

# Lebanon: Domestic Turbulence in an International Community

On the depiction of the Lebanese Civil War and 9/11 in  
Lebanese American fiction

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Such distinctions, resting as they must on an idea of the self as being (ideally) homogeneous, non-hybrid, “pure” – an utterly fantastic notion! – cannot, must not, suffice.

– Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*

When you have cut the umbilical cords that bind you together, you will at last become real men, and life among you will have meaning.

– Etel Adnan, *Sitt Marie Rose*

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## Introduction to the thesis

This thesis will investigate several works of Lebanese American fiction dealing with either the Lebanese Civil War, or the post-9/11 situation in the United States. The decision to limit this analysis to these two events was in part inspired by the ongoing presidential race in the United States, in which the discussion of immigration policies still turns out to be one of the main topics. The topic is especially relevant due to the recent movement of migrants from the Levant, which has been widely discussed, notably in Europe and the United States. Previous to this situation, there had already been a tendency among many American citizens and authorities to vilify Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent, which trend flows from a heightened state of caution with regard to terrorism, in particular after the attacks by Middle Eastern Muslims on the World Trade Center on 11 September, 2001. Such an attitude may be comprehensible to some, while to others, the vilification of all immigrant members of one ethnic group seems less reasonable, especially when keeping in mind that those suspected of terrorism are likely fleeing (the threat of) violence themselves. This brought me to consider comparing the post-9/11 situation in the United States to a significant domestic struggle in the Middle East – or in any case, to compare the way these situations are (re)presented in literary fiction – since I thought it might be interesting to search for similarities and differences between two situations of domestic unrest and inter-demographic friction, so as to figure out how these situations were established, and how they could potentially be resolved (again, going by their representation in works of fiction).

While there are many countries in the Middle East that have known civil wars and domestic violent incidents (such as Iraq, Yemen, Turkey, and Israel) the Lebanese 1975-1990 civil war was one of the largest modern Middle Eastern struggles, claiming around 150.000 casualties, and displacing about a third of the country's entire population at one point. It is also viewed as being to a significant extent the result of a religious struggle between Muslims and Christians, which could be related to the situation in post-9/11 America as well, as there are some strong anti-Muslim

sentiments among the (still predominantly Christian) population of the United States after the 9/11 attacks were claimed by a Muslim extremist group. On top of the above, Lebanese Americans are the largest sub-group in the Arab American community today. Since this civil struggle can be strongly linked to the issues of extended (religious) domestic unrest, as well as displacement and migration, I believe it would be suited for a comparison to religious domestic friction in the United States involving the presence of immigrants who are (believed to be) Muslim.

The novels I have chosen to analyse in this thesis are *Sitt Marie Rose* by Etel Adnan, *Koolaid's: The Art of War* by Rabih Alameddine, *The Last Templar* by Raymond Khoury, and *Once in a Promised Land* by Laila Halaby. Of these novels, two focus on the Lebanese Civil War, while two deal mainly with the post-9/11 situation in the United States. Of the two Lebanese Civil War novels, one is experienced from the point of view of a migrant, while the other focuses rather on the experience of the civil war through the eyes of a 'native' citizen; the same goes for the post-9/11 novels. I have also decided to select one novel written by a woman, and one by a man, for the Lebanese Civil War novels, and again, the same goes for the post-9/11 novels; hopefully, this decision will make for a diverse investigation.

*Sitt Marie Rose* is a 1977 French novel written by Etel Adnan. It was translated into Arabic in 1977, even before its publication in French, and into English in 1982. The novel deals with the Lebanese Civil War, and was inspired by the kidnapping, torture, and murder of a Syrian social worker. Adnan was born in Beirut in 1925, and studied in France, before studying and teaching philosophy in the United States from the mid-1950s until the early 1970s, when she returned to Lebanon for a few years. She then moved back to California in 1977.

*Koolaid's: The Art of War* (the shorter *Koolaid's* will also be used to refer to this novel throughout this thesis) is Rabih Alameddine's début novel, and was first published in 1998. It connects the Lebanese Civil War to the struggle experienced by the gay community in particular during an HIV/AIDS epidemic in San Francisco. Alameddine was born in Jordan to Lebanese

parents, and grew up in Kuwait and Lebanon. He currently resides in Beirut and San Francisco.

*The Last Templar*, which was written by Raymond Khoury, was published in 2005. The novel follows various characters involved in an investigation into a raid on an exhibition of Vatican treasures, carried out by horsemen dressed as Templars. Khoury was born in Beirut in 1960, and fled to New York with his parents upon the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War. He currently lives in London, England.

*Once in a Promised Land* is a 2007 novel written by Laila Halaby. It depicts the lives of a Jordanian couple, who had migrated to the United States many years before, during the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Halaby was born in Beirut to a Jordanian father and an American mother, and grew up in Arizona, where she still works, though she has spent some time living in other parts of the United States, the Middle East, and Italy.

After an introduction to the historical and theoretical background, the novels above will be analysed thematically, the first theme of which will be group formation, so as to investigate the process of definition of the borders of the various groups in the Lebanese Civil War and post-9/11 America. The second will be migration, as this typically problematises nationalist sentiments of being exclusively entitled to residence and rights in one country because of one's birth there, and creates friction between 'natives' and migrants; these are also the two groups the "Migration" chapter will focus on. The third theme will be harmony, and this chapter will investigate two different ways of attempting to resolve inter-demographic friction, which approaches are either submission and repression (conformity) or transgression (non-conformity). Eventually, what one would hope to have achieved upon arrival at the conclusion is to have a clearer image of how the Lebanese Civil War and the 9/11 terrorist attacks have impacted the lives of Lebanese Americans and the relationship between them and Americans of Western descent, as well as how Lebanese American fiction portrays their perception of these events, the unrest they have sparked, and the proposed potential solutions for this turbulent situation.

## Chapter One: Introduction

This very first chapter will attempt to paint a clear image of the historical background of the Lebanese Civil War and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and familiarise the reader with the terms of filiation, affiliation, and Othering. It will also include concise summaries of each of the novels.

### *1.1 Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks*

On one level, the Lebanese Civil War and the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September, 2001, have certain elements in common. Both involved terrorism, as they saw the use of violent acts for the purpose of inciting fear, and both inspired further domestic and international violence. Still, they are both unique events, each with their own complicated back story. The analysis of the circumstances of each event must remain concise here; hopefully, even a brief discussion will allow the reader some insight in these situations. This discussion of the historical background aims to give a clearer sense of the parties involved in the Lebanese Civil War and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as well as the post-9/11 situation in the United States. An indication of the involved groups, which comes with an indication of the relationships between them, will be especially relevant to both the analysis of group formation in chapter 2, and that of migration (id est, the establishment of national heterogeneity within a country) in chapter 3.

Lebanon, previously a colony of France, gained independence in 1943. Its borders were drawn in a “cold-blooded geographic trade-off between Britain and France”, though the French were also motivated to plead for the better parts of the land by their desire to please the Maronite Christians (Hirst 23), who had lived in Mount Lebanon for hundreds of years. Lebanon is geographically located at the intersection of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and with its large Maronite

population, which favoured the French as fellow Christians, the country leaned more to the West than to the Arab world. This remained the case when many newly emancipated countries in the Middle East came to favour the anti-Western Soviet Union during the Cold War (Hirst 54). The Maronites continued to be a dominant presence after Lebanon's independence, even though it had been decided that the president would be a Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament a Shia Muslim (Salaita 11). Tensions between the various religious groups present in Lebanon grew higher over time, and this was partly fuelled by the influx of Palestinians that had fled or been expelled from Israel and Jordan; the Palestinians, being Arab and predominantly Muslim, were seen as a threat by Christian groups who viewed themselves as being Western. On 13 April, 1975, a handful of Maronites were killed in front of their church in a drive-by attack, and in response, Maronite forces killed a few dozen Palestinians in an ambush; this event is known as the Bus Massacre, and it is commonly identified as the event that sparked the civil war. On a surface level, the two parties between whom the civil war was fought were Christian Lebanese and Muslim Palestinians; however, there were also Druze groups and secular domestic factions, as well as American, Syrian, and Israeli groups.

During the war, many buildings in Beirut were destroyed, and the plants that grew amid the destruction formed a green strip crossing the city, referred to as the Green Line (Møystad 421). This spatial division separated the mainly Muslim west from the predominantly Christian eastern part of the city. In 1978, after a relatively calm period, violence erupted once again during what came to be known as the Hundred Days War. More international parties became involved, and attempts at restoring peace unfortunately failed. The Taif Agreement of 1989 finally marked the beginning of peace, and in 1991, nearly all militia groups were disbanded, and most war crimes were pardoned.

In short, the religiously and ethnically fragmented nature of Lebanon called for subtle divisions of power, and these delicate power balances were upset by an influx of large numbers of displaced Palestinians. This led to the eruption of violence between Christians and Muslims, which



dichotomy came to be reflected in the very structure of Lebanon. The civil war ended up displacing hundreds of thousands of people (Byman 84); in fact, a significant number of Lebanese moved to the United States. Though these migrants only amount to a few tens of thousands of people, Lebanese Americans constitute the largest group of Arab Americans (“Total ancestry”).

