CHAPTER IV

Violence: Community and Communalism

In the previous chapter “Exposition: Political Power and Victimisation” the thesis discussed the fictional works of Serageldin to argue that political power was abused leading to victimisation of the rich and the poor alike and its exposition. The chapter “Violence: Community and Communalism” takes us further deep into the socio-political fabric of the Arab world, and makes an attempt to show the rise of communalism in a modern Arab state and the resultant violence, war, bloodshed. The novels that deal with this theme are Etel Adnan’s *Sitt Marie Rose*, Rabih Alameddine’s *Koolaids*, and Patricia Ward’s *The Bullet Collection*. Before the novels are taken up for a close analysis, the meaning and definition of the concept of community and communalism is defined and discussed in great detail and a bird’s eye view of the socio-political history of Lebanon is also offered in the thesis, without which the questions involved may not be very easily understood.

Community:

John Donne writes in one of his poems: “No Man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the maine” (Donne 98). Man is a piece of a “Continent”,…a part of the manine”, so succinctly put, the words of a great poet truly offer us a vision of man and his lot, subtly suggesting the interconnectedness of man and the world; inseparability of man from the world and vice versa. Together – man and the world – they constitute the whole. In other words, neither man nor the world is completed without the other. The world refers to the human community and it means people living together in a place owing to common interests and needs.
Man by nature is communal. He loves to live together peacefully and harmoniously. The term communalism in its original meant these qualities of sharing and living together. Terms such as ‘community’, ‘commune’, ‘communal’, and ‘communalism’ originate from the French *communer* meaning ‘to share’. The French word in fact derives from the Latin, *communis*; *com* meaning ‘with’ and *munis* meaning ‘duties’. Sharing in this sense becomes fundamental to community, as are close relationships and notions of commitment (Meltzer 2). Accordingly, ‘communal’ has all positive meaning as “communalist is a person of altruistic compassion, attached to his commune or community, a person of deep social impulses and humanism identified with larger societal goals and community interests” (Rasheeduddin Khan 12-13). Communalism, thus, proposes that markets and money be abolished and that land and enterprises be placed increasingly in the custody of the community. The Jewish “kibbutz” for example. The maxim “from each according to ability, to each according to need” is taken as a bedrock guide. Under the circumstances communalism means a cultural mechanism which maintains the cohesion within the community. Its main defining features include the collectivity of production and the absence of private property and exploitation of man by man. In short, it stands for something shared or done by all the members of community.

This can be illustrated with reference to The Levant or Historical Syria. The Levant is the geographic and cultural region in the Eastern Mediterranean which today consists of countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Israel. People living in this area include Muslims, Jews, Christians (Orthodox, Maronites, Catholic), Assyrians, Sunni Muslims, Yazidi Kurds, Shia Muslims (Alawites, Twelvers, Nizari and Druze Ismailis), Armenians, Latin Catholics, Adyghes, Turks, Samaritans, and Nawars. All these groups of people lived together for centuries. They
shared not only the geographic position, but cuisine, customs, language and a very long history. The conflicts between these groups started only after World War II when the western colonisers divided the region into Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Israel. This in addition, the American and Iranian interests in the region have made it worse. There is not a single part of the Levant where there are no wars and killing today.

The organisational structure of communities in The Levant and elsewhere did not revolve around blood ties but were based on personal needs or interests. These needs include food, shelter and clothing: the basic elements for survival. Each individual is a producer and a consumer of goods and services. A tailor, for example, stitches clothes for whoever gives money irrespective of his religious, ethnic or racial background. And a person in need of clothes will pay whoever is ready to provide him with such a service. This relationship of interests or trading of labour is destroyed when it is invaded by religious or political ideologies. And this is what happened in Historical Syria with the advent of the western super powers after World War II.

Over the last one thousand years of recorded history, man has developed well established religious, political institutions with leaders representing the interests of their members or followers. Being the oldest, and the one that has formed the deepest place in man’s heart religion has been there serving as the foundation for so many modern institutions. It has simply become indispensable. But the problem with religion may not be very easily resolved. While there are nations based on religious tenets, multireligious nations have become the order of the day. This has given rise to “communalism”, which in our times has come to mean violence, bloodshed, loss of life, war, jihad, human bombs, mercenary killings, abduction, terrorist outfits, sending the chill down the spine.
Under the circumstances, communalism has acquired a negative meaning today. Kenneth W. Jones defines it as a “consciously-shared religious heritage which becomes the dominant form of identity for a given segment of society” (Jones 39). The four important components of communalism are religion, identity, distinction and antagonism: religion shapes identity and heightens distinction which in turn feed antagonism that results in communal conflicts.

In fact, communalism is attributed to the manipulations of the masses by vested interests. An authority on communal issues in India, Asghar Ali Engineer, suggests this view: the “communal phenomenon is political in genesis” (Engineer 34). Politicians have often manipulated religious and ethnic differences to achieve their ends. *Competition among the political parties to secure electoral gains is also seen as the cause of contemporary communalism.* In this sense, communalism can refer to “the use and manipulation of religious and/or ethnic differences for ‘political’ ends” (Bates 1) or to “organised political movements based on the proclaimed interests of a religious community, usually in response to a real or imagined threat from another religious community (or communities)” (Pandey 6). In a sense, communalism is a *systematic misuse of religion for political purposes.*

Communalism, then, is a particular kind of politicisation of religious identity, an ideology that seeks to promote conflict between religious communities. Communalism meant a group of people living on the ideals of mutual respect till yesterday but today it is associated with sadism, aggression, hostility, cruelty, bloodshed, carnage, intolerance and violence.
Violence:

*Communalism has become a major issue because it employs violence as a strategy.* At a very basic level, violence is “the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, persons or property” (*Oxford English Dictionary* ‘violence,’ def. 1). One of the most expanded definitions of violence comes from Robert McAfee Brown, who in *Religion and Violence* (1987) defines it in the following manner:

> Whatever ‘violates’ another, in the sense of infringing upon or disregarding or abusing or denying that other, whether physical harm is involved or not, can be understood as an act of violence. The basic overall definition of violence would then become *violation of personhood.* (Brown 7)

Inflicting injury, causing damage to person or property and violation of personhood in sum means violence. And it is in this sense the word violence is used in this study. Sexual violence, verbal insults, spitting on a person, making obscene gestures at a person are several examples of the ‘violation of personhood’ whether physical force is used or not.

Violence is multidimensional: A father may use violence against his child to teach him good behaviour; the state to enforce compliance among people; various political and terrorist organisations may use it as a way of exhibiting their strength and dedication to their cause. Suicide squads especially in our times are a good example of this form of violence. Self-immolation and prolonged hunger strike protests are also extension of this trend. Violence may also be used for communicating a certain message to the society. The counter revolutionary rebels in
western France, for example, directed their violence against people accused of informing the republican soldiers about their movements; they abandoned the mutilated corpses near republican-held towns. In this way they sought to make examples in order to deter similar vocations (Kalyvas 27). This is called “systemically functional violence” which “preserves the social order”. However, there is another type of violence that destroys the social order and it is called “dysfunctional violence” (Kalyvas 19). Communal violence belongs to the second category.

Although violence, particularly communal violence, is sometimes motivated by genuine support for a political actor, it is more often motivated by narrow individual and personal interests such as settling private disputes, family feud or a feud between a wealthy and a poor family. In other words, an occasion that concerns a group of people or a community may be hijacked by vested interests and rogues for their personal gains – as it could be seen in Charles Dicken’s *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) which deals with the French Revolution and shows how the revolutionaries ended up killing not those who ruled the country but their personal enemies. One of these revolutionaries is Madame Defarge. She runs a wine shop in Saint Antoine that just happens to be the hub of all revolutionary activities. She assists the revolutionaries by stitching the names of their enemies into her knitting. Though Madame Defarge wants political liberty for the French people, she is even more powerfully motivated by a bloodthirsty desire for revenge, hoping to exterminate anyone related to Marquis because he raped her sister. Her father died of grief. Her brother was killed trying to avenge his sister’s honour. It is completely understandable that she plays a big part in the revolution only to take revenge for her family. She is consumed by the desire for revenge against a man who destroyed her family. For her, justice for the fate of her family is not just that Marquis gets killed. Justice should, she
thinks, include the extermination of all of the Marquis’ family. For Madame Defarge, as for the rest of the revolutionaries, passionate revenge gives way to the invention of spurious rivalry, the murder of innocent victims.

Violence is a signal of protest. People commit violence to show protest, to make known that something has gone wrong against them. Frustrated by the merry go around politics, some people may use violence as the last resort to express their rejection of the politics of their time. This type of violence is always associated with a feeling of vulnerability. The offender’s sense of personal vulnerability gets reflected in a hypersensitivity to specific kinds of social confrontations, such as domination or disparagement. This is called “the frustration-aggression hypothesis” (FAH). The FAH, originally developed by Berkowitz, describes the response to frustration, or blockage of attainment of one’s personal goals. The response to this denial or blockage may emerge as a ‘fight or flight’ situation, as either an aggressive, defensive reaction, or none at all (Berkowitz 69). For example, the Palestinians, being uprooted from their land while the whole world is watching, resort to violence because of the world’s failure to have their grievances resolved. Their fear of being dominated by the Israelis motivates their violent reactions. However, some of them chose ‘flight’ instead of ‘fight’ and became refugees. Arab American fiction deals with this.

