were written on his grave: "Here lies Ludwig Vassili Peter Charles Gregory-Smith. "The Gregory-Smiths had come from Uptown, Delaware. Our man was the only one of that name who had ever reached California" (46).

In spite of their different nationalities, both Jamal Naufal from the East and Charles from the West face the same identity confusion because they cannot understand that there are no real boundaries between the self and the other. They insist on constructing defined borders between themselves and the others. According to Adnan, "an acute awareness of oneself is not always a blessing" (42). What Jamal and Charles need to do is: "to go into the other and see that the other is really us. If you have an enemy, and you are so obsessed by it, that enemy will occupy your head. It becomes you. It is a difficult situation" (Saba). Adnan believes that if we do not make the borders between ourselves and the other flexible enough, we will end up surrendering ourselves and our identities to this other.

Throughout Adnan's book, the borders between the self and the other are so flexible that sometimes the first person pronoun "I" does not necessarily refer to Adnan or even to someone who is recognizable to the reader; only Adnan herself may know who is talking. The reader may go through the second part of the book "twenty five years later," believing that the speaker is Adnan herself until she surprises us: "the person who was talking in the previous section has been committed to a mental institution" (26). Later on in the book, Adnan, under the subtitle of "The First Person," explains the relation between the self and the other:

Is she another person? That enemy of mine has no face, no name, no being. Not even some shadow. But it is the ultimate presence. When I go to the kitchen I go through it, with much difficulty. Then it inhabits my chest. Then it becomes the first person. I mean "I." "I" follows the wind and the rain with anger. "I" knows what it means to be an Arab: proud, with no reason, humiliated, with no reason. The first person is a monkey who moved about San Francisco, Paris, Marrakesh and Bahrain. (17)

Part Four of Adnan's book "At Both Ends" is a good manifestation of Adnan's trial to move between the "self" and the "other." This part, unlike previous ones, does not have subtitles and it goes round one idea: the complex relationship between the self and the other. For example, E.T. Lawrence or Lawrence of Arabia, being at once a friend and an enemy to the Arabs, reflects this complex relationship and the borders that surround one's identity. Adding to this complexity, Adnan starts this part of her book identifying herself with the other: "When in the vast eastern Syrian Desert I found a mirror, I picked it up and read in it Lawrence's face; then the sky passed over, followed by a hot light" (55).

Adnan explores this complex relation between the self and the other from all its sides; a relation that is responsible for creating the modern man's sense of exile and loneliness. In her inner realm, there is no border and, hence, no conflict between the self and the other; they live together peacefully. In times of peace, the inner realm dominates, erasing the borders of the outer realm and opening space, and "dreams have the power to extend space and make me live in the greatest mansions"(2). In this spacious borderless world, there is one identity that encompasses the self and the other, and all the contradictions live together peacefully: "My enemy is Zamil. His name can also mean that he is a friend"(16). This imaginary borderless world inside Adnan results in an inner peace which is attainable only in moments of freedom, which turns the borders into "drawings:" But then, at unexpected moments, when the mind is free of associations, when one's gaze runs into some electric lines on which birds take a rest, or wires become clotheslines, or simply drawings; they can be writings" (28).

Nevertheless, in other times of stress, wars and betrayals, when "there is ... nowhere to escape to and start an anonymous life, we go inward, of course, but there one feels that the "outside" world is contagious." The outer world reigns with its borders, imprisonment, and alienation. The outer realm for Adnan is really close to Eliot's waste land with all kinds of tormented souls, where "spring is deadly, like red roses" and "Beirut is a special kind of a wasteland" (87). Even Love in such a world is cruel and is always attached to betrayals: "People are here to betray. There's a person who loved me to death, not to my death or hers, but to the death of a person I loved"(40). The reader comes across several love relationships, but none of them is a successful one. There is always something that separates the lovers, either visible or invisible.

The lovers in Adnan's book are all Orpheus, who is lost in a one-way trip where the labyrinth was sucking him in. He went on making music. The music was wailing. He was begging God to help him. He heard no answer, he gave up praying. He felt utter loneliness. He played a tune from Gluck's "Orpheus ..." and called "Eurydice! Eurydice!" The walls trembled and the sound's echo was drowning his mind. He entered a realm of no-return, a passage to nowhere. (96)

Through this journey, Adnan, herself, is Orpheus, who is "searching for love." Behind man's incapability of achieving love are the borders and the limited space in which he imprisons himself. In her quest Adnan removes the borders between two worlds: the actual world with its "waste land" scenery, and the inner imaginative world which is open, spacious and unlimited.

### **Adnan's Literary Concept of Border**

*In the Heart of the Heart of another Country* is a book that seems not to be bound by any rules. To Adnan, "any written page looks like a grid, the side of a cage, a screen: lines easily become wires, barbed wires keeping thoughts from overflowing, keeping inmates from escaping" (34). *In the Heart of the Heart of another Country* is different; it reflects an aspiration to cross all types of borders.