A decade or so after the end of the Lebanese Civil War, the entirety of the Arab American community, as well as the whole of the United States and the world, was shaken by the terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001. There are several different theories about the motivations for these attacks, including the suggestion that the Muslim, Arab attackers felt that the Islamic world, which had been intellectually advanced and dominant for centuries, was washed out by the globalisation of Western and especially American culture – of course, there are also conspiracy theorists who believe the attacks were orchestrated by groups ranging from the Illuminati to Wall Street. However, there are certain motives that are explicitly stated by members of al-Qaeda, the Islamic extremist group that claimed responsibility for the attacks. These include the United States' support for the establishment of the state of Israel, founded in an area previously inhabited by a largely Muslim population, which foundation resulted in violent episodes between Muslim and Jewish civilians. Other motives mentioned are the continued looming presence of U.S. military troops in Iraq after the Gulf War, and the sanctions imposed on the Iraqi people in 1990s, barring all trade with the country for over ten years so as to force them to retreat from Kuwait after invading the country.

The attacks on 11 September, 2001 involved the attempted hijacking of five commercial aircraft, of which four attempts were actually successful. One plane crashed in a field; one was flown into the Pentagon, which where the headquarters of the U.S. Department of Defense are located; and two aircraft crashed into and destroyed the Twin Towers and other parts of the World Trade Center in New York, in what is probably the most notable terrorist attack in modern history.

The combination of attacks on these specific locations – the Pentagon being the image of American military power, and the WTC being a symbol for American capitalist power – with the date on which they occurred (the American alarm number is “911”) shows that the terrorists meant to undermine the stability of and every sense of safety in American society, rather than seeking to directly invade the country and attack as many people as possible in an attempt to take over, which is the way wars are historically fought. In response to the 9/11 attacks, the United States launched the War on Terror, and invaded Afghanistan in order to strike back at al-Qaeda, which invasion marks the beginning of a conflict fought in the Middle East that would last over a decade and claim tens of thousands of lives. A large part of the U.S. military were withdrawn in the early 2010's.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks lead to the fragmentation of U.S. society in that it caused people to want to distance themselves from terrorists, and in doing so, distanced themselves from the stereotype of the terrorists, which means Arab and Muslim people. An investigation of the position and experience of Lebanese Americans, being the most numerous group of Arab Americans, will hopefully make for a sufficiently varied and accurate representation of the position and experience of Arab Americans in post-9/11 America in general.

## 1.2 *Terms and theories*

Several theoretical concepts will be referred to throughout this work, and a few of these will briefly be discussed here. These theories, including Edward Said's theory on filiation and affiliation, as well as Stuart Hall's work on representation and Othering, are particularly relevant to the research at hand, as they investigate the ways in which groups form and relate to each other: both the Lebanese Civil War and the post-9/11 situation show friction in the relations between ethnic, national, and/or religious communities, which may be a result of the process of group formation. The analyses of the theories of filiation and affiliation and representation will be limited to their discussions in Said's “Secular Criticism” and Hall's *Representation*, respectively, as these works are believed to provide a

relatively complete discussion of the concepts.

Edward Said was a Palestinian-American cultural critic who contributed massively to the studies of Orientalism and to the field of post-colonial studies. His article “Secular Criticism” is an introduction to his larger work *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Said begins the article by defining four different forms of cultural criticism, and contemplating the relationship of the intellectual and of the individual to their cultural environment; from there, he moves on to two types of relationships to the cultural environment, for which he uses the terms filiation and affiliation. Filiation is the formation of a bond between people on the basis of genealogical kinship, so in other words, it indicates family relations; affiliation is the voluntary association with others without relying on familial or blood ties for the formation of a community or society. Said argues that filiation belongs in the realm of nature and of life, and that it is subject to 'natural' bonds and forms of authority, such as fear and love; affiliation, on the other hand, is a concept belonging in the realm of culture and society, and it relates to bonds of collegiality and class (20). According to Said, systems of affiliation can over time evolve into systems as dogmatic and orthodox as the original system of filiation, which is presented as adhering to the 'natural' order of things. He also discusses the presence of these two types of bonds in modern cultural history, and makes reference to the central position of a failure to have children in works of literature (16). Said states that this failure to create offspring is seen as reflective of a barren and sterile modern era, which, so he indicates, is also mentioned by T.S. Eliot, who says that they alternative to this unsuccessful procreation would be for people to bond in a non-biological way, through institutions and associations (17). This shows that affiliation can not only be stimulated to replace filiation, but that it can also develop into a relationship as compelling as blood ties. Said actually gives an example of this when he discusses the way filiation and affiliation are present within the context of literary studies, and indicates that while systems of education are supposed to transcend filiative bonds and to be affiliative, they take

on the form of filiation in that they pass on a set canon from older instructors to younger students (21); one might also be reminded of the clichéd stories about students in the United States, who become a member of and involved in their fraternities or sororities for life, and who attend the same university as their parents. Furthermore, the aforementioned canon is defined within the highly selective limits of what is “acceptable, appropriate and legitimate so far as culture is concerned” (21). This implies that, by exclusion from the canon, certain parts of a particular culture are deemed unacceptable; Said's example of education as an affiliative system that has taken on the form of filiation thus also illustrates how dogmatic and possibly outdated sets of norms, claiming to represent the acceptable and therein distancing itself from the unacceptable (see also “Othering” below, in the section on Hall), are passed on from generation to generation. In the case of the Lebanese Civil War, and to a certain extent in the post-9/11 situation in the United States, the term “filiation” could be interpreted a bit more loosely, and be taken to indicate bonds between people on the basis of accidents of birth, without being limited to familial ties: thus, it would include place of birth, ethnicity, and possibly even religion. In the analysis of the novels, one will see that such accidents of birth have indeed evolved into fairly accurate markers of the borders of imagined and constructed communities.

Stuart Hall's work also investigates the issue of representation when it comes to the definition of (the limits of) cultures. Hall begins his article “The Work of Representation”, part of the larger book *Representation*, by explaining the process behind the formation of concepts and systems of concepts that are arranged, related, and classified in particular ways. He suggests one may think of such systems as a sort of conceptual map; however, such a map is useless if people are unable to convey these concepts to one another, in order to convey their meanings and intentions. This is where the system of language comes in: the first system relates things to concepts, and the second relates concepts to a verbal representation. Furthermore, different cultures have different conceptual maps,

meaning that certain things (and therefore also certain concepts and words) may be interpreted differently from culture to culture (assuming the initial thing is even present in each culture). Hall turns to a discussion of the way the distinctions between cultures came to be in a later chapter entitled “The Spectacle of the Other”, where he not only investigates the concept of the Other, but also the representation and construction of distinctions between races, genders, sexualities, ethnicities, and nationalities, all of which can again be called accidents of birth (see page 9). Hall follows the development of Othering through the ages, and shows how in Great Britain, for example, black people were initially accepted as saints and good Christians – illustrating how they were deemed worthy of acceptance into Britain's dominant religion – while they were later positioned as lesser human beings (Hall 239). Hall notes that both during the Victorian era in Great Britain and during the slavery era in the United States, white people perpetuate their idea of proper behaviour between whites and blacks. In the Victorian era, the British come to form an image of Africans, and come to impose their own domestic values on Africans – the “'racialising' of the domestic world and 'domestication' of the colonial world” (241). During slavery in the U.S., white and black people are positioned in society according to a structure of opposites. Black people are presented (and thus perceived) as natural, instinctive, and uncivilised, while white people are linked to civilisation and intellectualism. The supposed savagery of black people was used as an argument to support slavery, as white people argued Africans would turn wild when not under the control of white slave masters, as 'evidenced' by slave revolts. Hall also mentions the fact that black men were deprived of all traditionally masculine responsibilities by whites, which lead to some of these black men compensating for this by exhibiting macho behaviour, which in turn inadvertently confirmed the whites' fantasies that black men are hyper-masculine and hyper-sexualised (263). Other arguments supporting slavery – by reinforcing the invented inferiority of the black Other to justify their suppression – were invented in pseudo-scientific, pseudo-ethnological, and pseudo-religious theories about the delayed advancement of the black race when compared to whites (Hall 243). The

examples above shows how grounds for stereotyping and Othering can be invented, and how strongly these actions can impact reality, even though their pretence to naturalness, essentialness, and legitimacy is false, as they are constructed and cultivated. The process of the exclusion of constructed minorities results in a split between 'us' and 'them', between the normal and acceptable Self and the deviant Other (Hall 258). What Hall thus shows is that while initially, a group of people may be accepted into a culture, the original (and usually dominant) group may reject their presence after a while – the very instability of which structure thus indicates it is not essential or natural, otherwise, one would assume it to be timeless and stable – and devise ways to establish a division within that culture. This dominant group do so by reducing the two groups to a set of allegedly essential features (or stereotypes), pointing out the differences between these stereotypes (Othering), and inventing arguments for the superiority of one group. Othering is then a process of “essentializing, reductionism, naturalization, [and forming] binary oppositions” (Hall 277), in which the representation of the Other is used to justify the dominance and superiority of the Self. This naturalisation can be related to Said, who argues that systems of filiation are presented as following the 'natural' order; the racial distinctions Hall discusses could fit into this category – again, taking filiation to indicate bonds between people on the basis of birth (see page 9).

Said's and Hall's theories show that groups of people and the divisions between them, in the examples the articles present, are formed on the basis of accidents of birth, such as race and ethnicity, nationality, or sexuality. In distinguishing between the Self and the Other, the Self-group implies that it is acceptable and desirable, while the Other is not; this makes for a clear argument for the Self to consider itself superior to the Other. In the Lebanese Civil War, for example, the Maronites distinguish themselves from the Palestinian immigrants on the basis of nationality and religion, and argue for their own superiority in this situation because of their birth in Lebanon (id est, they have a 'natural' claim to the land), and negative stereotypes of Muslims, which are also

inadvertently reinforced by the Othered group. In the post-9/11 situation in the United States, people Other terrorists, but as terrorists are stereotyped as being Arab Muslims, these ethnic and religious demographics are also Othered.