Communalism:

Some thinkers believe that communal violence does lead to a permanent division of a society. James Dodd in his book Violence and Phenomenology (2009) writes that the legacies of violence are woven into the very fabric of our world and that “violence does not simply leave behind an effect; even once the damage has been repaired, the bombed cities rebuilt, the communities reconstituted and the traces of the lost all but erased, violence remains as a potent given instability lurking just below a
reconstituted facade of normality” (Dodd 140-1). In other words, communal violence leaves behind latent hostilities and any little spark at any time will be a sufficient precipitant for the outbreak of violence again. India can be cited as an example where communal clashes between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs have continued since pre-independence era through the “partition-violence.” The latter event has left such a deep scar that it lurks in the hearts of the people of all the three communities often lending substance for fresh violence.

Psychologists argue that violent prone individuals are abnormal and they “derive a real satisfaction from the harm they cause” (Horgan 45). Donald G. Dutton in his book *The Psychology of Genocide, Massacres and Extreme Violence* (2007) writes that “the initial reaction to killing or hurting others seems to be aversive but the distress subsides over time while pleasure emerges over time”. A perpetrator appears to derive pleasure from killing or hurting. This pleasure is called Sadism which “apart from whatever extrinsic motives it satisfies…acquires an intrinsic appeal” (Dutton 116-7). He cites the presence of laughter among harm-doers as an example. He also suggests that violence may serve to terminate boredom and anxiety. Erin E. Buckels et al argue that while some people experience distress after hurting an innocent person, in the case of others violence “affords a different emotional experience: It is pleasurable, exciting, perhaps even sexually arousing” (Buckels 1). What is meant by violence here is not the simple act of killing but that type of violence that goes beyond killing such as torture, mutilation, dismemberment etc. Sitt Marie Rose serves as a good example of this trend of violence.

Communal violence has been defined and conceptualised by plethora of scholars and researchers. According to M. Z. Tadjoeddin (2002), an Australian social scientist, communal violence may be defined as a “violence that occurs between
different communal groups. Groupings in the community based on religion, tribes, sect race and others” (Tadjoeddin 2). Communal violence may also be called ethnic violence, according to Horowitz, which refers to the situation where is perpetrated across ethnic lines. Horowitz argues that all conflicts that are based on ascriptive (birth based) group identities – race, language, religion, tribe, or caste – can be called ethnic or communal conflicts (Horowitz 41-54). According to this, Muslim-Christian conflicts, Black and White conflicts, Shia-Sunni conflicts fall into the category of communal violence. Raleigh and Kniveton (2010) view communal violence as an organised act that takes place between informal ethnic militias and traditional hostile groups. It exhibits spatial and temporal trends which are rooted in ethnic competition, resource access and wealth acquisition. This violence can take various forms including pitched battles and attacks on civilians. Communal violence may also involve sometimes government forces when it is supporting tacitly or otherwise one of the communal groups at the expense of the other. To conclude, communal violence means a form of violence having roots in ethnicity, tribal identity, race, religion, sect, language and it revolves around competition for socio-economic space, land, natural resources and political power.

Asghar Ali Engineer, an important Indian cultural historian and authority on inter religious affairs, in his book Communal Riots in Post-Independence India (1991) writes that communalism, as it is understood in our political parlance today, originated in the late nineteenth century, in the post-mutiny period (Engineer 2). Add to this, Achin Vanaik in his book The Furies of Indian Communalism: Religion, Modernity, and Secularization (1997) writes that the term communalism was first used by British colonists to describe colonies like India and Malaysia, where substantial religious minorities existed alongside a religious majority. The colonial
use of the term “gave it a negative connotation of bigotry, divisiveness and parochialism, thus helping to justify its civilising mission” (Vanaik 34).

While communal violence may be caused by the vested interests or politicians, it is the masses who ultimately fall victims. That is because they are vulnerable. Samir Khalaf attributes this to the “the displaced and surrogate character” of communal violence (Khalaf xi). When grievances and feelings of anger are not pacified, they are prone to be released on proxy targets unrelated to the sources that originally provoked the hostility. Such targets of displaced enmity are often chosen on the basis of how vulnerable and accessible such groups happen to be at the time. According to Rene´ Girard, “When unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim. The creature that excited its fury is abruptly replaced by another, chosen only because it is vulnerable and close at hand” (Girard 2). In other words, as the hostility degenerates into internecine fighting between fractious groups, combatants end up avenging almost anyone. Fighters start killing not those they want to kill but those they could kill. The masses are the most vulnerable and therefore an easy target. For example, during the Lebanese civil war Kamal Jumblat, an important Lebanese political leader, was assassinated in 1977. Though the assassination was attributed to Syrian agents, his frenzied followers went on a rampage and slaughtered more than 170 Christians in adjacent villages. Another example is the assassination of the Lebanese president Bashir Gemayel in 1982. The incident released a flush of contemptuous outrage. The fury was not, of course, directed against those who might have had a hand in the tragedy. Instead, it was discharged on the most vulnerable and accessible proxy targets: Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila camps where nearly 2,000 people, mostly children, women and elderly, were butchered. What these examples show is that political elites may sometimes fall victims in communal violence; however, it is
the common man who often pays the price as was the case during the partition violence in India.

At present, the whole of the Middle East is said to be caught in the worst ever communal violence in particular. Jews, Christians and Muslims of various ethnic, linguistic and tribal dimensions have been fighting among themselves over various issues ranging from religion, ethnic identity, to land etc. for the last several 1000s of years. There is no region, society, extention, mohalla, street which is not fighting some form of communal violence or the other.

**Lebanon and Communalism:**

That communalism is a product of politics can be seen with reference to Lebanon. Lebanon is an Arab State in the East Mediterranean. It borders Syria on the north and east and Israel on the south. The location of Lebanon at the crossroads of the Mediterranean basin and the Arabian hinterland has played a crucial role in its rich history and cultural identity, religious and ethnic diversity. The total area of the country is 4,036 square miles. According to Paul Doyle (2012), the population of Lebanon is estimated to be 4,143,101 in July 2011, however no official census has taken place since 1932 due to the sensitive confessional political balance between Lebanon’s various religious groups. Despite its small area and population, Lebanon is a complex mosaic of heterogeneous groups. It is the most religiously diverse country in the Middle East and according to Paul Doyle 59.7% is Muslim (Shia, Sunni, Druze, Isma’ilite, Alawite or Nusayri), and 39% Christian (Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Coptic, Protestant) with other religions and non-believers accounting for the remaining 1.3%. Presently 18 religious sects are officially recognised by the government (Doyle 28; 30-31).
Communalism in Lebanon goes back to the interventions of the European powers into the affairs of the Lebanese people. Prior to the French occupation, the name Lebanon was used exclusively to refer Mount Lebanon, other areas which are today part of Lebanon belonged to Syria (Chamie 171). The territory of Mount Lebanon was primarily inhabited by Maronite Christians and Druze. Because Lebanon was under the Muslim rule, the France insisted on the need for protection of Christians (Makdisi 24). Singling the Christians for protection denotes that there was an idea of religious commonness between the French and the Maronites. There was also a French imperial aspiration for the Levant in general. The Christian protection should therefore be seen as part of the French policy based on their interests and aspirations. Under the French protection, the Christians enjoyed many privileges: missionaries were sent to proselytise among the Christians and educate them, Christian traders were favoured by European merchants, and Christian work forces were actively recruited by French silk merchants (Makdisi 24). Since then, France maintained an unbroken cultural, educational, economic and humane communion with the Christians of Lebanon. This planted the first seeds of hostility between the Christians and other sects.

During World War I, European powers defeated the Ottomans in the Levant and the latter withdrew from Lebanon. The 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement divided the Levant among French and British powers, and the League of Nations assigned France to rule Lebanon and Syria. France started redrawing the geographical map of the region. The boundaries of the new Lebanon were expanded to include territories such as Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon and Tyre, southern Lebanon, and the eastern Bekaa valley; areas traditionally considered as part of Syria. The new country was established in 1920 and called Greater Lebanon (Chamie 171; Moaddel et al 6; G hous 42). But by
annexing territories populated mostly by Muslims, the French seriously tipped the religious balance towards the Muslim side. The Muslim minority multiplied by eight times and comprised 49 per cent of the total population, which set the stage for power struggles among Christians and Muslims. Muslims resented their arbitrary annexation to a Christian Lebanese state (Crow 494). This territorial expansion also caused consternation amongst the Christians who feared losing their local predominance. The establishment of Greater Lebanon marked the beginning of the pluralistic society of the present-day Lebanon (Moaddel et al 6).

