Book Section:
Delatolla, A. (2024) Poetry as a Queer Epistemological Method: Disrupting Knowledge of the Lebanese Civil War With Etel Adnan's the Arab Apocalypse. In: Hagen, J. J., Ritholtz, S. and Delatolla, A., (eds.) Queer Conflict Research: New Approaches to the Study of Political Violence. Gender, Sexuality and Global Politics. Bristol University Press, Bristol, UK, pp. 107-127. ISBN: 978-1-5292-2504-4.

https://doi.org/10.51952/9781529225075.ch005

Chapter Five: Poetry as a Queer Epistemological Method: Disrupting Knowledge of the Lebanese Civil War with Etel Adnan's The Arab Apocalypse

Andrew Delatolla

Introduction

Poetry, and literature more generally, is increasingly used in the disciplines of International Relations and Political Science as a subject of study to understand political and social issues (Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975; Hunt and Sands, 2000; Bleiker, 2001; Doucet, 2005; Grayson, 2013). As discussed in this chapter, poetry and literature can also act as a queer methodological tool to intervene, question, reinterpret, and transform how we think about issues and, in particular, conflict and war. In doing so, poetry can be destabilising for established social scientific categories, long-held assumptions about conflict, war, and even political violence. In this chapter, I use Etel Adnan's *The Arab Apocalypse*,[1] an epic poem written about the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) as a queer epistemological method to disrupt our understanding of the war. This poem was chosen due to its explicit discussion of the Lebanese Civil War, and its importance in the vast oeuvre of literature on the specific conflict. *The Arab Apocalypse* provides a queer epistemologically derived critique and disruption of general and normative assumptions of the Lebanese Civil War; putting forward a critique of how we *know* conflict, war, and political violence and how we study it.

Arts and literature, and in the case of this chapter, poetry, capture a more complete narrative of the Lebanese Civil War, in a manner that can more successfully explore its contradictions, revealing queer logics of conflict. Adnan's poem, *The Arab Apocalypse*, with its complex and tangled explanations of the conflict, its evolution and development, and its conclusion avoids the traps of orientalist and romanticised narratives and categories that facilitate much of the academic research on the Lebanese Civil War. That being said, the analysis of the *The Arab Apocalypse* that is developed in this chapter is not an inalienable truth. Instead, as Thom Donovan (2010) argues: 'any hopes one might have of achieving mastery over the language of [*The Arab Apocalypse*] is completely challenged. One can only fail and produce the best possible outcome in this failure. Interpretation is not enough. No explanation either'. While the

[1] Etel Adnan (1925-2021) was an activist, writer, poet, and artist who identified as a lesbian. Etel Adnan's biography, written by Kaelen Wilson-Goldie was published in 2018. The poem was largely a response to the Tel al-Zataar siege and massacre, home to around 30,000 Palestinian refugees and committed by Christian forces, lasting 59days and subsequently mimicked by Adnan in the structure of the poem into 59 stanzas (Adnan in *Middle East Report*, 1989; Plum 2020, 2-3).

academic scholarship on the Lebanese Civil War has covered different and compelling explanations for its outbreak, its prolongation, and conclusion, these different accounts have been produced within standard or normative (white [Western] hetero-masculinist) epistemic methodological practices in the social sciences and humanities. In other words, and as Charles Tilly notes, 'social science's strongest insights do not take the form of stories and often undermine the stories people tell' (2002, 26).

Building on feminist scholarship that unsettles what counts as 'real' knowledge,[2] I argue that the use of arts and literature, and specifically affective poetry, can provide the enduring first-hand accounts that not only challenge, but *queers*, the foundations of social scientific methods, methodology, and knowledge. Here, queering is disruptive of white (Western) hetero-masculinist linear logics of temporality, cause and effect, and is generative of novel ways of thinking. Art and literature often do not function within the bounded categories and classifications that the social sciences rely on to make sense of the world. Instead, they are reflective and reflexive, expounded from experience that provides insight into a particular positionality. By reading *The Arab Apocalypse* as a method, I argue that Adnan's queer feminist epistemic engagement with the Lebanese Civil War provides a unique positionality that disrupts linearity, temporality,[3] and draws attention to trauma[4] as a way to understand conflict.

The aim of this chapter is to show how literature and the arts can be used as source material for social science research, how it can expose queer logics that disrupt existing narratives of conflict, and how this can help formulate new ways of understanding conflict and political violence. The following section introduces *The Arab Apocalypse* in relation to the Lebanese Civil War. Here, I provide a guide to how I have read, understood, and unpacked the poem. What follows is a queer reading of the poem, where I focus on the problems of linearity and temporality in discussions of conflict and how understanding trauma can serve as a framing

[2] Simone de Beauvoir argued that the 'representation of the world as the world itself is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view that is their own and that they confound with the absolute truth' (2010, 166).

[3] Linearity is questioned and explored by scholars including Kimberly Hutchings (2008), who explores how ideas of time are based in Western political thought, which determines what we can and cannot know about politics, and Siba Grovogui (2016), who argues that temporal linearity is a product of empire. Grovogui's argument highlights the Western centric framing of termporality and Adnan's obfuscation of temporal linearity.

[4] Borrowing from Karin Fierke (2004) trauma is understood as 'a 'dislocation' accompanied by an inability to mourn or speak of the trauma' where trauma in relation to conflict is 'more difficult to come to terms with because the pain is a byproduct of intentional action' at which point, trauma becomes isolated 'to another level of experience […] the political, where [it becomes] part of the mobilisation of group solipsism' (472, 476, 490).

mechanism to better understand conflict. First, it considers the contradictions of reality – the normalcy of daily life and the abnormality of conflict which blend to produce new realities that quickly become the new familiar. In doing so, it questions the temporal rationalisation of peace and conflict: when does peace conclude and war begin and end? The following section examines how trauma is a motivating and mobilising force that provides insight into decision making and also challenges long-held assumptions about the Lebanese Civil War and Lebanese society.