### 1.3 *Introduction to the novels*

In order to familiarise the reader with the narratives that are about to be discussed, what will follow is a summary of each of the novels, as well as a brief indication of their historical situations. While there will be references to the plot lines of each novel throughout the thesis, it would be useful to provide a unified and concise overview of the plots, as this thesis will not focus on one literary work at a time, but will rather investigate themes. The lack of a unified summary of the novels would make for a rather scattered and fragmented image of their contents.

#### 1.3.1 *Sitt Marie Rose*

Etel Adnan wrote this short novel in 1978, inspired by the 1976 kidnapping and torture of Marie Rose Boulos, a Christian Syrian social worker who worked with mentally disabled children and supported the Palestinians, who were severely impacted during the Lebanese Civil War (“Lebanon: Hundreds”). The novel is divided into two sections. The first, “Time I: A Million Birds”, follows an unnamed narrator; Steven Salaita refers to this narrator as the 'overnarrator', and this term will be used throughout this work. The overnarrator returns in the second section, “Time II: Marie-Rose”, and shows the events unfolding there along with six other narrators.

“Time I: A Million Birds” begins before the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War. It is narrated by the overnarrator, who is presumably a young Christian Lebanese woman (as indicated by the phrase “We women” (4), and the fact that she is close friends with almost exclusively other Lebanese Christians). Her friend Mounir plans to make a film about two young Syrian guest labourers; he believes himself highly civilised and cultured – and Western – and wants to

investigate the Syrians' connection to nature (reminiscent of Hall; see page 10). Beirut, where most of the story is set, is shown to be a city of contrasts, where rich and poor, consumerism and industrialism, and Christian and Muslim sections are right next to each other, with the civil war enhancing the perceived contrasts between them and virtually tearing the city in two. The absence of government intervention is a worrisome reality, and militia begin to take over control of the city. The overnarrator shows how Mounir and his friends are indifferent to the suffering of civilians and migrants as the violence creeps out of the shadows and into daily life, leaving the city damaged, decaying, and primitive. “Time I” ends with the overnarrator suggesting that Mounir draw attention to the neglect and abandonment of Syrian guest labourers wounded and killed in the violence, but he believes such a 'political' message will make his film unmarketable in the Arab world. This first “Time” mainly shows the roots of Mounir's convictions, and his preoccupation with his own interests (id est, making his film) rather than with the well-being of others; this will be shown in “Time II” to have grown into strong anti-Palestinian, anti-Muslim sentiments.

“Time II: Marie-Rose” focuses on the Christian militia's capture, interrogation, torture, and eventual murder of Marie-Rose, a Lebanese Christian woman who teaches at a school for deaf-mute children. After her divorce, she became romantically involved with a young Palestinian. “Time II” is split into three parts of seven chapters each, narrated by seven different voices. The chapters narrated by Marie-Rose's deaf-mute students, who speak in one collective voice, indicate that they are tempted to fight alongside the militia, though they are also aware that their handicap makes them outcasts. The chapters narrated by Marie-Rose herself show a strong concern for the children, who are indoctrinated by the adults around them, and the poor, who are protected by no one. She has a powerful will and remains focused on the fight for what is right, even when she knows she will die. The third narrator, Mounir, again shows a fascination with Western culture, for example when he fetishises his ex-girlfriend Marie-Rose's non-Arab looks (she has blue eyes). Mounir believes that violence is a catalyst for civilisation and development, and he pretends to represent the



entirety of the Lebanese people. The fourth set of chapters, narrated by Mounir's and the overnarrator's friend Tony, show that he reduces the struggle to two camps – the Lebanese, or Christians, and the Palestinians, or Muslims – in which situation the Palestinians are to be eradicated. This narrator also shows he is strongly convinced women should have no place or voice in this struggle. The fifth narrator is Fouad, also a friend of Mounir and the overnarrator, who is obsessed with violence, and dehumanises the struggle; he also sees the torture of Marie-Rose as setting an example to the schoolchildren. The sixth narrator is Bouna Lias, a Christian priest, who attempts to convince Marie-Rose to re-ally with the Christians she has 'betrayed', and who justifies her torture; Marie-Rose challenges him by claiming he should the Palestinian cause and plight. The overnarrator from “Time I” takes on the seventh set of chapters, and reflects on the situation from a broader perspective, and especially on the violent aspects of it. These chapters show hypocrisy, primitiveness, and self-righteousness among the Christian militia; in the end, Marie-Rose is executed. The second “Time” shows different views on the Lebanese Civil War, and draws the reader in, so as to allow them to familiarise themselves with and consider these different points of view.

### 1.3.2 *Koolaid's: The Art of War*

Twenty years after *Sitt Marie Rose* was released, Rabih Alameddine published his début novel, which was written in the wake of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States (roughly 1981-1995). To provide the reader with a brief indication of the general topic: the novel shows some parallels between the aforementioned two events, in the chaos, despair, and marginalisation people experience in both situations (it shows how AIDS patients lose control of their lives, as do Lebanese civilians, and homosexuals as well as Palestinians and other minorities in the Lebanese Civil War find it difficult to find their place in a hostile society). The story focuses on a massive number of different characters, of whom the most prominent narrators

are Mohammad, a Lebanese American painter; Samir Bashir, a young Lebanese American; Samir's mother, who still resides in Lebanon; and Kurt, an aspiring painter. All of the male characters mentioned here – and then some – are non-heterosexual, and have been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Other characters include relatives and friends of the four main narrators, and such historical figures as Arjuna and Krishna, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Tom Cruise, besides a large number of other non-recurring characters. Though it is nearly impossible to identify the narrator correctly in every instance, below is an attempt at distilling the main plot lines.

Mohammad's story shows that he sees his group of friends affected in some way by HIV/AIDS. He dreams about his own death, and ponders how he would like to narrate it in poems and novels, even though he has already specialised in and achieved some level of fame with his painting. Mohammad is actually the protagonist of a second narrative: there are several short sections depicting four Christian horsemen, who have come to collect a dying man. At first, they reject him, because he is a homosexual, but eventually, the horsemen accept the man, and one of them tells him: "I love you, Mohammad" (245). The next story, that of Samir, shows him reflecting on his childhood in Lebanon and the outbreak of the civil war, as well as his explorations of non-heterosexual sex, after he is diagnosed with HIV/AIDS while living in the United States. A prominent motive in his story is that he wishes he could have had more time, showing that he feels like his life is not complete or fulfilled, and that he has not made peace with the idea of dying. He spends a lot of time on his personal history and development, and his sexual experiences. Samir's mother offers a more coherent and chronological story; her sections are easily identified, as they take on the shape of diary entries. She remained in Lebanon during the civil war, and reflects on the situation there, as well as on the life of her son, with whom she seems to be in touch regularly, and his illness. Finally, Kurt is rather concerned with his abilities as a painter, while also observing the effect of HIV/AIDS on the lives of others. He, for his part, is determined to deny the illness any power over his life, and plans to overcome this potential weakness. In all of these plot lines, we

recognise the loss of control mentioned in the first paragraph of this section (see page 14). A last interesting storyline is that of Nick and Samia, a couple whose adulterous relationship develops within Beirut itself. The description of their interactions is littered with violent imagery, with perhaps the most disturbing scene being the one in which Nick penetrates and stimulates Samia with the barrel of a loaded hand gun.

### 1.3.3 *The Last Templar*

Raymond Khoury's début novel, and the first post-9/11 novel to be discussed here, is quite different from the two Lebanese Civil War novels: it seems to be a crime novel in the style of Dan Brown's highly successful series of religiously-themed novels about the character of Robert Langdon. Religion is most definitely foregrounded in this work as well, while the post-9/11 situation remains less prominent in relation to the events of the novel. However, there are some interesting comments on post-9/11 American society, and the relations between those of Western or Christian descent and people who are or seem to be Middle Eastern or Muslim.

While a less prominent storyline follows a young Templar, showing the fall of his order and his mission to deliver a secret to Paris, the actual main characters in this novel are Tess Chaykin, a young archaeologist, and Sean Reilly, an agent at the FBI. They meet after horsemen dressed as Templars attack an exhibit of Vatican relics and steal one particular artefact: a small box, which turns out to be a machine used to decode encrypted messages. The Templar attackers turn out to have been hired by William Vance, a former colleague of Tess' father, who stole the encoder to solve an ancient Templar mystery. Tess and Reilly chase Vance to Turkey, where they discover an encrypted message in a crypt in a submerged town; this message points them to a sunken ship. Hidden in this ship is a lost gospel, penned by Jesus Christ himself – a carpenter, a man, and not the son of God. Vance planned to find evidence of this fact and reveal it to the world, so as to destroy Christianity as a first step on the path to a grander, more unified world, without religious borders;

agents and high-ranking members of the Vatican and the church were working against him. The documents end up in the ocean when Vance tries to escape with them. The novel clearly indicates the author's perception of the policies enforced by American authorities, and of extremism that is related to one's religious convictions.