Following the establishment of Greater Lebanon, a Lebanese Representative Council was formed in March 1922. The thirty members of the council were elected on a confessional basis with respect to the size of each sect. In their design of the constitution of Lebanon, the French ensured that the Christians had the majority. In other words, they ensured that the Christian predominance is not altered. Given the lion’s share of the power, the Christian leaders enjoyed greater political and economic power while Muslims were marginalised. One of the important consequences of this change was that the Christians became richer and wealthier soon. This led to animosity towards Christians among the Muslim community.

The creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920 which gave the Christians the lion’s share of the power was supplemented in 1943 by a “National Pact” which marked the beginning of the era of formal independence. Lebanon became independent in 1943 after being a French colony for 23 years. Owing to its religious diversity, Lebanon after independence had a confessional system which means the allocation of political and administrative power to various religious communities in government in direct proportion to their population it was institutionalised by the National Pact in 1943.
The National Pact of 1943 was an unwritten agreement between President Bishara al-Khuri and the Prime Minister Riad al-Sulh on sharing power between Christians and Muslims in a six to five ratio throughout government according to which the offices of President, Prime Minister and Speaker of the House were assigned to the Maronite, Sunni and Shia sects respectively. The seats in the House of Representatives were also divided by a ratio of 6 Christians to 5 Muslims (Harris 16; Farha 84; Petran 33). In addition to the presidency, the Christians held the other key positions in key ministries, in the army and in the courts including the commander-in-chief of the army, the highest judicial position, the Director-General of both internal security and intelligence and that of Governor of the Central Bank (Krayem np). The history of a new nation had begun thus on a principle of sharing power in proportion to population of the communities. However, this was not acceptable especially to Muslims because it was based on the 1932 census while the power sharing was taking place in 1943 by which the demographic reality had changed tremendously. This gave rise to animosity between the two communities. The system collapsed resulting in the breakdown of governmental authority and the outbreak of civil war in 1975.

Since its creation the Lebanese have been fighting over the culture issues: while the Muslims want it to be very close to the Arab world, the Christians are for the Western world. The Christians insisted on distinguishing Lebanon’s foreign policy from that of its Arab neighbours. This controversy extended beyond the political realm to encompass the field of education. Muslims insisted that Arab and Islamic culture and literature should be emphasised, which the Christians considered inferior. It was a difficult task for Lebanon to entertain good relations either with the West or the East; however the majority of the political decisions favoured the relation with the
European and American powers. The Muslim population felt that they were being isolated from their Arab neighbours.

The educational system in Lebanon based on Article 10 of its Constitution permitted every religious group to open its own religious schools. The Americans, the British, the French and the Muslims opened their own schools. By 1919, all sects had established their own schools. According to a study conducted (Charbel Antoun) there were seventy-seven different religious books taught in private schools in the 1960s teaching the young minds “Muslim and Christian,” “our faith and their faith,” and “us and them” (qtd. in Al-Habbal 46). Instead of teaching the equality of all religions, the Lebanese education system had divided people on the basis of religion with its own far reaching consequences for the nation.

The tension increased after the creation of Israel in 1948 as the Lebanese Christians supported Israel.

Add to this, the presence of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in Lebanon had further complicated the relationship between Christians and Muslims. Lebanon had received 100,000 Palestinian refugees in 1948 (Chatty 3; Suleiman 4). The Palestinians organised in Jordan and founded the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1964. Its goal was the liberation of Palestine through armed struggle. The PLO was expelled from Jordan in 1970 and its headquarters moved to Beirut. By 1973 the number of Palestinians in Lebanon was 400,000 (Chamie 183). The influx of several thousand Palestinians including the thousands of guerrillas from Jordan upset Lebanon’s delicate confessional balance, and divided the nation into two groups: the one supporting and the one opposing the PLO in Lebanon: majority Muslim population strongly opposed the creation of Israel right from day one.
The PLO considered Lebanon a launching pad for attacks against Israel. Israelis responded by launching their own revenge raids against Lebanese villages. According to Tabitha Petran, between 1968 and 1975 Israel committed more than 6,200 acts of aggression against Lebanon: nearly 4,000 aerial and artillery bombardments of villages, towns and refugee camps (Petran 142).

Under the circumstances the Christians wanted to use the Lebanese military to bring Palestinians under control but no Muslim government representative agreed to this. This forced the Christians to build their own militias in an attempt to counter the threat from the Palestinian presence. Realising that they were out numbered and out gunned, various Christian parties such as the Phalange, the Ahrar, the Guardians of the Cedars, and Tanzim combined politically and formed the Lebanese Front. They began acquiring heavy weapons and organising training camps, while the Muslim parties operated closely with the PLO and received heavy financial and military support from Arab countries, notably Libya, Syria and Iraq. These opposing objectives and mutual mistrust gave rise to periodic armed clashes between the Palestinians, their Lebanese supporters and the Christians and finally led to the civil war in 1975.

The war caused according to several resources 150,000 or 5% of the total population killed. Another one million people, a quarter of the population, were wounded. Between 500,000 and 800,000 Lebanese left the country (Stewart 494).

Lebanese civil war was one of the most violent wars in the history of the Arab world. “If war is hell,” Arno Mayer asserts, “then civil war belongs to hell’s deepest and most infernal regions” (Mayer 323). In his book *Violence, Veils and Bloodlines: Reporting from War Zones* (2010) Louis J. Salome writes: “Lebanon became synonymous with hell on Earth” (Salome 83). As the hostility degenerated into
internecine fighting between fractious groups, combatants ended up killing almost anyone. They were killing not those they wanted to kill but those they could kill.

Ever since the communal violence in Lebanon became a major issue for a number of writers writing in Arabic, English and French. Many critics such as Syrine Hout believe that the war has “facilitated the birth of the modern Lebanese novel, because the protracted violence broke many social, sexual, religious, and moral taboos and thus paved the way towards narrative innovation in form and content” (Hout 330). Memoirs, novels and short stories have been written to express sentiments about endangered and lost sites. Autobiographical elements, violence, identity, collective amnesia, loss of confidence and fault of humanity, religion are some of the characteristic features of this writing.

In the light of this discussion, now I take up Etel Adnan’s *Sitt Marie Rose*, Rabih Alameddine’s *Koolaids* and Patricia Ward’s *The Bullet Collection* for a close analysis.

Etel Adnan’s *Sitt Marie Rose* (1978)⁶, based on a real story, deals with the torture, murder and dismemberment of a Lebanese Maronite Christian woman. The novel is in two parts ‘Time I: A Million Bird’ and ‘Time II: Sitt Marie Rose’: the first part introduces the four male characters who are Mounir, Tony, Fouad and Bouna Lias, their hobbies and their special fascination for hunting birds; the second part deals with the trial and execution of Marie Rose by the four friends. Very importantly the novel maintains the true names of the victims making Amal Amireh describe it as a “witnessing text” (Amireh 252), which is a characteristic feature of political fiction.

The novel opens with the Chabab (a group of men in Arabic) the four friends in the present context. The common feature that binds them is hunting birds and love for seeing the blood stained birds falling dead on the ground. Describing them, the novelist writes: they “aim their rifles toward the sky like missiles launchers. They laugh. They show their teeth, their vigor, their pleasure” (P. 2). The scene has a historical bearing. We hear in the novel that the Europeans were the first hunters in this area: “Before, it was the Europeans…who went hunting in Syria and Iraq, and elsewhere. Now it’s the Christian, modernized Lebanese who go wherever they like in their touristo-military gear” (P. 3). As if to affirm the continuity between the European colonialists and the Lebanese Christians, Mounir testifies to the innocence of the Syrian villagers by saying that “we were the first Europeans they had ever seen. Excuse me, I mean Lebanese” (P. 5). Mounir’s remark is more than just a slip of the tongue. It reveals a subconscious identification with Europe and reflects the power he and his friends exercise over the Syrian villagers. By linking this leisure pursuit with the colonisers, Adnan demonstrates how the natives have internalised the colonisers’ violence.

With the advent of the civil war, the four hunters join the Phalangist militia and become hunters of humans. One of their victims is Marie Rose. Marie Rose is well educated, modern, passionate and tolerant. She married at the age of twenty. Unable to live with her husband who wanted her to be a home maker, she is divorced after having three children. After divorce, she has devoted herself to social service and now works for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon: “I have loved these thousands of men and women who fled like rats leaving a ship invaded by stronger rats” (P. 56). In 1967 she has founded an association for the Palestinian refugees. Through this association she collects donations for the Palestinian refugees and lives with the
Palestinians in the refugee camp in the Western Beirut with her three children and her Palestinian lover.

An activist for Palestinian refugees, Marie Rose also directs a school for the deaf-mutes in her former Christian quarter in the East of Beirut. In spite of the war, she continues to go back and forth between the two halves of the divided city in accordance with the two ties that bind her to the two communities. Marie Rose refuses to choose between the two halves, remaining in the liminal space between friends and enemies, self and the other. This does not conform to the war driven Lebanese society; in the sense that she is a Christian and therefore, all her activities remain neatly confined to the Christians. And for refusing to be so, she has been kidnapped by the four hunter friends Mounir, Tony, Fouad and Bouna Lias.