Disrupting Knowledge: A Guide to How I have Read *The Arab Apocalypse*

This chapter builds on existing critiques of knowledge production and our 'will to knowledge'. It began from critiques of common methods used in the social sciences and how they are, in the first instance, epistemologically produced in relation to whiteness, masculinity and heterosexuality (Weber, 2016, 18-71). And, relatedly, have their origins in imperialism and colonialism (Quijano 2000; Grosfoguel 2010; 2013). The knowledge generated from these positions are produced in relation to epistemic methodological traditions considered to be 'normal' or 'standard' in the social sciences; reflecting the 'normal' or 'standard' bodies of those engaged in knowledge production. In other words, this knowledge is generated by white (Western) and hetero-masculine bodies, traditionally for white (Western) and hetero-masculine bodies. Although we can argue that academic knowledge production has become more diverse since the mid-twentieth century, the *disciplining* nature of academic knowledge production asks diverse bodies with diverse experiences, from which their knowledge of the world is produced, to abandon or suspend these epistemic logics in order to orientate themselves towards 'normal' or 'standard' positions.

The critique of 'normal' or 'standard' positions of knowledge production builds on the arguments made by Cynthia Weber's intervention in *Queer International Relations*. As such, this article follows from existing arguments that the logical form of inquiry generally applied to the social world, in an effort to create a better understanding, is embedded in historic structures of white (Western) hetero-masculinity (Quijano, 2007; Escobar, 2007; Schiwy, 2007; Mignolo, 2007; Morgan, 2018). Although the social sciences have consistently attempted to position social scientific inquiry and study as objective (Code 1991, 2013), this sense of objectivity, as argued here is, first, epistemic of a particular (white) hetero-male positionality and therefore not objective at all. Second, and following from the first point, it has produced limitations on our understanding of the social world and politics, war and conflict, specifically.

With regards to the first point, it can be argued that the positionality of the researcher (race, gender, sexuality, class, education etc.), mobilises their preferences on how to engage in social scientific inquiry, and the kinds of puzzles, problems, or questions that they find of interest. By following the logics of normative social scientific methodology and training, there exists a coloniality of knowledge that sways between romanticisation and orientalism (Hoagland, 2020). In the case of Lebanon, from the romanticised evocation of Beirut as the 'Paris of the Middle East' to the orientalist gaze that views the country as 'Hezbollahstan' (Stephens, 2008), both are drawn from a coloniality of knowledge with its histories located in Western imperialism and colonialism.[5] This history has methodological foundations in logics of whiteness and hetero-masculinity: where knowledge is held and created by the white/Western educated researcher who engages in an intellectual paternalism; shaping the kinds of knowledge and logics that are considered acceptable. Third, and of particular interest to this article, the normative standard and accepted methods and methodologies in the social sciences produce limitations by attempting to weed-out the messiness of reality in an aim to rationalise the irrationality of politics.

Where rationality maps onto the bifurcated knowledge systems of the masculine and feminine (ie. binary hierarchical assumptions such as strong and the weak) as well as the homosexual and the heterosexual (the perverse and the normal), a queer episteme is one that accepts the possibilities of the 'and/or': the multiple categorisations and characterisations of existence that are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Weber, 2016, 41). Adnan's positionality concerning sexuality, as a feminist queer author and artist, is reflected in her work, where – as discussed in the sections below – the queerness of reality is prioritised over its simplified 'objective truths'. To better understand Adnan's positionality, I have engaged with her other writing and interviews. This has helped me understand her politics, her relationship to the world and the logic it produces.

Highlighting her attention to sexuality and gender as organising social structures, what can be called her queer and feminist sensibilities, Adnan, in an interview with Kathleen Weaver for *Poetry Flash* (1986), notes how 'men identify themselves through their sexuality. They identify

[5] The politics of citation are important here: on the one hand these critiques require citation. However, citing scholarship that is extractive and engaged in racist tropes only advances the professional visibility of those authors by first, encouraging them to continue on this research track, and second, providing them with favourable data that will help them win research funding, grants, and academic positions.

someone else through their sexuality.'[6] For the male heterosexual, understanding the self and the world is productive of binary genders (masculine and feminine: the strong and the weak, the public and the private) and sexualities (heterosexual and homosexual: the normal and the perverse, the (re)production of social power structures and the threat to those structures). From this position, sexuality is an episteme that helps us understand ourselves and the world.

Notably, throughout the conversation with Weaver, Adnan critiques male heterosexuality as the standard of normalcy, and highlights how masculinist sexual virility is concerned with power. Here, Adnan reflects on the writing of French author, André Gide, known as a symbolist, for his critiques of empire, and his writing on sexuality. According to Adnan, Gide's 'in praise of sensuality' was a symbol of anti-masculine decadence that was evidence, according to right-wing Catholics, for why France lost World War II. A decadence that was considered *irrational*[7] and embodied by Gide's progressive, as well as problematic, position on sexuality and sensuality. According to the right-wing Catholic French logic, Gide's decadence was a failure of male heterosexuality, which was evident of an effeminacy that did not match his biological sex. Although not completely in the category of 'perversion', Gide did not wholly occupy the category of 'normal' either. Rather, his position can be understood as 'queer'.