#### 1.3.4 *Once in a Promised Land*

Laila Halaby's novel, like *Koolaid's*, is largely experienced from the point of view of migrants. The 9/11 terrorist attacks are absolutely central in this novel, and their (mainly negative) impact on the lives of Arab Americans in particular is investigated here. The novel follows Salwa and Jassim, a Jordanian couple who have migrated to the United States and built their lives there; suddenly, they are faced with aggressive discrimination, because American society has instinctively decided to reject all those individuals who have anything in common with the Arab Muslim terrorists that attacked the World Trade Center and other locations in the U.S., which similarities include one's ethnic and religious background.

Salwa and Jassim met in Jordan when Jassim gave a lecture on water conservation and safety, with which topic he is highly concerned; he also works as a hydrologist in Arizona. They marry, and after having lived in the United States for a number of years, the 9/11 terrorist attacks shake their world, despite their insistence that this has nothing to do with them, as they are not terrorists, and have no intention of damaging American society. People – clients as well as colleagues – express their concern over Jassim's access to the local water supply, and a client refuses to speak to Salwa at the bank where she works. On top of that, many people they encounter outside of their professional life, such as in stores and in their personal circle of friends, now approach them in a different way, with caution and suspicion. The novel shows the destructive effect of the 9/11 attacks on their world. Salwa, who was hiding her pregnancy from her husband, miscarries; Jassim is so distracted by his own thoughts that he accidentally hits a teenager with his car, killing the boy. Both flee from

their worries and the problems within their marriage: Salwa has an affair with a much younger colleague, and Jassim is attracted to a waitress who helps him deal with the guilt he feels after the accident. Neither of their affairs end in a stable and happy relationship, as Jassim confesses to Penny that he is married; Jake actually turns out to be much more dangerous, and he assaults Salwa after already having endangered her career as a real estate agent by convincing her to have sex in a client's home. Both Salwa's and Jassim's attempts to resolve the hostility between (white) Westerners and Arabs through romantic relationships are thus unsuccessful. In the end, their own relationship is ruined as well: Salwa decides to return to Jordan, without taking into account that Jassim might object to and be hurt by this. It seems that her and Jassim's marriage has been damaged beyond repair.

#### 1.4 *Chapter conclusion*

What one would hope for the reader to have gathered from this chapter is some degree of familiarity with the two historical events – the Lebanese Civil War, and the terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001 – as well as with the concepts of filiation and affiliation and of Othering, and with the general contents of the novels that will be discussed and analysed here. First of all, the Lebanese Civil War, on a superficial level, was the result of tensions between the many ethnic and religious groups in Lebanon, and especially between the Maronites and the Palestinians, as the former felt their privileged position was threatened by the Palestinian immigrants. After this civil struggle, which lasted for about 15 years, many Lebanese found themselves displaced; some moved to the United States, where they again faced domestic unrest after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. This incident was, like the Civil War, provoked by one group's sense that their power was taken away: the groups that claimed responsibility for the attacks, al-Qaeda, said to be or are believed to have been provoked by the loss of the Islamic world's position of intellectual dominance, as well as the threat and enforcement of foreign measures in Iraq by American forces. The lasting impact of the attacks

on the Arab American population has lingered for almost fifteen years at this point.

The discussions of the theories in section 1.2 should have indicated that both Said and Hall mention that accidents of birth determine a significant part of the process of group formation. Said discusses filiation and affiliation, which terms indicate the formation of bonds between people on the basis of familial ties, and the non-biological association with other people, respectively. This thesis will at times broaden the meaning of the term “filiation” to indicate the formation of bonds between people on the basis of accidents of birth, so as to include race, gender, sexuality, and nationality. Said also states that systems of affiliation can be “naturalised”, taking on the form and dogmatic, compulsive nature of filiative systems of association. Hall also comments on the process of naturalisation when he discusses claims that the differences between certain groups are self-evident and unmistakable; he mainly uses examples related to race, but the process he indicates is in itself more universal. Hall shows how people may invent or emphasize perceived differences between themselves and another group, reducing both groups to one-dimensional stereotypes in order to point to one or a few supposedly essential characteristics, and establish a system of binary opposites on the basis of the supposedly essential differences between the two stereotypes. In the process, one group, the Self, assigns negative characteristics to the other, and distances itself from this Other-group, thus defining the Self as positive and the Other as negative, in the same action also establishing ground for a claim to superiority of the Self. The brief discussions of the historical backgrounds, as well as the theoretical one, is added to the summaries of the novels that are to be discussed in this thesis. The two Lebanese Civil War novels are *Sitt Marie Rose* – this novel though small, shows many different perspectives – and the structurally interesting *Koolaid's: The Art of War*; the post-9/11 ones are the Dan Brown-esque *The Last Templar* and the strongly migrant-focused *Once in a Promised Land*.

As indicated in the introduction, the following chapters will investigate how these novels show the process of forming borders between groups, which, following Hall, means that there is

both exclusion (Othering) and inclusion (establishment of the Self). Furthermore, this thesis will focus on the position of migrants, as perceived by migrants as well as 'natives', during the Lebanese Civil War and in the post-9/11 situation in the United States, as especially the migrant's experience of domestic unrest and violence may show us unique perspectives. Since all of the authors at hand were born in the Middle East before moving to the United States, one can quite safely assume that some aspects of their migratory experiences have found their way into their works of fiction. Migration complicates any nation's (self-)definition by problematising the way it views ethnicity, heritage, and “belonging”; also, as noted in the discussion of the Lebanese Civil War, the presence of migrants may cause inter-demographic friction, as it challenges the 'natural' claim of 'natives' to a piece of land. The last part of the analysis will focus on the attitudes of specific characters vis-à-vis the established borders between groups: simply said, one can conform – or not, which would problematise the alleged naturalness of the borders themselves.

## Chapter two: Group formation

Shepherd or sheep you have always defined yourselves in terms of herds.

– Etel Adnan, *Sitt Marie Rose*

### 2.1 Fragmentation

A recurring theme in the discussion of the Lebanese Civil War is the fragmentation and sectarian nature of Lebanon. Steven Salaita mentions this in his analysis of the political situation: what he points out is that the relations between the various demographics had been unstable for a long time, as the limits of the former French colony had been “carved delicately in Paris in the 1920s to produce a slight Christian majority” (Salaita 11), but this initial majority found itself outnumbered by high Christian emigration rates, and Muslim immigration and birth rates. After the 1975 Bus Massacre, tensions rose to the point of escalation, showing how problematic the fragmented nature of Lebanon still was after attempts at establishing balance between its various demographics. It is no surprise that many Lebanese and Lebanese-American fiction writers during and after the civil war, including the four novelists at hand, explore the topics of fragmentation and division, as well as the issues that come with this fragmentation. The theme of fragmentation is actually strongly reflected in the structures of both *Sitt Marie Rose* and *Koolaid's*, and it is also to a lesser extent also present in *The Last Templar* and *Once in a Promised Land*. The latter two novels shift their focus between characters and plot lines at times, while the former switch between characters and narrators quite often. All novels do show the negative effects of demographic fragmentation and sectarianism on (the behaviour of) their characters.

Adnan's novel consists of two “Times”, the first of which – Time I – is narrated by one single



person, presumably a young Lebanese Christian woman, who is referred to as the “overnarrator” by Salaita. The second part, Time II, is divided into three sections of seven chapters each. These 21 chapters are narrated by seven narrators in three cycles. The narrators are Marie-Rose's deaf-mute students; Marie-Rose herself; Marie-Rose's former boyfriend Mounir, who now leads the Christian militia; Mounir's and the overnarrator's friend Tony; their friend Fouad; Bouna Lias, a Christian priest; and the overnarrator, who returns for every seventh chapter. All of these narrators provide the reader with different perspectives on, as well as varying degrees of involvement in the civil war: the students wish to be more involved, but are aware that their handicap is an obstacle; Fouad is highly militant and more concerned with violence and bloodshed than morality and love, as already indicated in Time I, where his obsession with hunting and violence is stressed (Adnan 2); and Marie-Rose is clearly opposed to the militia's violence and animosity towards the Palestinians. This division among the characters, who are all Christians, already negates the image of the civil war as a struggle between two clear-cut and equally violent and militant groups. However, while the characters show the variety of points of view, the imagined division between religious, economic, and ethnic groups is still reflected by the spatial situation: Olivia C. Harrison draws attention to the fact that the war “accentuates these divisions, reducing the myriad complexities of life into binary fractures”, which then resulted in a neat spatial division within Beirut (Harrison 3), referred to in chapter 1 as the Green Line (see page 5). This enhancement of binary divisions and reduction of complexities seems to be the result of the civil struggle; however, there are also attitudes that contribute to the formation and amplification of binary oppositions on an active level, through the conscious reinforcement and emphasis of perceived differences, such as by religious groups; this will be discussed in section 2.2 (see page 26). Harrison comments on another aspect of the physical structure of the novel again when she remarks that the two Times of the novel are unequal (Harrison 3), with the pre-war Time I being shorter than Time II, which is set during the war. This inequality may suggest a contemporary focus on the binary divisions of the war (reflected by the larger war

section), rather than the acknowledgement of the pre-war emphasis on the reality of plurality in Lebanon (shorter pre-war part). The novel shows the division of Lebanon in the views of its characters, and the structure of the novel, showing the individuality of each narrator while also indicating the interpersonal connections between them, reflects the fragmentation as well. By suggesting that there is a contemporary and historiographical focus on the dichotomy (Muslims versus Christians) and juxtaposing it with evidence of the plurality of the residents of Lebanon, *Sitt Marie Rose* shows that militia have established a self-contradictory set of limits for the Self: they claim the allegiance of all Christians, without taking into account that not all Christians agree with them. As their guidelines for inclusion are inconsistent, then so are their standards for exclusion; this undermines the validity of the militia's claim for the rejection and inferiority of Palestinians and Muslims. The heterogeneity of the Lebanese people, as well as the suggestion that the anti-Palestinian sentiments are unfounded and unjust, are further stressed by the presence of the sympathetic overnarrator and of Marie-Rose, who are Lebanese, but support the Palestinian cause.