Marie Rose is declared a ‘Christian traitor’ and has been held a capture in the class where she taught her children. Marie Rose is interrogated, tortured, killed and finally dismembered before her deaf-mute pupils in a dastardly act. Th four hunters want to demonstrate to the pupils the fate of the “traitors” so that “later they won’t get any ideas about rebellion” (P. 61). Unlike other murders that take place in the wilderness or battlefields, this one is committed in a classroom that becomes a battlefield. Describing her situation, Marie Rose says:

Here I am on a battlefield. It’s a terrain closed in on all sides where it is absolutely essential that someone dies. Death always designates the presence of a battle.

To all landscapes there is a particular configuration. The one I’m on is flat, with no grass, just chairs. There are no trees, just a blackboard. There are no horses, only militia men. There are no peasant-witnesses,
only handicapped children. There’s no powder, no bombs, just instruments of torture. (P. 84)

This shows the severity of the communal violence that has spread to apartments, homes and classrooms which is a clear indication of the fact that the whole of the society is not only communally divided but also turned into a battlefield. Setting the crime in the classroom is of enormous significance. Crime, especially its most violent manifestation (murder), has crept into the boundaries of civilisation, the school, the symbol of civilisation. This is an evidence of the deterioration of a civilisation during communal conflicts. The classroom also functions as a microcosm of the warring city, Beirut, and the dismemberment of Marie Rose is a symbolic dismemberment of Lebanon as a nation.

Marie Rose is murdered for three reasons: she is Christian but lives in the Muslim camp; she is a Lebanese but supports the Palestinians; and finally she is a woman mixing in politics. The three claims – sectarianism, ethnicity and gender – are the three major themes that the novel attempts to explore.

Being a Christian, Marie Rose is accused of betraying her religion: she is “Christian and she went over to the Moslem camp” (P. 36). She is supposed to support the Christians. Her support for the Muslims puts her in the side of the enemy. Because Mounir and his cohorts see the struggle against the Palestinians as a religious war, she is considered as a traitor because she helps the infidels or Muslims. Marie Rose knows well that the Chabab are victims of the Christian upbringing that glorified the Crusades in the Christian schools that included an annual procession commemorating the Crusades. Marie Rose remembers when Mounir and his friends were young:
The Crusades excited all of them. Every year, those French priests led a procession in which all the students of the Christian schools dressed in white tunics with square red crosses sewn front and back…They carried palm branches through the streets of Beirut singing ‘I am a Christian. This is my glory, my hope, my support.’ The next day at school they were proud of having defeated the Infidel. (P. 47)

The Chabab seem to have internalised the spirit of the Crusades instilled in the Christian minorities of Lebanon through colonial hegemony. So, “they dreamed of a Christianity with helmets and boots, riding its horses into the clash arms, spearing Moslem foot-soldiers like so many St. Georges with so many dragons” (P. 47-4). In this they reproduce colonial structures of filiation whereby the Muslim, recast as Palestinian, figures as the enemy, the outsider.

In Adnan’s account, the ethno-nationalism that the Christians of Lebanon champion is a direct byproduct of colonialism and colonial education. The novel suggests that Mounir and his friends are victims of colonial education which has made them reject their Arab identities and offered them an illusionary European self.

The novel’s most sustained attempt to link Christianity with communal violence occurs in the passages in which the priest Bouna Lias, core of the four hunters, speaks to Marie Rose before killing her. Boasting of his commitment to the Christian religion, Bouna Lias says: “Christianity is in danger” and reminds her that the civil war is a religious one: “Islam is behind them. Therefore we are at war with Islam, whether you like it or not. They can’t separate their religion from their culture, from their heritage, and neither can we. We’re fighting for the road that leads to the Divine” (P. 63).
Religion here is used as an excuse. The Chabab believe that they are God’s agents on earth and fulfilling his will. They are operating on God’s behalf. The very presence of a priest at Marie Rose’s trial and the militiamen’s constant reference to their Crusades against Islam underscores the role religion played in instigating and protracting the communal conflict in Lebanon.

Marie Rose is killed because “she’s Lebanese and she went over to the Palestinian camp” (P. 36). The ‘Palestinians’ are being discriminated; they are considered as ‘others’ ‘foreigners’ and ‘strangers’ though they “belong to the same ancestral heritage the Christian party does” (P. 54). Adnan here draws on the Arab cultural tradition to emphasise how nationalist thought grounds its distinctions between insider and outsider, ally and enemy, in kinship and not citizenship relations. The Palestinians, though sharing the same culture, history and land, are not recognised as belonging to the Lebanese land which is a deliberate political and communal divide orchestrated by the forces of communalism.

Adnan’s message is clear: the Lebanese have to broaden their outlook and embrace humanity as a whole. They have “to cut the umbilical cords that bind [them] together” (P. 95). So, in order to engender Lebanese nationalism, communal loyalties must be expunged from the people’s consciousness. There should be only one loyalty, loyalty to the nation.

The active role of Marie Rose in politics stands in contrast to the woman’s role in the Arab world. Yolla Polity Sharara writes that in the Middle East “women and politics were two opposite poles…Politics was ‘public,’ ‘outside activity,’ ‘history.’ A woman was everything that was most private, most eternal and ‘ahistoric,’ the ‘within,’ the ‘at-home’ that everyone, boy or girl, found in the home, the mother” (Sharara 21). The murder of Marie Rose is to more to show what will happen to Arab
women when they encroach upon the male domain. Marie Rose is a “woman who stands up to them [the murderers] and looks them in the eye” so she becomes “a tree to be cut down, and they cut it down” (P. 67). Elsewhere the narrator comments on the Arab women’s condition saying: “Every feminine act...were regarded as a rebellion in this world where women had always played servile roles. Marie Rose inspired scorn and hate long before the fateful day of her arrest” (P. 101). It is clear that the intention to kill Marie Rose has been building up for years and the war has given the executioners a suitable pretext to murder her. Commenting on Marie Rose’s attempt at self-liberation, Adnan writes: “when, for example, someone like Marie Rose leaves the normal order of things, the political body releases its antibodies in a blind, automatic process. The cell that contains the desire for liberty is killed, digested, reabsorbed” (P. 76). Marie Rose confronts the fascists, their perverted values, and rejects them all together. They are afraid of Marie Rose who epitomises the feminist values and dares the male world.

In conclusion, *Sitt Marie Rose* explores communalism and its negative effect on the society especially on women and children, who are the most vulnerable section of the society. It also explores the communal mind set of the Lebanese that refuses to nurture a national culture, secular attitude that are the hall mark of civilised societies such as the many first world countries in the world including India, that fosters religious tolerance. Rabih Alameddine’s *Koolaids: The Art of War* which again is set in Lebanon and also deals with communalism.

Rabih Alameddine’s debut novel *Koolaids: The Art of War* (1998)\(^7\) deals with the Lebanese civil war. Unlike linear stories that have a beginning, middle and end and move smoothly with time, *Koolaids* is composed of different vignettes –

---

soliloquies, diary entries, poems, excerpts from plays, newspapers, emails, and scriptures – posted one after the other without any logical order. The events never follow one another in a fixed or progressive sequence. Such a technique is not deliberately chosen as Alameddine himself acknowledges this:

I write in fragments of narrative, mostly non-linear. It is not a conscious choice. I try to write a conventional narrative, but my mind rebels. I desperately want to prove to myself that I have the patience, and skill, to sit on my computer long enough to write a traditional narrative. But, other than a few short stories (longer vignettes?), I fail miserably.

(Alameddine, “Shattered Truths” np)

This failure of writing, Wail Hassan in Immigrant Narratives (2011) asserts, “gestures toward the impossibility to communicate fully – to translate – the horrific effects of war” (Hassan 208). Writing in this way is, undoubtedly, due to the author’s personal experiences in the past: “I believe I write the way I do because of my personal makeup. It is the combination of my experiences, my perception, and everything that I am that forces me to tell stories in pieces and not in conventional narrative” (Alameddine, “Shattered Truths”, np). The structure of the book reflects the seemingly infinite chaos that the writer perceives in this world. It also reflects the unstructured thoughts of a writer under stress.

Communal violence is the central theme that dominates the novel and involves a huge number of characters who are either dying or attending to friends who are dying. The novel shows how innocent people are victimised by the communal violence. While the warring parties are big politicians, the victims are always common people who are often not communal. The stories of innocent victims are
revealed through the diary of Samir’s mother, a Druze, Lebanese woman who lived in Beirut during the war. She has recorded many tragedies that the Lebanese experienced during the war. What is remarkable in these diary entries is not death but the violent ways in which the innocent people are killed.