Analysing and referencing Gide's story, Adnan argues that the logic behind French conservative Catholic positions meant that the masculinist failure caused by decadence could be avoided with the repression of human expression, the latter being a basis for masculinity and masculine sexual virility. The repression of human expression, as foundational to masculinist sexual virility, results in an untethered violence characterised by power and domination (Waever, 1986). Here, two aspects become evident. First, that masculine positionalities reinforce a linear and binary logic to understand the world; one that perpetuates power dynamics, domination, and hierarchies. Second, despite the thrust of conflict, war, and violence being associated with masculinist positions, a queer feminist episteme allows us to understand how conflict produces knowledge that exists in contradicting and multiple realities. That *irrational* realities do not have to be *rationalised*. Adnan gets to this position, arguably, from her own experience of failure: failure to embody the socio-cultural variant of hetero-

[6] An argument that comes through clearly in Patricio Simonetto's chapter in this volume.

[7] Irrational is italicised because it is only irrational so far as we hold hetero-masculine epistemes to be rational.

femininity that engages in the normative heterosexed world and its embedded logics. Here, I use Adnan's poetry to expose the queer logics that emerge from her positionality.

Adnan's engagement and writing on the Civil War, particularly in reference to her understanding of *apocalypses*, discussed below, reflects the experiential subjugation of violence, its production in relation to daily life.[8] However, her writing does not exist in a space of pacifist ideological framings. Rather, it offers a critique to the dominant narratives of this specific conflict, especially those which are uncontroversially reproduced in the scholarship on the Lebanese Civil War. These dominant narratives speak of sectarianism, third-party involvement, and of hetero-masculinist desire, which mobilises actors towards power. At times, these histories refer to the War as being a conflict of 'outsiders' (Tuéni, 1982), absolving Lebanese nationals involved in bringing the country to fifteen years of violent conflict. These narratives often blame the Palestinians for their reckless behaviour as refugees, the Syrians and Israelis for their physical occupation of the country (Badran, 2009), the French for establishing a flawed system of governance, and the Arab and Syrian nationalists for wanting to absorb Lebanon into a greater Syrian state – dissolving Lebanon of its distinct (Christian) character (Zamir, 1978).[9] In parallel, the Lebanese Civil War is also discussed as a conflict made entirely by its own population, a war of Muslims against Christians (O'Ballance, 1998, 12) – the modern continuation of the Muslim conquests and Christian crusades, a conflict over the national identity of the state, and a power grab when the state was at its weakest. The extremities of these narratives are dubious, serving political and ideological trends and offering simplified versions of history that dominate the realities of those who have lived through the conflict. In common with one another, the conclusions drawn are often developed from a normal epistemic position that is methodologically white (Western) and masculine; overshadowing the diverse experience of conflict or harnessing that experience for a specific ends.

This begs the question, although beyond the scope of the chapter, what does *queer desire* motivate individuals toward, if not power? Arguably, queer desire disrupts patterns of 'normal' and 'universal' relations as an emancipatory practice from the repressive practices of

[8] Other poets who have engaged in a similar fashion include Warsan Shire and her poem *Home*; Maram al-Masri's collection of poems 'Liberty Walks Naked'.

[9] Meir Zamir writes that Emile Eddé wanted to secure Lebanon's distinct Christian character, an ideological and imperial racist construction of Lebanon that has persisted from 1860 until the contemporary period (see Delatolla 2021).

masculinist sexual virility, but to what end? Here, thinking through the notion of queer desire requires analysis that moves away from a masculinist epistemic framing of politics and conflict, understood as a desire for power, and towards a queer epistemic project, one that possibly does not have a goal.

Engaging this queer epistemic project and reflecting on the lived realities and politics of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), *The Arab Apocalypse* offers a reflexive engagement. Adnan does not rehearse the standard, often depersonalised, framings and linear narratives of conflict and power. Instead, Adnan reflects on her experience of living the conflict, positioning the reader of the poem in the streets of Beirut where daily life became enmeshed in the violence of gunfights and shelling. By reading and re-reading the poem in this way, Adnan's positionality, how she experienced the conflict, and her understanding of the conflict becomes increasingly evident. In this retelling of the Lebanese Civil War, Adnan does not play on long held tropes of resilience, she encapsulates feelings of alienation experienced by conflict and the continuation and banality of everyday life that has been pockmarked by decisions of others. In using this epic poem as a means to understand the Lebanese Civil War, an alternative space of knowledge is provided, one that challenges accepted methods and methodologies, providing a queer feminist epistemological methodology, that dispels the necessity of linearity and objectivity to reveal another kind of truth.

The Arab Apocalypse not only avoids the extractive, generalised, romanticised, and orientalist constructions of Lebanon and the Lebanese Civil War, but crucially, brings the story of the civil war back to an epistemological position that is personal. To read *The Arab Apocalypse* is like being transported to Adnan's positionality. Whether intentional or not, her relationship to the environment of conflict is a feminist position that is reflective and reflexive (England, 1994; Rose, 1997; Hemmings, 2012). Here, the epistemological position of white (Western) hetero-masculinity that emphasises 'objectivity' and depersonalisation is not accentuated. Instead, Adnan holds the proverbial hand of the reader, inviting them to a specific place and time, one that existed in her memory.

Etel Adnan's *The Arab Apocalypse* offers a queer feminist understanding of conflict, and specifically the Lebanese Civil War by disrupting the linearity and causality imposed by 'scientific' thinking. There are no dates, no time stamps, and the 'events' that are discussed are entangled with one another, creating a temporal elasticity where the days blur together during

conflict. While the logic of time is transformed, the conflict is marked by trauma and what Adnan refers to as 'apocalypses'. This acts to reinforce the positionality of the storyteller, in this case Adnan, one that is reflexive and does not emphasise temporal linearity as equivalent to truth by its objective measurement. By forcing the reader to consider the affective positionality of the individual who has experienced the conflict, the corrective lens that is normatively asked for in the social sciences is abandoned. Instead, a reflexive immersion into an individual's memory and experience of conflict, unmediated by methodological purity, reveals the distortions of time, the blurring and obscuring of party divisions, the feeling of loss through destruction, and a helplessness to control one's own mortality. In doing so, the reader embodies Adnan's positionality; a practice that is foreign to the social scientific researcher who seeks objective truth when such objectivity can only be found by tallying the names of the dead, the missing, and the disappeared. Even when engaging in such practices of quantification, these truths are always incomplete.