The structure of Alameddine's *Koolaid*s also resists the idea that there are but two groups who are as homogeneous and as clearly bordered as the militant factions would like to pretend they are. There are two main narrators – the young homosexual Lebanese-American men Samir and Mohammad – and many more minor ones, scattered among numerous sections, each no longer than a few paragraphs; what complicates matters further is the fact that the novel moves on to a new narrator after practically each section without explicitly identifying the new narrating voice, making it almost impossible to correctly identify the narrator and plot line each time. The structure of the novel not only reflects the fragmentation of the Lebanese nation at the time of the civil war, but it also clearly illustrates that this fragmentation can cause chaos and uncertainty for those involved, as they are torn between different identities and (af)filiaions that overlap with and reject each other. Samir and his family, for example, have trouble uniting their faith with Samir's homosexuality, despite their filiative connection. The novel's splintered structure is also confusing for anyone

attempting to make sense of the complicated sects and the relations between them. As Dervla Shannahan states in her queer-focused analysis of the novel, *Koolaid*s does not only switch between characters and narrators at an astounding pace, but also between religious traditions (Shannahan 132), as amusingly highlighted in one passage showing three of the horsemen chanting a verse from the Qur'an, while the fourth horsemen scolds them for not reading exclusively from the Bible, as they are supposed to do (Alameddine 99). On top of this, the novel even changes literary genres at times, diverging from the main plot lines to include such things as news reports (24), diary entries (31), and to several scenes describing imagined discussions between celebrities that take on the form of a play (37). As it showcases a structural plurality, *Koolaid*s can hardly be aligned with one single religious or literary tradition, and this reflects the way its characters find themselves at the intersection of affiliations.

As mentioned before, the two post-9/11 novels mainly show fragmentation in the actions of their characters, while it comes across less prominently in their structures. In *The Last Templar*, the reader is presented with the fragmentation of American society as a whole due to ethnically and religiously selective targeting and investigation of Arab and Muslims communities, both domestic and foreign, as a response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This is most remarkably illustrated in a passage in chapter 14, in which FBI agent Reilly reflects upon the Bureau's practice of planning visits to mosques, making certain to bring at least one Muslim agent or police officer with them, which illustrates that there are perceived differences between Muslim communities and the authorities that need to be bridged through the explicit inclusion of Muslims in groups that represent the authorities. Reilly also expresses an awareness of the targeting of Muslims in the search for potential terrorists:

Databases that had mushroomed after Oklahoma City were awash with names of homegrown radicals and extremists; those following 9/11 were overflowing with names of Muslims of many nationalities. Reilly knew that most of them were on those lists not

because they were suspected by the authorities of terrorist or criminal acts or tendencies, but simply because of their religion. (Khoury 73).

This reflection on the policies of the FBI and other authorities, such as Homeland Security, immigration services, and police departments (Khoury 73) show that it is considered common practice for the authorities to categorise the population of the U.S.A. on the grounds of ethnic and, in this case, religious ties, illustrating the United States' fragmentation. The particular phrasing of the term “homegrown radicals”, especially when contrasted with “Muslims” in the next line, also seems to suggest a disconnection from and Othering of the Muslim community. The novel thus shows the institutionalised discrimination of Arabs and Muslims, though Sean Reilly's thoughts also indicate that he is aware of the fact that the targeting of Muslims is not based on reasoning or investigation, underlining the irrationality of ethnic and religious profiling.

The fragmentation of American society by the authorities returns in *Once in a Promised Land*. As in Khoury's novel, the 9/11 terrorist attacks are shown to suddenly evoke or awaken anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments in the United States. This is discussed by Anastasia Valassopoulos, who argues that this means Arab Americans and Muslim Americans are, like Jassim and Salwa are in the novel, confronted with a sudden need to defend their Arab and/or Muslim background, and therein, they are faced with a need to define what Arab-ness is (Valassopoulos 596). In the process of defending Arab-ness, we come to see that Arab Americans are held to a different standard of what is acceptable behaviour than non-Arab Americans are: non-Arab Americans have a “compulsion to be communitarian and watchful” (Valassopoulos 602), which, in the case of store clerk Amber, means that she reports Jassim to her manager, with the only cited provocation being that he “just stood there and stared for a really long time” (Halaby 30). Salwa, on the other hand, receives a recommendation from a colleague to decorate her car with American flags to show her love for the U.S. – something non-Arabs are not encouraged to do, which suggests that non-Arab Americans have a sort of innate patriotism Arab-Americans do not possess. Arab Americans thus face a higher

threshold when it comes to the amount of effort required to defend their position within the United States. Steven Salaita also notes the heightened sense among non-Arab Americans of needing to be patriotic by defending the United States from perceived threats, which attitude he refers to as “imperative patriotism” (Salaita 88); he also mentions that Arab people are physically stereotyped, and since terrorists are thought of as being Arab, this both means that those that fit the physical stereotype of 'the Arab' are quickly suspected of terrorist inclinations, and that they are Othered, as no one wants to be associated with terrorists. The narrative's focus on two people of Arab descent and birth, who have left their native country for the United States, and who clearly love their new home and have built a life and a career there, denies the validity the claims that Arabs and Muslims are all terrorists, and the novel shows how these claims undermine the efforts of the individual to assimilate into and be a productive contributor to American society, which means that they prevent the subversion of fragmentation, thus contributing to its perpetuation.

## 2.2 Unification

While subtle perceived differences between ethnicities and religious sects divide societies and nations, it seems that certain religious organisations in the novels at hand are bent on being a unifying force, though they merely focus on reducing fragmentation by unifying the sects of their own religion, rather than unifying all people. In fact, they partake in stereotyping people and sorting them into the Self- or the Other-group based on their (supposed) religious affiliation. *The Last Templar* offers a particularly interesting take on the issue of religious unification, which will be discussed later on.

As indicated in section 2.1, *Sitt Marie Rose* shows that the fragmentation of the Lebanese people occurs mainly along religious lines, which are then further generalised to present the situation as exhibiting a division between Christians and Muslims, and simplified to rough spatial lines (the Green Line, see page 5). This division is reinforced by religious groups – in the case of

Adnan's novel, the motivations and actions of the Christian camp are shown – in order to reduce the complexity of the initial situation with its many sects to one single set of binary opposites. In doing so, the Christian militia facilitate the identification of those with a filiative bond to either the Christian Self or the Muslim Other, thus making it easier to identify the perceived enemy, and to claim the allegiance of the perceived ally. This attitude is evidenced by the priest Bouna Lias, who states the following: “If you were a Moslem, Marie-Rose, there wouldn't have been this problem. They would have shot you at the first roadblock. But you're a Christian, and I would like it if we could still save your life” (Adnan 63). What this indicates is that people are actually identified and shot as enemies based on their (supposed) religious affiliation. Salaita indicates that the Othering of Muslims is reinforced through the origin myth of the Crusades: Lebanese Christians appeal to a history in the medieval Crusades, therein appealing to a Eurocentric (that is to say, modern and civilised) and Christian background, while denying Palestinian Muslims any claim to both a shared history and a shared modernity. The stereotyping of Muslims as uncivilised savages then serves as a justification for Christian on Muslim violence (Salaita 16, 17) (see also page 5 for the section on the Bus Massacre), which violence actually shows the reversion to savagery and primitiveness of the Christian militia, and invalidates their claim to civilisation and refinement. To further illustrate this, Salaita points to the character of Bouna Lias, a Christian priest, who vilifies Marie-Rose for her perceived betrayal of her Christian background, and uses this as a justification for her torture and murder; by giving permission to torture Marie-Rose in front of her deaf-mute students, he shows these children what affiliation with Muslims will lead to, simultaneously instilling loyalty to the Christian camp and stimulating rejection of the Muslim/Palestinian cause (Salaita 19).

Thomas Foster directs his reader's attention to the fact that Mounir, a prominent member of the Christian militia, even seeks to reduce the distinctions between all the different groups, whether hostile or friendly, to one equation of life and death, of victor and vanquished, so that peace can be (re)established within a context of dominance (Foster 68). Mounir also assumes the unity and

homogeneity of the entire Christian community, and in doing so, he assumes that all individual Christians are representative of the entire community. One aspect of the novel that problematizes this assumption that all Christians can adequately represent the Christian cause is the presence of Marie-Rose's deaf-mute students: they need to learn a specific language in order to properly express themselves, which communicative obstacle hinders their representative capacities. On top of this, they are aware that one facet of their being does not grant them automatic access to a certain group, as they clearly state when they contemplate the possibility of belonging to “the People” (Adnan 44) (Foster 63). The children's collective narrative voice says that “it's not only because we're poor. We're not all poor”, which quote shows the heterogeneity of their group, even if they have a handicap in common. *Sitt Marie Rose* seems to claim that the Christian militia attempt to (over)simplify the complex sectarian nature of Lebanon during the civil war, simultaneously claiming the allegiance of all Christians to strengthen their own position and Othering all those with a Muslim background; however, this image is contradicted by the inclusion of voices showing the heterogeneity of the Christian camp, invalidating its claim to essentialness and naturalness (see also page 11 on Hall).