The novel offers a series of violent incidents that are caused by communalism. One of the vignettes narrates the fatal destruction of Najwa’s family. While the family is sleeping in its apartment, a shell explodes inside the building killing Najwa’s husband and their three children. Najwa is severely injured by two pieces of shrapnel one of which is lodged in her stomach and the other in her forehead. In another vignette a person called Mr. Suleiman is on his way home with his wife and children in his car and he is stopped by a flying checkpoint and is murdered before his children and wife. Another snippet is about an unnamed archeologist who is working with her team underground in central Beirut and a sewer is intentionally opened to kill the whole team. In yet another piece, Samia Marchi, a thirty-year-old Muslim woman is happily in love with a Lebanese Christian military leader called Nick Akra. The militiamen enter their apartment and kill them both. In another snippet a shell explodes outside Makram’s home and a piece of shrapnel flies through the window and hits his father in the throat. He suddenly collapses in a pool of blood, his throat slit by shrapnel.

These stories however small they may be, they narrate the dance of death during the Lebanese civil war. They capture the turmoil and bloodshed that characterised Lebanese civil war and foreground the brutality and violence in unexpected places. What is also remarkable in these fragments is that the war has no front and it engulfed nation as a whole. It was everywhere sparing none.
Alameddine’s novel is a critique of communalism and its causes. For Alameddine the source of communalism is the absence of a national identity that includes all the people living in Lebanon and not just a Christian or a Muslim. He finds the ritual practices of the church in Lebanon such as the glorification of the Crusades the real villain. Bigots among Maronites are denounced. An email sent by a person named Roger Dabbas to his “Fellow Christians” serves as an example. The email describes who the real Lebanese are. He claims that the Christians are the true Lebanese: “We are the true Lebanese because we are the only descendants of the Phoenicians, the only indigenous people of Lebanon” (P. 58). He even claims that Arab Muslims were conquerors of Lebanon and that the Lebanese were liberated by the French. Concluding his email, he states that:

Maronites are NOT Arabs, never were, never will be. We are Syrio-Aramaic. We are Phoenicians. We need to be proud of our heritage and revive it. We need to throw away Arabs shackles that everybody tries to bind us with. We are not Arabs. We are Lebanese. Lebanon is the homeland of Christians. We shall refuse to live under occupation. We will always be Christians, always Lebanese. (P. 59)

He exhorts his fellow Christians to remain united to fight the so called Arabs, projected as enemies.

The novel exposes the destructiveness of ethnonationalism which challenges the Lebanese identity, reflecting the constant tensions. The assertion of distinct, even unique, communal identities is viewed as separatism. Alameddine’s message is that all people who live within Lebanon’s borders are part of the Lebanese nation regardless of their ethnic, racial, or religious origins. For him the Lebanese nation is
not defined by loyalty to a family, faith, or ethnic ancestry. Lebanon has to be defined by loyalty and devotion to Lebanon as a whole.

The novel warns against the disastrous consequences of confusing cultural and national identities and mistaking the former for the latter. Positioning oneself with or against an external, larger national/cultural group (here Arabs), a religious one (Christian or Muslim) and/or a political one in the name of ‘true’ Lebanese nationalism is, in fact, the very negation of enlightened and tolerant nationalism. The novelist wants the cultural identity to be secondary to, and larger than, the individual’s inherited nationality. For this, while cherishing one’s acquired cultural identity, including one’s religious beliefs, every citizen should be “a Lebanese first”, that is, open-minded enough to be respectful of other Lebanese irrespective of their cultural allegiances. Only the distinction between these two types of identity would guarantee collective loyalty to the idea of Lebanon as a pluralistic yet unified nation.

Religion is another cause of the Lebanese strife. The novelist shows with great vim and audacity religious dogma and its destructiveness. He refuses to endorse sectarianism and as a result articulates an implied humanism. He finds religion as a dividing force and as a rhetorical device among those who engage in confessional politics, warfare, crimes, and corruption. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah in the novel shows this. At the end of the story, the novelist says, “Let’s get this straight, and I do mean straight. God tells us men fucking men is a terrible thing, but a father offering his two daughters, vestal virgins no less, to a horde of horny buggers is heroic. Now that’s straight (P. 64). Further, he adds, “God…asks us to idolize drunks who sleep with their daughters or offer them to a horny, unruly mob. This is the lesson of Sodom and Gomorrah” (P. 64). Such blatant critique of Prophetic behaviour reveals the novelist’s disgust with religions. Alameddine is possibly mocking God by
presenting him as a ridiculous fool, an entity without any logic. There has been a mockery of both religions and their advocates foregrounding the anger of the novelist. He wants the Lebanese to shed their religious shackles and embrace the rational principles of humanity. For him, all religious metanarratives are illogical. He is not afraid of being labelled as anti-religious: “you can call me a heresiarch, if it makes you feel better. I like that word” (P. 121) which clearly shows his views towards religion as it is practiced in Lebanon today.

The novel also exposes the Lebanese educational system which is highly communalised. In the books taught in school only Christian villages were printed. A child feels very sad because the book does not describe his little village. When he asks his father why their village is excluded, its father tells him that the book is “about a Christian Lebanon. Our village was not in it because it was not Christian. All the villages in the book were Christian” (P. 29). So, the seeds of communalism do not spare the text books of a nation is an indication of a deeply rooted communal situation and the war is its rich harvest.

Alameddine does not overlook the legacy of the colonial rule, the incursions of foreign powers in the conflict and the fragile political system in Lebanon. The colonial forces have left Arabs with a European Complex. In one vignette, an unnamed character notes:

We all had what some would call a European complex. We wanted so hard to be European...There were those who mimicked everything European. They ate European, dressed European, watched European movies. It was a sign of sophistication if one intermixed difficult English words with the predominant French. Many of these Lebanese – let’s call them Francophiles – had trouble speaking their native
language, Arabic. They really had problems speaking to other Lebanese if those others were not like them, if they did not speak French fluently. Most Francophiles were Christians, but not exclusively. They even developed a relationship to America similar to what the Europeans have, an unhealthy fascination mixed with simultaneous disdain. (P. 28-29)

The disapproving tone of this passage reveals that Lebanon had travelled westward before a large number of its citizens actually immigrated to Europe and the United States during the civil war. Alameddine here also suggests this has contributed to the cultural dilemma and sectarianism that stimulated the Lebanese Civil War. The ultimate result was that the Lebanese Christians never saw themselves as belonging to the larger community of Arabs.

The destruction of the Lebanese society by the European powers is symbolised in the destruction of the ancestral home of a character called Mohammed. Mohammed imagines the waves of the Mediterranean growing bigger and bigger. They become dark blue. “They cover the house. It is storming. Water submerges the house. It is coming in…Cracks in the ceiling appear and water comes in. Through the windows. Through the doors. The house shakes” (P. 19). The waves coming from the Mediterranean are simply the European powers destroying Lebanon.

Alameddine believes that the communal conflict has partially been supported and sustained by the foreign powers such as Israel, for example, which instigated communal fighting in Lebanon. To overcome the Palestinians in south Lebanon, the Israelis supported the Shiites. These Shiites later became Hizbullah. The Shiites fought PLO but when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, Israel became their enemy. The Israelis then started supporting the Christians in the south to fight the Hizbullah.
Those Christian became the south Lebanese army. In this sense, the novel is a call for the Lebanese to rise and unite against the outside powers.

After Israel, Syria has controlled the Lebanese people and government to such as extent that the elections are completely controlled by them; ministers including the president are appointed by them. The president does nothing without Syria’s approval. He is nothing but a “Syrian dog,” (P. 217), the novelist expression concludes it all. The pictures of Assad (the President of Syria) are all over Lebanon as if he were the president of Lebanon. The Lebanese economy exists only to serve Syria. The national bank cannot do anything without Syria’s approval. The army does only what Syria wants. The Syrians take money and allow Italian ships to dump their nuclear wastes on Lebanese soil. No project can be built in Beirut without bribing Syrian officials. The hashish and opium trade is completely in Syrian hands. They are making their money forcing the farmers in the Beka’a Valley to plant nothing but drugs. The children are being forced to study according to Syrian standards. They are being brainwashed in accepting Syrian rule. Shops in Beirut have to pay the Syrains to remain open. Lebanon’s foreign policy is Syrian foreign policy. Accordingly, the Lebanese are living “under Syrian occupation” (P. 218), who have used the technique of divide and rule to maintain their hold on Lebanon.

The Lebanese politicians also have their role in the communal conflict who have used this to achieve their vested interests. The novelist wonders as to how murderers are elected as presidents of the country. Bashir Gemayel, the leader of the Phalange Militia, whom Stalin would be proud of, killed thousands of Lebanese and was elected the president. Suleiman Franjieh, another murderer, was also elected president. Elie Hobeika the leader of the militiamen became a minister in the government (P. 213). “All war criminals are now ‘respected’ politicians…Jail is used
only for government opponents” (P. 216-7). The novelist condemns the Lebanese politicians “motherfuckers” (P. 153) and ‘wild dogs’: “My country is being torn apart by packs of wild dogs, and my countrymen are apathetic” (P. 124). He feels that “Someone should bring the leaders together, put them in the same room, and kill them” (P. 115) in order to bring peace to Lebanon.