By reading *The Arab Apocalypse* as a method to derive alternative epistemic knowledge, as well as a critique of normal and standard social scientific methodology, new avenues towards comprehension are produced. This is not necessarily a knowledge generating programme, as the knowledge already always exists in documentary forms like *The Arab Apocalypse*. It is, however, a way to engage in research that does not attempt to separate trauma from experience and extract "facts" in the pursuit of knowledge. Explored in the below sections of this chapter is an analysis of how Adnan provides a layered narrative of conflict, one that is an epistemically queer feminist method to understand conflict and, specifically, the Lebanese Civil War.

Adnan layers the narrative of conflict, reflecting a lived experience that embeds her positionality and trauma into the events by using different methods. First by tying the experience of conflict into daily life, exposing its emergence from the positionality of an individual bystander of the politics, militias that engulfed her life. Her submergence into the conflict, however, transformed her from bystander to witness, shrouded with guilt for being unable to stop the actions of others, producing feelings of culpability. What some may call survivors guilt. Here, she is not a researcher writing history, reading history, or trying to find answers in a conclusion. Adnan traces the forceful continuity of daily life as well as its changes, the interruptions, and the events that cannot be disrupted. Second, Adnan punctuates her writing with signs and symbols, what she has described as 'excess of emotions […] I wrote by hand, and here and there, I put a word, and I made instinctively a little drawing, a sign… Maybe

it is because I see these apocalypses… because my first thought is always explosive. It is not cumulative' (Ulrich, 2014). This relationship between memory, experience, and emotion in relation to the conflict, and the inability to engage in cumulation, arguably, speaks to a kind of queer methodology to conflict that allows blind-spots, wilfully created or subconsciously developed, to exist without correction and without reference to a historical timeline, causality, or rationality. In doing so, it understands conflict as being irrational and filled with contradictions; facilitating a conception of conflict as an event that cannot be rationalised by a will to knowledge or methodological engagement.

Queering Linearity and Temporality: Tensions between War and Peace

The social sciences emphasise the importance of linearity and temporality to discuss events, case studies, and attempt to evidence causation. While I do not argue that this is necessarily a problem, the significance of linearity and temporality in social science methodology emerges from a need for objectivity and the reliance on fact to help fill gaps in knowledge. Yet, in the case of conflict, war, and political violence, the experience of linearity and temporality is often subjective and the gaps in knowledge are filled with emotional responses. Here, knowledge is produced from the non-linear experience, what can be understood as a queer epistemology. Discussed in this section is an intervention in temporal linearity and its abstracted reality in the context of conflict and war.

Adnan begins *The Arab Apocalypse* with what reads as the banal passing of the day. In a style and manner reflective of the works of Gertrude Stein, the repetition, or what Stein refers to as 'beginning again and again' (Springer, 1991, 193), of the sun and the ordinary scenes of life in Beirut fill the first four pages. Here, Adnan sets the scene, a day goes by, and another day, the sun rises, it takes on different hues, it produces different light, it is yellow, green, red, and blue; each repetition is a new 'beginning again and again'. The division of daily life, marked by the sun's appearance, references a division of time that later wanes as the conflict unfolds.

Figure 1

Etel Adnan, from *The Arab Apocalypse* (The Post-Apollo Press, 1989), p. 7. Reprinted with permission of The Estate of Etel Adnan and The Post-Apollo Press.

As the first four pages end, the reader begins to understand the universality of the sun, of daily life under the sun, regardless of traditions and culture. While the sun is universal, it is not experienced in a uniform manner. It appears everywhere but is not the same everywhere that it appears. Yet, the sun always marks a new day; it sees off the moon; it oversees the heat it produces, the life it gives, and takes away; and it is a reminder that the days continue. Here, a linear experience of time can be traced, where the days are similar but distinct, there is a new different beginning.

Unlike Stein's poetry, however, Adnan's use of punctuations, small drawings, that interrupt her writing, cause literal pause. It can be imagined that these apocalypses, as Adnan describes them, bring her world to a stop. Here, in reference to the sun, it is evocative of a moment of pause, perhaps emerging from a dimly lit interior to the raucous city streets, looking up at the sky and allowing for a moment for the body and mind to adjust to the new environment. A small explosion of bliss and exaltation before the day continues. While the effect that these pages serve to remind the reader of the everyday lives that were lived before the conflict, allowing the reader to position themselves in relation to Adnan, almost as if the reader can occupy the same experience, they also provide a reminder of the stretchiness of time, the gaps that are naturally produced throughout and the day, and the not always linear experience of life.

While the focus on the sun in the first pages of *The Arab Apocalypse* represents the banality of everyday life prior to conflict, the importance of the sun is not to be diminished. Referencing *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the sun-god, Shamash, has given people the 'power […] to bind and to loose, to be the darkness and light of mankind' (Sandars, 1964, 115). It is accepted that Shamash, the sun, sees it all, allowing humans to make decisions, even those that sun does not like. In the case of Adnan's writing, the Arab is no more and no less than a subject of the sun, much like Gilgamesh understood his inferior position in relation to Shamash, whose power was all encompassing. Similar to how the sun follows Adnan through her daily routines before the eruption of conflict, it continues to do so during the conflict. However, with the conflict, her relationship to the sun changes. Where the banality of the everyday disappears, the sun, much like everything else, becomes an active participant in the conflict, as Shamash does in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Following from this position, Adnan writes, 'O sun which tortures the Arab's eye in the Enemy's prison!' and continues by highlighting how the passing of time and trauma are held together, with trauma obscuring temporality.