Hence, it cannot be categorized as corresponding to a specific genre. It has been classified as a memoir, a collection of essays about war, and a collection of poetry. Adnan wrote her book in prose-poetry; a new genre that breaks borders and all restrictions. By choosing to write in prose-poetry, Adnan is able to penetrate the philosophical meaning of cultural and literary borders and is eventually able to cross them. The memoir has often been read as a post-modern text that mixes poetry, autobiography, and history. One can easily use Sonia Saldivar-Hull's words to describe Adnan's book as one that "resists genre boundaries as well as geopolitical borders" (211).

From the cover picture of the book, one can notice Adnan's fascination with windows and doors, and her simultaneous fear of walls and wires. In the picture, the reader can identify that there are a backyard with broken doors, broken glass windows, light and shade, but there are not any walls. Walls are symbols of the imprisonment of Orpheus, being lost in the alleys by their endlessness that affected his sense of orientation: "I can still see the walls, which are touching my shoulders. I'm nearing panic but holding, holding my breath, and my fear. The only escape left is my imagination, and it is catching fire" (92).

In addition to the cover picture, the structure of the book reflects a desire for freedom and liberation. Though this book was meant to be a memoir, it turned to be a piece of surrealist automatic writing about miscellaneous, seemingly disconnected topics such as: "Place, Weather," "My House," "People," "Politics," "Education," "Wires," "the Church," "My Cat," "Business," "Apples," "Vital Data," "More Vital data," "A Person," "That Same Person," and "Another Person."

The impact of Adnan's multifaceted identity on the concept of border is clear in her memoir, which comes to be different from the traditional Arab memoir that used to be didactic, informing, or historical. Rather, Adnan's memoir achieves what Evelyn Accad calls for in the field of biographical writing, a "symbolic or intellectualized level," thereby transcending the manifest content of the narrative" (156-57). It has a transcending power that turns the autobiography to a border-crossing memoir and to be not simply a narration of the history of Lebanon, California, or the Arab world, but it goes deeper to ponder a history of the human self in the modern age: a definition of the self and the other; and a philosophy of wholesome being. Adnan's memoir is a piece of surrealist art that reflects a constant search for the self in a world fragmented by borders.

Adnan's journey, like Khalil Gibran's, is an existential one in which she is creating her own world out of what she calls "a kind of a waste land" world (87). Like Khalil Gibran, Adnan finds her resort in a mystic imagination which opens vast vistas in front of her, removes borders, and turns walls into "invisible waves:" "He entered the old quarter of Sidon, its mile of alleys. Walls were turned into waves because his imagination was on fire" (95). As an existential exile, she does not want to be bound in a limited space, time, or even identity. Adnan does not welcome ends, of space, of time, or of identity. She chooses to be free.

Through a mixture of history and personal narrative, Adnan allows the reader a clear view into a life of an Arab American woman who crosses all borders, creating a third space. Adnan overcomes physical borders by creating the sensation of an imaginary world without barriers, which could be described as a "place of contradictions," a "third country," a mediator, a third term, a liminal space of in-betweenness, and a hybrid place.<sup>1</sup> In her inner realm when she enjoys a moment of freedom when the borders of the world turn into invisible lines between waves, she becomes able to "go from country to country and each time, the earth, under my feet, becomes an ocean"(10).

## **Conclusion**

Throughout her memoir, Etel Adnan is able to cross several borders, whether within herself or between the self and the others. She is able to cross a number of borders as a writer, as an individual, as a feminist, as an Arab American, as a Muslim who has a Muslim father and Christian mother, and as a politician who is constantly moving between the Middle East, Europe and America. Her memoir is full of numerous imaginary migrations and of borders that are constantly crossed. She tries to fight against, and whenever possible to erase, all kinds of borders that have been imposed upon man by education, religion, politics, and traditions. "We need schools without walls. We need to be a nation of swimmers. We need the end of nations. The end of ends" (8).

In Adnan's borderless world, people are multiculturally sensitive. They are able to participate vicariously in different ways of life, and they are liberated from the narrow confines of their own particular selves. Adnan believes that people should live in a wider world of numerous but interconnected cultures in which people and ideas cross national borders. She believes that in order to live in this borderless world, people need to be flexible and multi-dimensional and to understand and connect with other cultures and the diverse world that shapes their own lives directly or indirectly. Adnan wants to bring down all the walls and borders that separate people and to unite them under the banner of a larger identity, that is under the banner of humanity at large. To borrow Gloria Anzaldua's apt words, throughout her memoir, Adnan is able to "juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode- nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (79)

Adnan's memoir is, in short, a border crossing experience engulfing all the cultures and educations that Adnan has ever experienced and gone through. In her book, she journeys through a kind of post-colonial "waste land," in which there are borders that separate human beings into isolated fragments: Arab or American, man or woman, Muslim or Christian, rich or poor.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This metaphor of Adnan's borderless world is conceptualized in Homi Bhabha's idea of hybridity and "the Third Space":

The theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity ... And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the other of our selves. (38-39)

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