Despite bad politicians, the interference of foreign powers, Alameddine is optimistic because he believes that “Crisis awakens” (P. 20) and also enables the Lebanese to learn from their war experiences. Alameddine compares the history of Lebanon and the civil war to that of America and finds certain identical aspects. American social structure is very similar to that of Lebanon. The country was founded as a refuge for the people of the world. People seeking freedom of religion and expression founded America but being of different ethnic background and religion, they did not identify with their host country. Rather they identified with their clans, states or regions. There was a civil war. One group tried to overcome another group. The war was more violent, and much bloodier than the Lebanese war. The American civil war taught them all to identify with America first and refer to themselves as Americans. They adopted the national slogan “From the Many There Is One.” Lebanon, like America, is a country of refugees, “a sanctuary, for oppressed people throughout the region” (P. 69). Prompted by this analogue of history, the novelist urges his people not to feel delegitimised because of the civil war. He views the war as “a legitimizing event,” a “crucible in which the nation of Lebanon was born, in much the same way as the American Civil War was the crucible in which the nation of America was born” (P. 70-1). He writes:

No person who engaged in, or lived through, the Lebanese Civil War…should feel compelled or threatened into surrendering their
cultural identity as a result of the Lebanese war. Rather, a national identity should emerge, in conjunction with a cultural one. Everyone from Lebanon is a Lebanese first. Everyone passed through the war, suffered from the war, and now faces occupation because of the war and its outcome. There is a common history which weaves each community, ethnic, regional, and religious, together to form one national identity. It was the common thread of the American Civil War that did the same for America. (P. 71)

The civil war in America has awakened the people and that has enabled them to build a new country with all people having equal rights. And therefore: “Because each community of Lebanon has known oppression in its history, none should oppress the other” (P. 69) and draw upon the experience of the United States and start uniting. War and communal violence unite and divide people simultaneously but the common loss suffered by them unites them again.

A survivor of the Lebanese civil war, Patricia Sarrafian Ward’s *The Bullet Collection* (2003)\(^8\) is also set against the Lebanese civil war. One of the important facts about the Lebanese civil war is that it is like any other civil war; it does not spare anyone even children. Almost all Lebanese children have been emotionally as well as mentally affected by the menacing cruelties of war that throws families into pieces. This has been very well expressed in Etel Adnan’s *Sitt Marie Rose*: “This country is stained with blood. The walls are spattered with blood, and there is not a single child who has not seen with his own eyes either a corpse or an execution. It’s a sick world” (Adnan 95). Sitt Marie Rose herself is murdered in front of the deaf-mute children.

---

These and other such threats, deprivations, and indignities continue to consume their psychic energies and traumatise their everyday life because children are the most vulnerable to psychological consequences of violence and destruction. *The Bullet Collection* is an expression of such a psychic damage and victimisation of children. The novel is a vivid proof on the impact of war on children as it could be seen in the following analysis of the novel.

*The Bullet Collection* revolves around two sisters: Marianna, the narrator, and her sister, Alaine, the protagonist. The war begins when Marianna is seven and Alaine nine. They are the daughters of an American professor called Stephen and a Lebanese mother, Ani. Stephen had come to Lebanon to teach at the Lebanese American University where he meets Ani and marries her. When the war outbreaks, the family finds itself entrapped in the city of Beirut. As the family members are exposed to the atrocities of war, Alaine develops psychic strains; she cuts herself, attempts suicide, and escapes from home to recklessly wander the streets at night; she collects bullets, pieces of shrapnel, and other war debris which in turn become hidden tokens of her internal disintegration. A few years after the war, the family resettles in the United States unable to endure the atrocities of war. The novel, divided into three parts entitled ‘Autumn’, ‘Summer’ and ‘Winter’, is set in Lebanon, America, Greece and Italy and depicts the life of the Stephens before, during, and after the war. Employing the non-linear narrative mode, the novel shifts between the present and the past, childhood and adulthood. Thus, the narrative strategy reflecting the arduous task of converting traumatic memory into narrative memory typical of a trauma survivor.

The novel opens with the two sisters’ recollecting their idyllic childhood that was possible only “before the war…” (P. 1) evoking nostalgic childhood memories of a peaceful Lebanon. With peace and security around, the two sisters are seen climbing
the hills, taking taxi rides all over Lebanon and Syria, spending winter in Beirut and summer on the Mountain, picking thyme with their friends, visiting ancient sites with their family, walking along the seashore in Beirut, and shopping in the souks. Summers are special for the children as the family vacations in the countryside, where they harvest lavender, pick figs, and enjoy the terraces that ran through fields filled with poppies, daisies, and heather. However, this peaceful life does not last long. With the advent of war it is all shattered into pieces. Centre cannot hold things fall apart – the parents who have already lost control over themselves lose their control over their daughters. The family becomes fragmented with every member of it living in his/her own world and the happy moments get replaced by hours in the damp, humid basement of the building or nights spent in the bathrooms squeezed between the tube and the toilet.

The impact of the war and the violence it inflicts on the innocent is seen and felt through Alaine. She sees militiamen lurk in every corner in the streets and “stray bullets pitter-pattered like rain onto the empty dirt playground across the street” (P. 285). Whenever the two sisters look out of the window, they see only jets, burning tires blockading the streets and soldiers patrolling the sidewalks. They see militiamen and snipers who are themselves young children. Ward masterfully describes the way the militiamen cross their wrists over the barrels of their machine guns, guarding the streets, which, till the dead hours of the night, remain alive with gunfire and bombs. The hollow sounds of guns echo between empty buildings “breaking a city already broken” (P. 92). With air attacks, the city becomes more frightening:

Flares lit the targets, and the city was silhouetted against a white glowing sky. Then the white flooded with red and as the smoke lifted, the sounds of the bombs reached us, ba-boom, a beautiful, deep sound,
and the smoke billowed upwards, thick until it disintegrated high up above the buildings. (P. 147)

Plunged in such atrociousness, Beirut appears “like a stunned beast, netted and charmed temporarily by these handsome, pale soldiers” (P. 187). Beirut, the city of tourists, is slowly transformed into the city of terrorists as the two young girls notice it and experience it.

When fighting intensifies, a constant sense of threat and fear pervades the neighbourhood where violence is frequent, unpredictable and random. If the war planes attack during the day, the daily life of the people is paralysed: “pens were dropped, dishes left on the counter, books earmarked and closed” (P. 137). Going to and returning from work places get paralysed by military checkpoints. People are imprisoned as in Albert Camus’s The Plague (1947) behind high walls, in corridors and humid shelters hoping to save themselves from being killed.

If the attacks happen at night, people living in the building with Alaine’s family gather blankets and pillows and crumple together in the basement with their children. They look “like ghosts, staring at one another, silently knowing we might die. We felt despair, and it kept each of us in place, seated, separate, and acceptable not to. The lifts and falls of hope had no place here” (P. 280). They wait in constant fear “expecting death” (P. 209) night after night and believing the next bomb would be on the building. Each bomb or gunfire makes them shiver. People living in the building with Alaine’s family belong to different political, religious, communal, economic, social, cultural and educational backgrounds. However, they crumple together in one place. The war eliminates all social status and hierarchies. In such an inescapable prison-house surrounded by streets awash in blood and anguished cries, the social or professional status no longer matters. What matters is survival.
At school the condition is not much different: when the bombs thunder in the
distance, Marianna and Alaine along with their schoolmates rush out of the classes to
the schoolyard or creep under the tables. And at home they are forced to stay inside
and playing in the terrace or the balcony which has “changed into an empty place of
danger” is forbidden (P. 25). They are never to move about in the open but when they
go out, they “emerged with care, stepping like people avoiding ants, as if our very
cautions would protect us” (P. 51). At night Alaine and Marianna sleep in the
bathroom putting a mat on the toilet seat. At times Alaine unrolls the sleeping bags for
her sister and takes her hand into her chest while sleeping to make her feel safe when
the sound of gunbattle is heard outside. Marianna recalls all that in this way:

When we lay in our sleeping bags squeezed between the sink and the
toilet, warm and safe, Alaine sang to me and the bombs sounded like
beasts roaring from beneath the earth, popping my ears, shivering my
eyelids, lifting the skin from my flesh, Alaine sang and we were warm
and the window, open so that it would not shatter from the noise,
allowed in the night air of gunpowder and hot things, metal things
whose heat and smell drifted to our faces; tanks, the engines of the
jeeps, the barrels of Dushkas, shells of bullets spinning down
pavement, fiery shrapnel gouging walls and arms and trees, and we
clapped our hands and sang and we were warm there on the tile with
the window half-open. (P. 38)

Life in the bathroom with no respite is death and it hits Alaine’s family. Uncle Ara’s
store and house are reduced to debris by a jet attack. Uncle Ara and his wife die a few
days later. The militias plunder everything that is there in Jiddo’s apartment before
they use it as a military stronghold. Uncle Bernie is kidnapped and later found dead.
Awad’s husband, a tenant in the same building, disappears in mysterious circumstances. Jamil and Amer, Marianna’s friends are no more. Alaine eavesdrops elders’ stories only to hear about the deaths and kidnapping of relatives. Lebanon society is attacked from within by militias and from without by the forces of the war and this novelist succeeds in communicating to the readers. This is not without its effects on the young minds.