A simple reading of these pages in relation to the rest of the poem is that the repetition of daily life evokes a sense that life goes on. Yet, this sentiment is limited by questioning whose life goes on and the kinds of traumas that occur that disable a sense of daily life, provoking an experience where time expands and contracts, the days become blurred, and, in the moment of these apocalypses, stops altogether. Adnan's reflection on her reality provokes a contradiction to how we discuss conflict, where the experience of conflict can diverge from exact timelines. This is evident later in her writing when the appearance of the sun, its announcement as a prelude to the new day, is staggered by the events being described.

Figure 2

Etel Adnan, from *The Arab Apocalypse* (The Post-Apollo Press, 1989), p. 10. Reprinted with permission of The Estate of Etel Adnan and The Post-Apollo Press.

As the tone is initially set in the first pages of *The Arab Apocalypse*, it quickly begins to explore the unfolding of the conflict. Often discussed as the trigger of the Civil War, the 1975 Bus Massacre, is referred to as 'the non-event'. Here, Adnan is referring to Phalangist[10] gunmen who killed 27 Palestinian refugees in the Ayn al-Rummunah district of Beirut. The event is often viewed as a consequence of an attack on a church congregation in East Beirut where Phalangist party members, Joseph Abu Assi, Antoine Husseini, Dib Assaf, Selman Ibrahim Abou were killed. Yet, by referring to this as 'The night of the non-event' (Adnan, 1989, III, 11), Adnan provides an antithesis of how the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War is normally described.

Adnan's positioning of these developments as a non-event also forces the reader to consider other events, possibly more important events over a longer timeline, that have contributed to the development of the Lebanese Civil War. In other words, by discussing it as a non-event Adnan's perspective challenges the periodization of the conflict. In the first instance, from Adnan's position, the event did not present itself as an environmental shift in the country. In the second instance, she implicitly references the longer history of Lebanese, Levantine, and Arab politics and society; requiring the reader to re-engage with the political and social context

[10] The Phalange (Kataeb) are an ultra-nationalist Christian Lebanese political party and were a prominent paramilitary organisation.

and history. For example, revisiting this history of conflict can reference forms of state making and nation building by the French throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the establishment of the state of Israel and the Palestinian Nakba in 1948; the 1958 crisis; and the politics concerning the collapse of Intra Bank in 1966; without ever mentioning these events. This disrupts the 'starting point' of the Lebanese Civil War as a rational periodization of the start of the Lebanese Civil War, often discussed as 13 April 1975.

By challenging the starting point of the Lebanese Civil War, Adnan presents a conundrum for researchers engaged in normative methodological practices. Specifically, she presents a narrative where the accepted *cause* of the Lebanese Civil War is much more complex, historically produced, and filled with contradictions. By understanding the production of conflict in this manner, the linear relationship between cause and effect is problematised, as is the dichotomy between peace and conflict. In other words, the means to understand how the social world functions according to 'normal' social scientific methods and methodology is disrupted. Adnan forces the reader to consider the longer scale of history, with multiple overlapping, contradicting variables and asks the researcher to question: when does peace end and war begin?

The non-event, according to Adnan, was like previous events: disturbances. Yet, the accumulation of disturbances, the pinnacle being the night of the non-event, was there 'War in the vacant sky' (Adnan, 1989, III, 11).

Figure 3

Etel Adnan, from *The Arab Apocalypse* (The Post-Apollo Press, 1989), p. 11. Reprinted with permission of The Estate of Etel Adnan and The Post-Apollo Press.

The environmental shift is detailed by the sun's absence in that moment, where previously the sun's omnipresence was the only object worthy of note, however, war overshadowed all else. As daily life comes to a standstill following that night, the sun is referenced as rising in the East 'from the mosque' to the West, or 'the vacant Place'. Unlike the first pages when there was a pause to admire the sun, there was nowhere to escape: no shade, an allegory for the coming apocalypse.

Similarly, in the final pages of *The Arab Apocalypse*, Adnan describes the political realities of the conclusion of the Civil War and the material and immaterial realities as the environment shifts once again. The post-war environment is often discussed as a period of development, retrospection, and reconciliation. It is thought to be a period of unease, with conflict always being around the corner, yet marked by declarations of pacific agreements between elites. Although Adnan does not describe the political agreements, policies, government making in the immediate post-war period, she reflects on her surroundings, presenting a queer reality where conflict is said to have concluded but the new 'post-conflict' environment is assembled on the foundations of violent conflict. This, again, blurs the categories of peace and conflict, prompting the question – when does conflict finish and peace begin?

As fighting between the Lebanese factions came to an end, Adnan references the Syrian occupation of Lebanon: 'There are more Syrian kings in the ant-hills than ants STOP THEM!' (Adnan, 1989, XLVI, 65). The vision of a post-conflict environment held by many is one of a new pacific environment, a sense of return to the sun-pocked days, yet the Syrian army officers, referred to as Syrian kings, that occupied Lebanon following the Ta'if Agreement,[11] became the rulers, law bearers, and judges who dictated the lives of the population. Although the Syrian occupation was meant to maintain order and a pacific environment, they were not innocent of crimes or neutral purveyors: 'They drank drops of sweat and infants' blood' (Adnan, 1989, XLVI, 65). The Syrian presence as a continued marker of coercion, blurred the boundary between war and peace.