As mentioned before, the practice of religious Othering as a way of identifying a community also occurs in *The Last Templar* and *Once in a Promised Land*. Both of these novels show the stereotyping and discrimination of Arab-Americans after the 9/11 terrorist attacks: they are reduced to their supposed religious ties to Islam, and the supposed connection of Islam to terrorism, for which alleged indirect ties to Islamic extremism and terrorism Arab Americans and Muslim Americans are Othered by the predominantly non-Arab, Christian American environment they are situated in. In *Once in a Promised Land*, for example, people are worried Jassim may abuse his access to the local water supply and poison them all, because they associate his ethnicity with Islamic extremism, even though Jassim does not consider himself to be a very religious person. This shows how all Arabs and Muslims are tossed onto one pile, denying the existence of subtle

differences, while some Western Christians begin to form a unified front against this perceived threat (see also page 26 on imperative patriotism).

The simultaneously unifying and fragmenting actions of religious groups is discussed again in *Koolaid's*. Alameddine's novel shows that religion, in the process of creating a common ground by appealing to a shared sacred text and a shared origin myth for all Christians, defines itself by accepting and acknowledging certain modes of behaviour, and rejecting others. Dervla Shannahan brings this up in her sexuality-focused analysis of the novel, in which she points out that the artist Mohammad shows the hypocrisy of heteronormative Christianity in his contemplation of the way it rejects homosexuality, while not explicitly rejecting incest and paedophilia in their scripture, with particular regard to the story of Lot is Sodom (Shannahan 135) (Alameddine 64, 65). As mentioned in the discussion of unification in *Sitt Marie Rose*, the attempts of religious groups (in this case: Christianity) to gather and grow its following have both a unifying and a segregating effect, as the setting of requirements for inclusion and unification (affiliation) also demands the determination of requirements for exclusion (Othering), which in this case is the exhibition of homosexual behaviour.

Lastly, Khoury's novel provides the reader with a rather different take on the unifying/fragmenting role of religion. The novel reminds the reader that three of the largest religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – actually share an origin myth: all of these religious traditions view Abraham (or Ibrahim) as a patriarch, and his first son Ishmael, born to Abraham and his wife Sarah's Egyptian handmaiden Hagar, is seen as the patriarch of all Arabs in the Muslim tradition. He is also recognised as a forefather of the Muslim prophet Muhammad, who is believed to embody the fulfilment of God's promise to Hagar in the Bible verses Genesis 17:30 and Genesis 21:18, where God states that He “will make [Ishmael] a great nation”. Long after the departure of Hagar and Ishmael from Abraham and his family (which is believed to be the point where the Judeo-Christians and Muslims diverged), the descendants of Abraham's second son Isaac were split into two groups again when the story of the resurrection and divinity of Jesus spread, and some



aligned with his followers, while others stuck with their Judaic traditions. What this indicates is that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were originally one group; in Khoury's novel, the Templar Order seeks to re-establish this unity by eliminating that which sets each group apart from the other, which in this case is quite plainly each religion's distinctive beliefs about any form of higher power. Since they are in the possession of proof that Jesus was not divine, in the form of a gospel written by the carpenter's son himself, the Order have decided to start with undermining the validity of Christianity's distinctive belief that Jesus was the son of God. William Vance, who discovers this secret centuries later, plans to reveal the Templars' documents to the world, so as to continue their mission; however, he is hindered by Vatican agents and officials. What the reader is thus presented with in *The Last Templar* is the idea that while the aforementioned religions do acknowledge a common origin myth, they ignore this potential for peace and unity by emphasising and actively preserving their distinctive features; the novel also shows that there is actually a religious order dedicated to the undoing of this religious fragmentation, showing the heterogeneity of Christianity. However, *The Last Templar* also imagines the potentially disastrous results of the revelation of the humanity of Christ in chapter 71, in which cardinal Brugnone, a high-ranking Christian clergyman, reveals this secret, and goes into the chaos and despair such a revelation might cause (though he seems to do this mainly to justify his secrecy and lies). Brugnone explains that this deception or misconception has been around for too long to be undone, and that in today's advanced and educated society, it would simply be embarrassing for millions of people to acknowledge their apparent ignorance and gullibility (Khoury 330). Besides this, the cardinal also points out that in the Bible, Paul says that “if Christ be not risen, then *is* our preaching vain, and your faith *is* also vain” (Corinthians 15:14). If the myth of Jesus' resurrection is invalidated, the entirety of the Christian community will be left feeling disillusioned and betrayed (Khoury 331). What *The Last Templar* proposes is that religion causes and perpetuates division, while at the same time parts of it (in the form of the Templar Order) strive for cross-religious unification; however, it also makes clear that

the undoing of religious fragmentation, at least the way the Templars attempted to, could devastate millions.

### 2.3 Chapter conclusion

To summarise this chapter, the fragmentation of the narrative as well as the disagreements of the characters among themselves reflect the heterogeneity and plurality of both the Lebanese and the American populations. In each of the four novels, religious organisations show attempts at gathering together the sub-sects of their religion and unifying these people on the basis of their birth into a particular religious group – which could be argued to be a form of filiation – so as to strengthen their position vis-à-vis other religions. They do so by Othering members of other faiths, which practice leads to starker contrasts and increased divisions between different religious groups.

What is interesting about the Civil War novels is that the fragmentation of the Lebanese is reflected in the remarkable structure of the novels, while the structures of the post-9/11 novels seem more straightforward. This may be due to the fact that the Civil War novels' authors felt they had to reinforce the plurality of Lebanon – in *Sitt Marie Rose* by showing different views on the war, and in *Koolaid's* by showing the sexual plurality that challenges the rigid requirements for religious inclusion, for example – that was denied by the contemporary constructed image of the civil struggle as a clash between uniform binary opposites. In the post-9/11 novels, there does not seem to be such a strong emphasis on the subtle plurality of American society, which may be due to the fact that Arab Americans and Muslims were suddenly overwhelmed by anti-Arab and Islamophobic sentiments in the United States while believing themselves to be properly assimilated. In *Once in a Promised Land*, Jassim believes himself to be well-integrated; in *The Last Templar*, agent Reilly's thoughts on the terrorist watch list maintained by the authorities show that institutionalised discrimination against Muslims has grown exponentially. The novels actually focus on establishing a definition of Arab-ness that will ensure their re-inclusion in the melting pot of American society.

## Chapter Three: Migration

So, where would he go today? To the rolling farmlands of Central France?  
To the foothills of the Alps? To the seashore, or beyond, to his beloved  
*Outremer*?

– Raymond Khoury, *The Last Templar*

### 3.1 Perception

One Lebanese Civil War novel and one post-9/11 novel are experienced from the point of view of 'natives' (note: this term occurs in quotation marks throughout this thesis, as virtually all human beings are technically migrants). Coincidentally, these novels chronologically precede their migrant-focused counterparts, and therefore, this chapter will start with an analysis of these literary representations of the view of the 'native' on immigration. This chapter will also include references to the portrayal of U.S. government policies pertaining to the treatment of immigrants.

*Sitt Marie Rose* is actually unique in this investigation, because unlike the other novels, it does not deal with the migrant experience of Middle East-to-United States migrants, even though Etel Adnan had already lived in America prior to the production and publication of this novel in the 1970s. The novel does go into the issue of migration, however, as it discusses Palestinians and Syrians residing in Lebanon. The first of the two “Times” actually focuses on the process of writing and producing a film that Mounir, a friend of the novel's overnarrator, wants to create; this film is to follow two young Syrian migrant workers in Beirut. Mounir has already shot some material of himself and a few friends hunting in the Syrian desert prior to his conception of this film, and while watching the hunting film, the overnarrator explains that Syrians “lack the proper style ... to hunt as

well” (Adnan 3), which implies that they are not thought of as advanced, or in any case, are thought to not be as advanced as the Lebanese. On top of this, the novel indicates that Europeans used to go hunting in Syrian, a role the Lebanese have now taken over. This connects and equates European and Lebanese hunting tourists; Mounir even goes so far as to confuse the terms “Europeans” and “Lebanese” at one point (Adnan 5), further reinforcing the idea that Lebanese people are really European as opposed to Middle Eastern, thus Othering non-Lebanese Arabs. This latter group, of course, includes those non-Lebanese Arabs that live within Lebanon's borders (such as the Syrian guest labourers and the Palestinian refugees, for example), which means that these immigrants are Othered and imagined as less advanced and less modern than the Lebanese.

In his discussion of the *chabab* in *Sitt Marie Rose* (“young men”, the Christian militia), Steven Salaita mentions that they are presented as “prone to self-hatred and racist violence” due to their Eurocentric obsession with their Crusader history (Salaita 16), which further supports the idea that these young Arab Christians use a focus on their connection to European 'modernity' to Other those Arabs from predominantly Muslim nations like Palestine and Syria, whom they portray as barbaric (16). Thomas Foster draws a similar conclusion: his article pays special attention to the fact that Mounir has a desire to create this film because of a nostalgia for pre-colonial times and a connection to nature, which he believes Syrians do still possess. As mentioned before, the borders of Lebanon were drawn by the French, which means they are wholly artificial (one might argue that all borders are, but here, the borders are clearly determined by people, rather than by natural landmarks and the like); Foster suggests that Mounir's longing for a natural state is a response to this artificial state (Foster 61). However, Mounir is at the same time unwilling to support the Syrians. When a few hundred Syrian migrant workers are killed in the civil war, the overnarrator proposes to use the film about the Syrians as a way to draw attention to their suffering; however, Mounir rejects this idea, as he believes this topic would make the film “too political” to be accepted in Lebanon (Foster 61) (Adnan 24). What this indicates is that Mounir, believing himself to be a

representative of the entirety of the 'native' Lebanese people, is more than willing to exploit Syrian migrants labourers as a source of entertainment, while being reluctant to defend or protect them. Adnan uses this point to stress the hypocrisy and irrationality of (the members of) the militia.