The insanity of the war starts leisurely creeping into Alaine’s bones; signs of her psychological breakdown show up which is seen clearly in the games she now plays. From both therapeutic and cognitive perspectives, children use play to work out an understanding of experience, including violence, to which they are exposed. Alaine seems no exception. Her toys are self-made guns, model war crafts besides her collection of bullets, shrapnel and grenades. When she plays with children in the neighbourhood, she imitates the militiamen. Being the older among them she organises them into two fighting parties. She also makes imagined checkpoints with police asking people for their identity cards. She provides them with guns and pistols that she has made. Alaine’s use of toy guns and imagined checkpoints and cars appear appealing to her because they promise dramatic power and excitement. They channel her into replicating the violent accidents she witnesses. The games which Alaine plays show how war has limited her world. It consists only of three components: guns, soldiers and checkpoints.

It is in such an environment marked by madness and violent deaths Alaine lives and after a year or so she slowly relapses into the state of depression. This coincides with the Season Fall: “One day in the fall Alaine did not go to the school, and after this everything was different. This was the beginning of everything, of blood on her arms and face, of the psychiatrists and the pills she would be forced to take, of
her running in the night, pursued by those who loved her” (P. 75). Confining herself to a room, she has lost her appetite and becomes “grimly obsessed by the bombings” (P. 198) and “kept herself home…brooding in corners, reading books on the Great War…hardly eating, speaking only if necessary” (P. 113). What she sees overwhelms and numbs her senses. She no longer talks with anyone and “caged herself in silence no one can break” (P. 174). She “remained limp and inconsolable in those times, under her own spell” (P. 38). Her lips become thinner and harder than usual and her sad black-brown eyes look lost. She shows interest in nothing. She does not respond to her parents’ questions. Her silence is her answer to all the questions her parents ask her.

It is likely that Alaine’s seemingly inexplicable neurotic behaviours stem from her unconscious, irreconcilable needs. Her desperate need for safety and protection drives her toward behaviours characterised by detachment and evasion because the horrific catastrophe she witnessed and went through has shattered her belief in the possibility of establishing nurturing, intimate relationships with others. Further, Alaine’s complete retreat to her isolated life in her room can be figuratively explained as regression to the earliest, infantile stage of life. In a sense, the self-sufficient, encapsulated room is like a womb; the room is completely severed from the outside world. Overwhelmed, exhausted, and defeated by the hostile world outside, Alaine longs to return to the kind of warmth, protection, and comfort that can be found only in the absolutely static and serene conditions of the womb. Alaine is the future of humanity, society and community. Her death-like situation indicates a dying community, a nation. In this sense Ward suggests that communalism may destroy a community, a nation.
Apparently Alaine is leading a double life. Physically she is with the family but emotionally and mentally she is living in another world: “Within her was another Alaine who lived in secret from our house, who had slipped into the outside world while we were not watching” (P. 102). Elsewhere the narrator adds: “Alaine had left us for another world, and in that world, there was no recourse other than staying absolutely still. If she moved, her skin tore open, her head and fists propelled into the walls, her legs run fast as the rockets. There was danger in rousing her from bed” (P. 48-9). Somewhere else the narrator affirms, “Alaine did not exist in this world” (P. 160). Feeling insecure in the real world, Alaine escapes to another world, a world known only by her. Alaine’s detached and semifantastic world, while in a pathological sense is a coping mechanism, is a way to attempt to preserve her naïve vision of the world. This imagined world is produced by the feeling of loss: the loss of the peaceful world. Alaine stays in this alienation caused by the war. What is emphasised here is “internal exile” as a psychological phenomenon. Her condition of health reflects the similar fate the nation is suffering.

Consequently, Alaine suffers from hyper-vigilance. She runs out of home for whole nights. She slips out when everyone is asleep; though the family attempts to keep an eye on her “she slipped away in a breath” (P. 85). She comes back home covered in blood; she has seen a half-decomposed dead soldier and after burying the decomposed body she brings his belongings – blood-stained shirt, gas mask and bullets – home. This further deteriorates her psychological health. Since then she leaves home looking for dead humans to bury them. Marianna knows that her sister goes out searching for dead bodies. She knows this from the objects strewn about her room: “The things she brought home I knew belonged to dead soldiers, maybe even civilians” (P. 85-6). Assaulted by repeated images of dead people, Alaine has been
traumatised by them. *The Bullet Collection* shows with this how war has usurped natural law. Alaine the future of a nation, of a community, represents the naked dance of death. Blood smeared Alaine is that dance.

Alaine’s exposure to violence changes her emotional landscape. Each time she witnesses violence, her basic trust in the world as a safe and predictable place erodes. She suffers from nagging worries and her view of the future begins to change. This leads her to ‘pervasive pessimism.’ So, she starts collecting unexploded grenades, bullets and shrapnel to save herself when necessary. She arranges her collection on the shelf feeling secure that she has the weapon necessary for her safety. For her, this ritual seems to help. This on another level indicates the world of death replacing a world of life.

Alaine here has been used by Ward to manifest the evil side of war. After witnessing violence, Alaine internalises that and becomes violent herself. She engages in aggressive and delinquent actions oriented toward herself. She bruises and cuts her body several times during her attempts to commit suicide. She bangs her head against the wall and sometimes punches it. One day she smashes her fists through the bathroom window in an attempt to climb out. Such behaviour shows the deep effects of war and violence on her. The best term that is used to describe this kind of behaviour is “Self-Inflicted Violence” first proposed by Ruta Mazelis who notes that such acts are used by most people as a strategy for coping with the violence inflicted upon them by others. As Mazelis notes, SIV does “serve to save life rather than hurt self” (Mazelis 2). People self-injure not to create physical pain, but to soothe profound emotional pain. Mazelis has also noted that persons who practice SIV have often experienced their bodies as being legitimate targets for harm by others. Applied to Alaine’s case, it is clear that she self-injures only to give vent to her suffocating
depression. She uses such destructive acts not to annihilate herself but rather as a strategy for survival. In the words of Marianna, Alaine “subsisted on her own nature like a wild animal, feeding herself, teaching herself what she needed to survive” (P. 160). Though such an act – destroying the self in order to survive – seems paradoxical, it is psychologically proved that cutting oneself relieves the pressure of psychic wounds.

Alaine can no longer distinguish between the real and fantasy. She imagines ghosts under her bed, monsters coming up from the crack between her bed and the wall in her room at night. War is self destructive, indeed, but the psychological death is much more dangerous than death. It is a decease that would destroy generations. In this sense The Bullet Collection is a grim reminder of the fact that war hits the living community with the deadliest of the psychic disorders that would remain haunting for generations which is worse than death. Ward in The Bullet Collection is suggesting that Lebanon is caught in a vicious cycle of war, communalism which is cancerous and would hit generations.

While communal violence and war have negative effects on people’s psyche, peace and security have their positive effects. In America, Alaine shows remarkable resilience and recovery. She begins to make a home for herself in the U.S., fixing up their run-down rental house, painting the walls, renovating and redecorating the rooms and planting flowers in her efforts at renewal and recovery. Feeling sheltered, Alaine becomes a normal person. Every morning she gets up, makes her bed in silence and cleans the rest of the house too. She helps her mother cooking and embarks on the garden, surveying it from the window, plotting, and consulting books. She also starts helping refugee children, donating her clothes and toys to them. She becomes patient and more serious. She hides her scarred wrists and burns most of the
things she owned: books, war debris, written notes and blood stained clothes. The burning of her belongings indicates her desire to start anew. The burning is a kind of purging; a determination to forget everything connecting her to the past. She erases all reminders of her earlier suffering. She blurts out: “I don’t remember…And I don’t want to” (P. 182). And in order to forget she has to assassinate those memories, to cut them out like a cancerous limbs. Describing this method of recreation Marianna says: “Alaine squeezes herself harder, drawing her legs in and up and locking her head so tight between knees and chest that her thin white neck might snap. She is depriving the old self of air and light, suffocating it out of existence. It is almost gone. This is what she has been doing, methodically crushing herself, creating the new Alaine” (P. 182). Feeling safe, Alaine attempts to disengage herself from her violent Arab past, and comes to terms with her American surroundings.

Communal conflicts render people homeless. Thousands of people leave the place of their birth under the pressures of communal conflicts and become refugees. This is what happened to Alaine’s family. Some of the most trenchant passages in the novel are those describing the family’s sad relocation to the United States. Although they have fled the danger of the war, a danger that has psychologically damaged all of them, they live disoriented and disconnected in ‘safe’ America. The parents keep looking for jobs but do not find. Later on, though a professor, Alaine’s father accepts a job in a store and the mother works in a library and cuts out coupons to save money in the supermarket. For Alaine’s father such a job is belittling and does not do justice to his higher professional degree. He silently endures humiliation and endlessly toils for the daily survival of his family. Alaine’s father finds life back in the United States burdensome: “His face had grown too thin, grown deep lines around the mouth, across the forehead, and now he looked to the side, tapping his cigarette on the
ashtray with nothing more to say” (P. 60). He, vibrant and prominent in Lebanon, is only a shell of a human in New England.