Adnan's writings on the emergence of the Lebanese Civil War, reflects a dynamic of contradiction and complexity that is rarely captured in the academic writing on conflict. The outbreak of war, as Adnan describes it, does not occur overnight, but is reflective of a process that alters the background to which we live and experience life. In this process, the familiar is changed, absences and vacancies appear, and the voids are not filled; a new familiar is created. This is not necessarily captured by scholarship that is engaged in hetero-masculine logics which places events in binary categories, describes events as linear; that seeks to understand why or how the war started by tracing a political desire for power; and which presents the post-conflict situation as one of divergence from conflict (Chamie, 1976; Haugbolle, 2005). In Adnan's

[11] The Ta'if Agreement, or the National Reconciliation Accord, sought to formally put an end to the conflict with the principle of 'mutual coexistence'.

writing, the categories, temporality of war and peace are queered. Here, Adnan highlights the ongoing particularities of war for which a new reality is once again developed.

Trauma as Queering: Understanding the Lebanese Civil War

By engaging with *The Arab Apocalypse* as a queer feminist epistemological method, we are able to gain insight into Adnan's experience and positionality, our understanding of the Lebanese Civil War, and, more generally, of conflict. The knowledge that emerges from this engagement reveals multiplicities and disrupts linear logics of conflict that are normally based in white (Western) hetero-masculine logics. Here, the chapter explores how trauma is *queering*. In other words, trauma disrupts previously held linearity, logics, and sensibilities. In the case of the Lebanese Civil War, we can understand how trauma informs sectarianism. Although many of the existing analyses and arguments that are concerned with sectarianism in Lebanon are problematic, viewing sectarianism as an inherent or biological force, by examining sectarianism through the spectrum of trauma it is possible to disrupt long-held assumptions.

As the conflict, as told in the poem, unfolds and the violence of each event begins to surpass the previous, the apocalypses, 'explosive' first thoughts, while not cumulative, reference ongoing incomprehensible traumas. The tragedies mount, from the Sabra and Shatila massacre, the use of chemical weapons, to the massacre at Quarantina. It provokes Adnan to command 'STOP'. 'STOP' becomes an echo, a word that lingers in the air as it bounces off events. It acts as a circuit breaker, a plea for pause, with the brutality of the conflict transforming the banality of everyday life. Notably, despite the long process of conflict development – discussed in the previous section – the experience of conflict produces an anxious temporality that is difficult to measure. It is an apocalypse that appears without much warning as the deteriorating environment occurs in a manner that individuals and society acclimatise to. Although, by definition, an apocalypse presupposes a conclusion for everyone, the conclusion is experienced differently by different people. These apocalypses take on a similar dynamic as the sun, they are universal but not uniform. For those who are dead, the violence draws their worlds to a decisive end. For those who survive, despite physical continuity, they become ensnared by a psychological process. This is an apocalypse as trauma alters every aspect of life.

Throughout the poem, Adnan generously offers her own experience of trauma to make sense of conflict. Trauma acts as a motivating factor that shapes a desire for salvation and survival, possibly as a way out. This is dissimilar to the masculinist desire for power, although it could

produce similar violent results. However, unlike masculine desires for power leading to untethered violence, trauma is tethered, it is a link to the subject that cannot be broken. Discussing how trauma shapes desire, however, Adnan writes that 'a sun-ambulance carries Christ to the insane asylum … Close to the monkeys' (Adnan, 1989, X, 25). Here, the stability found in religion is altered through trauma, it becomes the factor that makes us ill and irrational. This critique serves a dual purpose. First, it disrupts how the Lebanese Civil War is often framed as motivated by sectarianism and thus needs to be understood as a sectarian conflict. Second, it exposes the traumas – the depths of deprivation and loss caused by conflict – that is fertile ground for religion to root itself in society in a novel fashion.

In the first instance, the emphasis on sectarian conflict found in much of the scholarship limits our comprehension of the real political and social complexities of the conflict. A focus on sectarianism limits the narrative to one that is focused on the discourses of the militia-leadership; treating the 'other' as an existential threat. In the context of the Lebanese Civil War, sectarian discourses served a propagandic and mobilising purpose. Sectarian discourses helped construct the self and the other, where the self was always in existential danger and the other was always dangerous. Dangerous to the community and nation that the self belongs to and inherently represents.[12] These narratives are, effectively, an elite desire for political power, which plays on the populations' desires for salvation and survival but does not explain the desires or the role of the population. Where attempts have been made to explain the desires of the population, there is often a discussion of *inherent* or *embedded* sectarianism, an argument laced with biological determinism that is deeply problematic. For example, the assertion that the Christian Orthodox community were the *Muslims of the Christians*, reducing the entire Christian Orthodox community to a sectarian trope and painting them as *traitors* to the ultra-nationalist Christian right.[13]

Second, the traumas of conflict provide opportunities for sectarianism to become rooted in society, a response to the apocalypse, and fulfilling the purpose of propaganda by transforming society.[14] In trying to make sense of these dynamics, Adnan is engaged in a critique of the

[12] Zeina Maasri (2009) explores these dynamics by analysing political and propaganda posters from the Lebanese Civil War.

[13] The trope developed because many prominent Christian Orthodox figures had aligned themselves with leftist and Arabist political parties.

[14] Similarly, Rahaf Aldoughli (2021) argues that sectarianism in Syria has become embedded through issues of ontological security.

illogical conclusions which portray the conflict as a matter of inherent sectarianism; by using Adnan's writing as that of a witnessed account of the conflict, it is possible to work through the prevalent sectarian narratives to highlight the contradictions and understand the function of trauma in producing a *fait accompli*:

Figure 4

Etel Adnan, from *The Arab Apocalypse* (The Post-Apollo Press, 1989), p. 48. Reprinted with permission of The Estate of Etel Adnan and The Post-Apollo Press.