The discrimination of immigrants is also shown in the post-9/11 novels, as discussed in chapter 2. As mentioned before, *The Last Templar*, like *Sitt Marie Rose*, views the position of immigrants through the eyes of a 'native', which in this case means it is experienced mainly from the point of view of agent Reilly. His contemplation of the authorities' policy of targeting those American and international citizens with an Arab and/or Muslim background has been discussed before as well, though it is also indicated in the novel that he is slightly uncomfortable with the targeting of Muslims and Arabs based solely on their ethnic and religious background (Khoury 73) (see page 24). Later, when the Templar attack on the museum is discussed with a seemingly well-respected Catholic clergyman, cardinal De Angelis, it becomes clear that Reilly, as an individual, is reluctant to blame the Muslim community for the Templar museum raid (or for terrorism in general), while De Angelis is quick to assume Muslims are guilty (Khoury 59). This suggests that while the authorities may be (re)presented as exhibiting anti-Muslim sentiments, and may attempt to distance the Christian Self from the Muslim Other, there are still individuals within each of these religious imagined communities, even though – like in *Sitt Marie Rose* – certain groups would like to pretend there are but two homogeneous camps.

### 3.2 Participation

The other side of the migration process – that of the actual migrants themselves – is depicted in Alameddine's *Koolaid's* and Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*. Both these novels show the migrants' perception of the host culture, and the way they relate to their culture or country of origin after their migration.

Contrary to the portrayal of agent Sean Reilly in *The Last Templar*, showing his discomfort at

the thought of discrimination against Arabs and Muslims among American government organisations, there is no such focus on the benevolence of the individual in *Once in a Promised Land*. In this novel, the behaviour of the authorities vis-à-vis immigrants includes, but is not limited to encounters with government officials, such as FBI agents. The novel's protagonists, Salwa and Jassim, are faced with Islamophobia and anti-Arab discrimination while going about such mundane tasks as shopping or dealing with clients at work; even their friends and colleagues come to question these Jordanian immigrants' position in American society. Several clients express their concern for the water supply to Marcus, Jassim's boss and long-time friend, as they believe Jassim, being a hydrologist, has access to it, and fear that he may poison or otherwise pollute it. Marcus brings this up to his wife, which prompts her to wonder if he thinks Jassim “is capable of doing something bad to the water supply”; this awakens in Marcus “that vague doubt that had been lodged way back in his brain, undercutting the faith he had in others” (Halaby 236-7). Lastly, Jassim's co-worker Bella grows suspicious of him, begins to keep a log of his activities at work, and eventually reports him to the FBI. Meanwhile, Salwa receives a suggestion from a colleague to display her love for the United States by adorning her car with the stars 'n' stripes, as she says: “You never know what people are thinking, and having this will let them know where you stand” (Halaby 55). Also, a client refuses to work with her at the bank (where Salwa is a teller), demanding to have a manager assign her a different teller. What these examples show is not only that civilians have come to express anti-Arab sentiments after 9/11, but that they also appeal to those in a position of authority to lend credibility to their suspicions, such as when people express their concerns about Jassim and Salwa to their superiors (Marcus and Bill, respectively), or when Bella believes her own suspicions to be valid enough to warrant alerting the FBI. Even more disturbing is that these management and government representatives actually (have to) take these suspicions seriously. FBI agents show up at Jassim's work after he is reported by Bella, and he ends up being fired by Marcus; when Salwa and Jassim are targeted in the store, and call out the clerk on this

discriminatory behaviour, the girl's manager attempts to soothe the situation, but shows no sign of intending to correct the clerk's behaviour. This reflects the passive attitude of the authorities towards ethnic profiling, with which reflection the novel indicates their complicity in the discrimination of Arab Americans.

Especially for Salwa, the confrontation with a suddenly rejective environment crushes the hopes and dreams of freedom and happiness she associated with the United States. The couple's experience is that non-white, -Christian, or -Western inhabitants of the United States are suddenly compelled to show their allegiance to America after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, while the devotion of Christian or non-Arab Americans to the United States is not questioned. Authority figures, ranging from store and bank managers to the government, implicitly reinforce and support this idea by acting on suspicions against Arab-Americans. The need to meet other people's standards of patriotism puts pressure on Salwa and Jassim, though they keep their discomfort and unhappiness to themselves. This suppression of discomfort adds to the existing strains on Salwa and Jassim, as well as their relationship, which strains, according to Silke Dewulf, are the result of secrecy and a lack of communication. Salwa keeps her pregnancy and miscarriage from Jassim; Jassim hides the fact that he accidentally killed a boy, as well as his being fired. Dewulf argues that the building up of secrets lead to a situation where Salwa and Jassim are unable to "tell the other what is going on and they begin to lead parallel lives" (Dewulf 46), and the secrets between them indeed end up driving them apart. Salwa realises her secret pregnancy and miscarriage drive a wedge between her and Jassim: "In the redness of her blood she saw the crevice between her and her husband" (Halaby 91). The novel indicates that a lack of communication leads to the disconnection of two people, which can be assumed to symbolise the detrimental effect of a lack of communication on ethnic and religious relations within the United States, stressing the importance of dialogue in American society. This idea is reinforced by the comfort and relief that especially Jassim finds in his interactions with his new (that is, post-9/11) white Western friends, the affiliation with whom relies completely on

chance, as he meets them after diverting from his usual routine and comfort zone after the accident he has with Evan, an event that kills the boy. Jassim communicates about accidentally killing Evan with a waitress, Penny, as well as with the mother of the boy, and through these conversations, he is able to share and process his guilt.

The representation of the migrant experience in *Koolaid's* is somewhat different from the way it is represented in the other novels in that it does not focus on the institutionalisation of discrimination to the same extent. One of the more remarkable moments in this novel that deals with an inter-cultural encounter, between non-migrants and migrants, occurs when Samir, a young man who moved from Lebanon to San Francisco, attends an exposition of paintings by Lebanese-American artist Mohammad. Samir learns that some of the other people attending the event assume the paintings to be abstracts. He is initially slightly embarrassed, as he thought “if you could tell what they are, they are not abstract” (Alameddine 101); since people more knowledgeable of art had classified the paintings as abstract, Samir believes he must have viewed them wrong. Samir had actually immediately recognised these paintings as representations of typical Lebanese architecture (101), and Mohammad confirms that this is the depiction that had been his intention. This encounter illustrates the misunderstanding of the Lebanese people and their culture by those outside Lebanon, as they apparently still do not share a conceptual map (see also page 9), though this misunderstanding of migrants is not presented as going hand in hand with hostility and xenophobia in *Koolaid's*, while it is in the other three novels. The novel thus shows that even when people do not harbour malevolent feelings towards immigrants, they may still exhibit behaviour that indicates their ignorance and lack of understanding of other cultures, which prevents them from experiencing all of its layers, as the ignorance of the art show attendants keeps them from appreciating Mohammad's paintings for what they are, or are intended to be. Alameddine seems to say that while the eradication of racism and ethnicism is a step in the right direction, this does not automatically mean the people with different cultural backgrounds are suddenly on the same page.



*Koolaid's* shows other signs of a cultural gap between the Lebanese and Americans. A friend of Mohammad's sister, Marwa, had started a correspondence with an American girl when she still lived in Lebanon, which continues after she moves to the United States. This girl, Sarah Miller, seems very concerned for Marwa's safety, as she believes the civil war must impact her Lebanese peer severely; sometimes, she will send gifts along with her letters, such as a small piece of cake or a pencil, to "ease the pain" (Alameddine 191). Marwa and her friend, Mohammad's sister Nawal, had exaggerated their suffering in an essay that a few periodicals actually published, and they had also sent this essay to Sarah; it seems that this is the main reason Sarah believes they have suffered immensely. Apart from sending her the essay, Marwa never replies to any of Sarah's other letters, though this does not stop Sarah from sharing intimate details about her romantic and sexual encounters, her uncertainties regarding her boyfriend, and the possibility of marrying him. While it is clear that Marwa and Nawal lied, the novel does suggest that Sarah is quite ignorant of what really happened during the Lebanese Civil War and of what would be actually helpful in consoling Marwa after the traumatic experiences Sarah believes she suffered. Sarah also assumes an intimacy and friendship, or affiliative bond, with Marwa, while the latter and her friend Nawal merely giggle at the personal and emotional stories Sarah shares. What this seems to imply is that the United States, though aware that the Lebanese people are suffering, are rather unconcerned with the civil struggle, and only offer a half-hearted attempt at a solution, while being mainly involved in their own interests and personal troubles. This could be linked to what Samir's mother writes about the U.S. military troops stationed close enough to Beirut to assist and protect Lebanese civilians: she explains in a 1996 diary entry how Israeli air strikes on Beirut claim civilian lives, while the Americans are more concerned with their own interests in the negotiations between Israel and Syria. She states that the "Americans allow this because they want to save the peace process by making sure Peres get reelected", and that the Lebanese "pay with their lives so the bastard can win an election" (Alameddine 209). This portrayal of American involvement in the Lebanese Civil War

shows that they are perceived as self-involved and lax when it comes to protecting the innocent. Mounir, in *Sitt Marie Rose*, seemed to agree with the idea that declaring against the suffering of innocent people (in that case: the Syrian guest labourers, see page 33) will be detrimental to one's own interests. *Koolaid's*, then, like *Once in a Promised Land*, implies and condemns the complicity of powerful American political forces, who choose to remain passive in the face of injustice, in the suffering of civilians.