The family becomes poorer. It cannot afford to pay for the daughters’ education. The parents gamely try to rally their children’s spirits while liable themselves to burst into tears or sink unexpectedly into grim silence. They struggle in trying to build a new life in America. Despite their struggle to keep their daughters away from all this, Alaine understands that “this country does not want us” (P. 16). She finally understands that all the difficulties she is encountering are because of the war and, therefore, when she looks at the photo album of her mother, she wishes she was born in a war-free country: “if there hadn’t been a war, my life would have been like yours” (P. 67-8). But “war doesn’t let a man choose his fate” (P. 91). Ward in such passages paints a vivid tableau that is familiar to exiles and war refugees everywhere.

Alaine’s family serves as a microcosm of Lebanon. More precisely, the battle inside the family is the larger battle fought across the nation. In this novel, the war goes on in two parallel dimensions: outside in the streets, and inside within the family. The novel has the unmistakable ring of truth about growing up and living under the most harrowing conditions. Both the family and the nation are torn apart. *The Bullet Collection* in this sense can be seen as a tragedy of a family as well as of a nation. Both are extinguished. The breakdown of the family has an essential bearing on the tragedy because it offers a microcosm of a disintegrating society.

By constantly shifting her focus between depicting the atrocities of the war and the difficulties of the exile, Ward shows how war renders people helpless and homeless. She invites the reader to be present in the suffering and to bear witness to the traumatising violence to which her characters are subjected. Ward’s message is
that war and exile both create suffering. Both rob childhood of its joys, dreams and innocence. The war robs Alaine’s childhood and exile robs the family’s fortune. Furthermore, Ward’s iterative return to the past bespeaks her commitment to render visible painful issues in the nation’s recent history.

The three novels discussed in this chapter *Sitt Marie Rose, Koolaids: The Art of War* and *The Bullet Collection* explore communalism and community with reference to the Lebanese society. War and its horror happen to be the central preoccupation of the three authors which they duly transform into words. Innocent victims, random deaths, barbaric killers, snipers, bullets, grenades, and bombs provide the subject and the rhythm of the three novels suggesting a world of chaos, loss, and brutality. Furthermore, the texts unfold the complexities of memory, victimisation, and survival and try to convey the experience of living and dying under the war and its brutal and dehumanising face.

Adnan, Alameddine and Ward are Arab American novelists all now. Instead of being disadvantaged by exile and subjective memories, their works become transgressive acts simultaneously inscribing and questioning the morality of the war. The creative output of these writers becomes more significant nowadays because when the war ended in 1990, the Lebanese authorities passed a decree neither to discuss the war nor to record it in the historical texts at schools. The aim is to make the Lebanese forget it so that it will not open the healing wounds again. These works act as a regenerative and probing force against the Lebanese people’s widespread avoidance of discussions revolving around the war. They stand in contrast to the collective amnesia pervading the Lebanese social consciousness. Despite the disparity in their war memories, Adnan, Ward and Alameddine form a unified front resisting the pervasiveness of collective denial and the sectarian prejudices ingrained in the
Lebanese mentality. Confronting not only the war, but the forgetful attitude of people immune to the atrocities around them and to whom war has become outdated. They, on the contrary, feel that a stunning delineation of the horrors of the war and its impact on the psyche of the people will prevent the repetition of such acts. Their aim, to use Huda Barakat’s words, is “to understand how an entire people turns into criminal fighters” (qtd. in Cooke, “Mapping Peace” 80). Accomplishing this purgative act from an exilic location holds a particular significance since it allows them to write with what Syrine Hout describes as “the hindsight necessary to create critical distance from the war’s violence and chaos” (Hout 285). In short, these authors offer a warning against future case of ethnic or sectarian cleansing and genocide. Their motive is that such a momentous crime against humanity must always be remembered.

What these works have in common is the representation of violence as a process of fragmentation that results in the disintegration of the self, the individual, community or the society and their ways of coming to terms with such acts.

The focal point of these works is civilians, not soldiers, who are the principal characters and victims. Such a choice of the characters demonstrates how innocent people become entangled in the machinery of war. As in any war, while the fighters are big political warlords, the victims are always the ordinary people who are the instruments as well as the targets. Hence, we find the authors sympathise with the victims: children, women, defenceless villagers, and refugees, all left to the mercy of reckless gunmen, greedy politicians and opportunists.

Dealing with the Lebanese civil war from exile, Alameddine, Adnan and Ward weave both forms of memory – nostalgic and critical – into their literary work. Sweet and bitter memories exist side by side. They do not focus only on the negative aspect
of Lebanon as a barbaric nation but show how the war has contributed to the
destruction of a once beautiful country.

These writers severely attack the Arabs. Etel Adnan, for example, writes in
*Sitt Marie Rose*: “The Arab world is infinitely large in terms of space and infinitely
small in its vision. It’s made up of sects and sub-sects, ghettos, communities, worked
by envy, rotten, closed back on themselves like worms. This world must be aired, its
stiffness must be eased” (Adnan 57). However, this is not because they hate their
origins but rather because they feel sympathy for their bleeding nation. Living in
developed countries does not mean they look down upon their people and origin. It
means that they have experienced the meaning of true freedom, of harmonious
communities, like America, that live peacefully despite their varied ethical, religious
and cultural backgrounds. Their texts express their hope that the Arabs will one day
stop shedding blood and learn the technique of peaceful life and tolerance.

To conclude, Adnan, Alameddine and Ward’s novels are political in the sense
that they deal with the miscalculated decisions of those in power which bring havoc
on the Lebanese society. Though there is not a single politician in the three novels, the
authors condemn the politicians who poison a society on the basis on religion. In
other words, the writers are of the opinion that it is not so much the complexity of the
communal situation as the nature of the political relations then existent in Lebanon
that caused the catastrophe of 1975. The three authors are fully aware that though the
first initiatives of the war were internal and a byproduct of deep cultural cleavages
inherent in sharp communal, confessional, and other primordial and segmental
loyalties, the war was protracted by local politicians and foreign powers. In other
words, the novels show how communal conflicts become political conflicts. In this
sense, the novels suggest that political struggles still play themselves out under the distorting cloak of religious sectarianism.

The uniqueness of these novels lies in the exploration of the effects of civil war on the lives of those who were never involved in politics. The three novels deal mainly with the predicament of innocent and completely unpolitical people caught up in the whirlwind of the war. They represent a community of people who seems to have no dealings with the political life of the nation whatsoever and is suddenly thrust into the vortex of a political cataclysm. The exception here seems to be Marie Rose who supports the Palestinian cause but she is not a political figure in the sense that she does not represent a state or a political party. In other words, her support for the Palestinians is humanitarian rather than political. Further, most of the victims in these novels are women and children the most vulnerable section of the society.

While Etel Adnan and Rabih Alameddine concern themselves primarily with the external political and social circumstances of their characters, Patricia Ward concentrates on the psychological effects of war on society. Adnan and Alameddine give a detailed analysis of the causes of the war which include politicians, religious leaders and foreign powers while Ward in The Bullet Collection is concerned exclusively with the consequences of the war. With that the war affected Lebanese society comes a full circle: the novels offer the pre-war, the war and the post-war scenario of the Lebanese society.

The three novels are ideologically very loaded. The civil war becomes the locus for the exploration of larger political concepts like colonialism, nationalism, communalism, sectarianism, secularism, religiosity, pan-Arabism and many others. Dealing with such political ideologies, these novels hit the core of political fiction. The authors show the positive and negative aspects of each ideology. In other words,
these novels offer a critical thinking about the politics of the Lebanese civil war and the shaping of Arab American fiction.

The writers, in addition to exploring some of the complex and very deep dimensions of Lebanon's agony, offer ways of making Lebanon a land of peace. They argue for an end of confessionalism or the distribution of power of government on religious and sectarian basis. Lebanese political parties have developed along religious, geographical, ethnic, and ideological lines and dynastic rulers, some prestigious families. This is why politics in Lebanon is mixed with religion, the sectarian and the communal forces. The west and the developed countries in Europe and America have successfully kept religion, race, ethnic and linguistic identities out of politics, which seems to be the secret of the relative peace, progress and political stability they have achieved. Political stability, communal harmony, peace and progress seem to elude the Arab world making it a backward region although very rich in natural resources. Modern Arab intellectuals well versed in modern politics and economy seem to be exploring the ways that would enable the Arab world to transcend religious, political, communal conflict and the ways that ensure progress of their nations. This modern generation includes the creative writers such as Adnan, Alameddine and Ward who have been lending the energy of their creative imagination to nation building which is the sole function of political fiction.

Works Cited