For the mother in the poem, who 'was beating raw meat' the mix of psychological and physical manifestations of conflict, the traumas, on the individual are apparent. The mother evokes hunger and desperation, where 'she ate with cannibal eagerness'. The *icons*, in this passage, represent the psychological and the bread represents the physical. They are a trauma initiated desire for salvation and survival with direct reference to the Church. After which, she 'sang a solar litany on Resurrection Sunday', the Muslim equivalent of Friday morning prayers.

In moments of enduring suffering and trauma, religious differences helped mobilise animosity and conflict, because, in these moments, salvation and survival were finite. However, as Adnan notes, these witnesses, across religious divisions, are otherwise the same. They exist in the same sphere of trauma and are moving towards the same goal. The perceived and real threat to their survival provokes the same response: 'the mother and the recitant met in the fire / I saw them throw their cut-up fingers on the Church's platter'. And, as in their mutual hungers, desire for survival and salvation, 'the saint did not come to their rescue the Companions neither'. Adnan evokes an important feeling of dismay, of being let-down by the religious beliefs that, in their desperation, they held on to. These beliefs structured their eagerness to fight, to turn their backs on their neighbours, justified by a sense of righteousness. They could no longer blame the politicians, militia leaders, or religious leadership for the violence, becoming the 'thing' that they feared in the *other*. And when the promised salvation and holy intervention did not occur on their behalf, they continued to fight. Here, Adnan notes that 'the sun's pain rose on the thermometer' a reference to Gilgamesh, and despite lack of salvation and holy intervention, the 'muezzins and priests posted bulletins of victory', claiming that the deaths were not in vain.

Adnan's writing draws out the political positionalities inhabited by individuals, politicians, and religious leaders, and in doing so, shows how the opposing factions are mere reflections of each other; how distinctions between good and bad, leader and follower are not clear. Adnan blurs these boundaries, where responsibility becomes queered. For example, both mother and recitant are victims of conflict and responsible for conflict, for their own and each other's trauma. What Adnan highlights in this passage is the complexity of conflict, where everyone holds responsibility and everyone holds trauma, where the beginning and end points are no longer distinguishable, and victory is empty in meaning.

In the final lines of this page, Adnan writes: 'the combatants remained horizontal on the horizontal line of the sea'. While Adnan refers to the bodies as combatants rather than the 'dead', she is illustrating the likely inevitability of their fate: death. Here, it is a death whose commemoration is swept out to the sea, remaining distant, much like the horizon line, but never raised towards the heavens. This is in contention with the 'posted bulletins of victory' because, if there was indeed victory, the dead would be celebrated, remembered, and cared for.

This section has explored Adnan's experience of trauma from the Lebanese Civil War and the impact of trauma on conflict perpetuity. Challenging long held assumptions concerning the Lebanese Civil War, the question *why* individuals fight is drawn out, with no definitive answer or explanation. But, do we need an answer? By exploring these dynamics without searching for a causal relationship, how we *know* conflict changes. We can abandon white (Western) hetero-masculine knowledge systems that continuously colonise and speak for subjects being 'researched'. It encourages the researcher interested in conflict to alter how they engage with a subject, to take an expansive position on what forms of knowledge are worthy of engagement - such as poetry, literature, art, music, and film. By beginning here, we can abandon extractive practices that seek ownership of knowledge. We can, instead, seek to understand the positions, experiences, and responses of individuals. Afterall, how can we claim to know a conflict, a society, a community, without paying attention to how they choose to talk about their experience?

Conclusion

The Arab Apocalypse by Etel Adnan, like other works of art and literature, offers an affective and reflexive communication regarding conflict that is not always grasped in academic scholarship on conflict, war, and political violence. Adnan's positionality and episteme that

pervade the pages of the epic poem is one that is feminist and queer. In doing so, and as Cynthia Weber argues, this episteme, her feminist and queer way of knowing, 'ignite[s] in modern surveyors […] a frustration with the impossibility of knowing [the conflict] for sure' (Weber, 2016, 3).

While this intervention is primarily and specifically concerned with the Lebanese Civil War, general arguments can be made about research in the social sciences. This includes understanding the white (Western) and hetero-masculine dynamics of knowledge production in the social sciences and questioning how knowledge is attained, what counts as 'real knowledge', and whose knowledge matters. As explored in this chapter, this can mean turning to other kinds of documents, including art and literature, to gain novel understandings of a particular problem, challenging long-held narratives, and disrupting the binary categories deployed in academic scholarship. In doing so, however, it is not enough to engage with poetry and literature, but seek out an understanding of the author's oeuvre, experience, and politics; their positionality. Here, we can understand poetry and literature, and other art forms, as knowledge producing.

Within the epic poem, Adnan explores the competing realities of the Civil War, but in doing so positions herself as a witness, living with the consequences of elite desires and politics, and the overarching structures of empire. As a witness, Adnan problematizes many of the enduring 'facts' of the conflict, including its linearity, temporality, and causes and consequences. Discussed in this chapter is the disruption of knowledge regarding when conflict starts and ends, altering the timelines, and putting forward a more complex argument that queers the categories of peace and war and our will to knowledge. Similarly, Adnan problematizes the logics of empire by making an intervention in the narration of sectarianism. Building on feminist reflexivity, she disrupts a long-held 'truth' of the Lebanese Civil War and Lebanese society by arguing, as others have done in different circumstances (Aldoughli, 2021), that sectarianism is not inherent, but a resulting mobilising force of trauma.

Bibliography

Adnan, E. (1989) 'Arab Apocalypse', *Middle East Report* [online], 160 (September/October), Available from: https://merip.org/1989/09/arab-apocalypse/.

Adnan, E. (1989) *The Arab Apocalypse*, Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

Aldoughli, R. (2021) 'Collectivizing Trauma and Narrative in the Syrian War: Sectarianization and Ontological Security', *SEPAD Discussions: The Middle East in 2050* [online], Available from: https://www.sepad.org.uk/announcement/collectivizing-trauma-and-narrative-in-the-syrian-war-sectarianization-and-ontological-security.

Badran, T. (2009) 'Lebanon's Militia Wars' in B. Rubin (eds), *Lebanon: Liberation, Conflict, and Crisis*, New York: Palgrave Macillan, pp 35-62.

Bleiker, R. (2001) 'The aesthetic turn in international theory', *Millennium* 30 (2), 509–533.

Brett, S. (2008) 'From Lebanon to Hezbollahstan', *The Wall Street Journal* [online], 13 May, Available from: https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB121063617750986741

Chamie, J. (1976) 'The Lebanese Civil War: An investigation into the causes', *World Affairs* 139 (3), 171-188.

Code, L. (1991) *What can she know?: feminist theory and the construction of knowledge*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Code, L. (2013) 'Taking subjectivity into account,' in L. Alcoff and E. Potter (eds), *Feminist Epistemologies*, New York: Routledge, pp 15-48.

De Beauvoir, S. (2010) *The Second Sex*, London: Vintage.

Donovan, T. (2010) 'Teaching Etel Adnan's The Arab Apocalypse,' *Poetry Foundation* [online], 10 February, Available from: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet-books/2010/02/teaching-etel-adnans-the-arab-apocalypse.

Dorfman, A., and Mattelart, A. (1975) *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, New York: International General.

Doucet, M. G. (2005) 'Child's play: The political imaginary of international relations and contemporary popular children's films', *Global Society* 19 (3), 289–306.

England, K. (1994) 'Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research,' *The Professional Geographer* 46 (1), 80-89.

Escobar, A. (2007) 'Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise', *Cultural Studies* 21 (2-3), 179-210.

Fierke, K. (2004) 'Whereof we can speak, thereof we must not be silent: trauma, political solipsism and war,' *Review of International Studies* 30 (4), 471-491.

Ghassan, T. (1982) 'Lebanon: A New Republic', *Foreign Affairs* 61 (1): 84-99.

Grayson, K. (2013) 'How to Read Paddington Bear: Liberalism and the Foreign Subject in A Bear Called Paddington', *BJPIR* 15 (3): 378-393.

Grosfoguel, R. (2010) 'Epistemic Islamophobia and colonial social sciences', *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 8 (2), 29-38.

Grosfoguel, R. (2013) 'The structure of knowledge in westernised universities: Epistemic racism/sexism and the four genocides/epistemicides', *Human Architecture: Journal of the sociology of self-knowledge* 1 (1), 73-90.

Grovogui, S. (2016) 'Time, Technology, and the Imperial Eye: Perdition on the road to redemption in international relations theory', in A. Agathangelou and K. Killian (eds), *Time, Temporality and Violence in International Relations*, London: Routledge, pp 45-60.

Haugbolle, S. (2005) 'Public and private memory of the Lebanese civil war', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25 (1), 191-203.

Hemmings, C. (2012) 'Affective solidarity: Feminist reflexivity and political transformation,' *Feminist theory* 13 (2), 147-161.

Hoagland, S.L. (2020) 'Aspects of the Coloniality of Knowledge', *Critical Philosophy of Race* 8 (1-2), 48–60.

Hunt, P. and Sands, K. (2000) 'British empire and post-empire children's literature', in R. McGillis (eds) *Voices of the Other: Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context*, New York: Garland Publishing, pp 39–54.

Hutchings, K. (2008) *Time and World Politics: Thinking the present*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Maasri, Z. (2009) *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War*, London: IB Tauris.

Mignolo, W.D. (2007) 'Delinking', *Cultural Studies* 21 (2-3), 449-514.

Ndlovu, M. (2018). 'Coloniality of Knowledge and the Challenge of Creating African Futures', *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 40 (2), 95-112.

O'ballance, E. (1998) *Civil war in Lebanon, 1975-92*, New York: Springer.

Plum, H. (2020) '"I Planted the Sun in the Middle of the Sky like a Flag": In and of Etel Adnan's Arab Apocalypse,' *College Literature* 47 (3), 1-31.

Quijano, A. (2000) 'Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', *International Sociology* 15 (2), 215-232.

Quijano, A. (2007) 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies* 21 (2-3), 168-178.

Rose, G. (1997) 'Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivities and Other Tactics,' *Progress in Human Geography* 21 (3), 305-20.

Sandars, N.K. (trans.) (1964) *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Baltimore: Penguin Classics.

Schiwy, F. (2007) 'Decolonization and the Question of Subjectivity', *Cultural Studies* 21 (2-3), 271-294.

Springer, M.D. (1991) 'Repetition and 'Going Round' with Wallace Stevens', *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 15 (2), 191-208.

Tilly, C. (2002) *Stories, Identities, and Political Change*, London: Rowman and Littlefield.

Obrist, H.U. (2014) *Etel Adnan in All her Dimensions*, Milan: Skira.

Weaver, K. (1986) 'The Non Worldly World: Conversations with Etel Adnan', *Poetry Flash* 158, Available from: http://www.eteladnan.com/reviews/interview_poetryflash.pdf

Weber, C. (2016) *Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality and the Will to Knowledge*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zamir, M. (1978) 'Emile Eddé and the territorial integrity of Lebanon,' *Middle Eastern Studies* 14 (2), 232-235.