### 3.3 Chapter conclusion

It seems that in both of the Lebanese Civil War novels, migrants are appreciated or even exploited for their entertainment value, while they remain misunderstood (the misinterpretation of Mohammad's artwork) or undefended (Syrian migrants working under poor circumstances), which indicates that they have not (been) fully accepted and assimilated into the host culture. These two novels suggest that acceptance and integration would improve the living conditions of immigrants and ensure that they are treated humanely, while also stimulating inter-cultural exchange and understanding. The post-9/11 novels show that Arab American migrants and Muslims in the United States are faced with a sudden dramatic increase in Islamophobia and anti-Arab sentiments after having lived in the United States for years. This is further illustrated by the presence of characters who are initially friendly towards Arab Americans, but who later observe or experience a shift in their own or in the country's general attitude towards this demographic.

The role of the American government in the Lebanese Civil War is discussed here and there in *Koolaid's*: the military is shown to be passive, and seems to refuse to interfere because of their own political interests in establishing peace between Israel and Syria; meanwhile, an exchange of letters between young Lebanese and American girls illustrates the ignorance and well-intended but practically useless efforts of Sarah Miller. The difference between the portrayal of the American authorities in the Lebanese Civil War novels and in the post-9/11 novels is that the passivity of

American authorities is more general in *Koolhaids*, while in the other two novels, it seems to be more of a passivity towards the issue of ethnic stereotyping and Othering. What this can be assumed to reflect is that during the Lebanese Civil War, the American government were interested in ensuring the safety a broader peace process, while after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, they were complicit in the targeting of Arabs and Muslims, as evidenced by the analysis of agent Reilly; to counteract racial profiling would be to undermine their own efforts towards the persecution of potential terrorists, and therefore, they remain passive towards the issue injustice in the form of racism and ethnicism.

## Chapter Four: Adaptation

Because each community of Lebanon has known oppression in its history,  
none should oppress the other.

– Rabih Alameddine, *Koolaid's: The Art of War*

### 4.1 *Transgression*

In previous chapters, the populations of both Lebanon and the United States are shown to be fragmented, to a certain degree, along the lines of religion, ethnicity, and nationality. In chapter two, it was pointed out that some of these borders have been established to ensure a sense of community among the members of a particular religious or ethnic demographic. The issues of nationality and nationalism are challenged by migrants, but the reader encounters characters that oppose the other two types of borders (ethnic and religious) as well. Stuart Hall argues that with the formation of borders around an imagined community comes a sense of balance; when this balance is disrupted by people who cross borders, specific rigid cultural categories are unsettled (Hall 236), leading to anxiety among those who prefer everyone to be neatly organised along cultivated, artificial borders (id est, nationalists and the like). One could perceive the actions of these transgressive characters as attacks on community building and the formation of stable groups, which is exactly the view many of the characters with strong nationalist sentiments are shown to have: Marie-Rose, for example, provokes the rage of the Christian militia, who are convinced that her affiliation with a Palestinian man indicates her betrayal of and attack on the Christian camp. However, such fears are unfounded, as it seems the motivation of such characters are Marie-Rose goes beyond merely childish kicking against the pillars of the cultivated systems, and the characters show that their transgressions do not actually prevent the formation of groups and communities.

Adnan's Marie-Rose is most definitely a brilliant example of a character that challenges and

crosses borders and classifications. Even though she initially dated the Christian Mounir in her teen years, and later married a Christian man, she is clearly not bound exclusively to the Christian camp by her romantic and emotional commitments, as she divorces her husband, and begins a relationship with a young Palestinian, who is perceived as the Muslim enemy by the Lebanese Christian militia. As Edward Said states, certain interpersonal associations that go beyond blood ties, and are thus affiliative, rather than strictly filiative, can over time become as rigid and dogmatic as filiative bonds; in this case, the fact that Marie-Rose was born into a Christian environment means that the Christian militia believe she is tied by blood to the Christian cause, which indicates that religious affiliation is presented as having developed to the point where it follows dogmatic and supposedly natural (that is to say: indisputable) filiative structures in the bonding process. On top of this, Olivia Harrison points out that Mounir appeals to Marie-Rose's sense of filiation with the Christian camp in an even more direct way, when he asks her to consider her children (Adnan 88) (Harrison 5); she refuses to yield to Mounir's plans, and insists that his actions lead to the deaths of innocent people. This shows that her sense of justice and her belief in the equality of all communities of Lebanon supersedes even her motherly love, supposedly the strongest natural bond. Her affiliation with Palestinians is viewed as a sign of desertion and betrayal by the militia, and they use this as a motivation to detain, torture, and eventually murder her; they are supported in this by the justification they get from priest Bouna Lias (see also page 27). Adnan, like we have seen in the investigation of the other novels, indicates and, through her narrators, condemns the complicity of authority figures in violence. Marie-Rose herself refuses to subscribe to the militia's notion that there are two clearly defined camps, without any grey in-between areas, and she insists that she has a right to cross those borders that would separate her from her lover if others had their way, thereby showing that she values the freedom to associate with whomever one pleases, regardless of strict cultivated political or religious borders. Marie-Rose refuses to align herself with the idea that the imagined two camps are homogeneous and equally violent and hateful; she does not take part in the

violence between a few small groups, which are not representative of Lebanese society as a whole anyway, but attempts to assist those non-militant civilians who are hurt in the violence between militias. Even as she is being tortured by the Christian militia, she clings to her belief in peace and love, defying the militia's claims that violence is necessary. Harrison argues that even her death resists the militia's belief in the homogeneity of the Christian camp: she shows that Marie-Rose's death resists the illusion of homogeneity because her eventual death is supposed to weed out heterogeneity within the Christian camp (Harrison 9). By eliminating Marie-Rose, and preventing the deaf-mute children from turning on the Christian militia, they acknowledge that Marie-Rose did in fact have a different opinion, and that the children have the same potential to disagree, and so they are forced to acknowledge the heterogeneity of their own imagined community, as well as the invalidity of their claim to the self-evidence of homogeneity in the Christian camp. Marie-Rose's transgressions thus force the militia to involuntarily admit that their borders are not as clear or accurate as they would like them to be, which challenges their convictions and their justifications for the violence they inflict upon others.

In addition to the above, Steven Salaita points to Marie-Rose's name as a clue as to why her supposed betrayal of the Christian cause is taken so seriously by the militia. He believes that her name is a reference to the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, who is actually a trans-religious figure; the novel also compares Marie-Rose to Mary in physical appearance (Adnan 45). This positions Marie-Rose as a symbol of non-conformity, transgression, and trans-religious unification even more strongly; however, even though they accept the figure of the Virgin Mary, who embodies a way to salvation for Christians, the Christian militia oppose the trans-religious side of this Biblical figure, as they continuously want to deny Muslims (whom they take to be synonymous with the foreign Palestinians) any claim to a shared history or culture. Salaita takes this to be the reason for the rage of the *chabab* towards Marie-Rose: since she is a symbol of purity, connected to the Virgin Mary and the immaculate conception, that let herself be defiled by a Palestinian man, she has

allowed the purity and salvation of Christians, Lebanese Christians, and Lebanon to be lost (Salaita 18-9). Thus, by crossing and blurring imaginary borders, she opposes the goal of the Christian militia to maintain the purity of the Lebanese people by keeping them cleanly separated from the Palestinian/Muslim perceived enemy.

Thomas Foster suggests that the deaf and mute children also oppose the illusion of homogeneity that the Christian militia is shown to be so obsessed with. The handicapped students are rejected by and hindered in their communication with their environment, which illustrates a lack of homogeneity and inclusion of all Christians within the Christian camp, thus challenging Mounir's belief in its homogeneity, as well as the militia's belief in the strength of the pseudo-filiative bond between all those who are born in a Christian environment. The children themselves, as mentioned before, contemplate their belonging to the group, and show that they are aware it takes effort to be a part of “the People”: for example, they that that to be poor – most likely yet another accident of birth, as it remains difficult even today to escape the economic class one is born into – is not enough, and that “You have to be docile and innocent” (Adnan 45). Their attitude challenges the militia's conviction that filiation (in the broader sense of “bonds based on birth”, rather than only the sense of “familial ties”) is sufficient for the formation of groups.

The refusal to partake in and acknowledge the struggle between two sides, as represented by Marie-Rose in *Sitt Marie Rose*, crops up again in *Once in a Promised Land*. Jassim, and especially Salwa, refuse to surrender to the racism and discrimination aimed at Arab-Americans and Muslims after the 9/11 attacks; in doing so, they challenge the idea that they are different from other American citizens, and the idea that their inferiority as Others is natural and undeniable. They are supported in this by several non-Arab and non-Muslim friends and colleagues, who accept them into their lives despite the widespread animosity towards Muslims and Arabs in the post-9/11 United States. Sexual attraction and romantic relationships seem to play an important role in the process of affiliation between people of different cultural and national backgrounds (as it does in

*Sitt Marie Rose*, by the way, in the relationship between Marie-Rose and her lover) after 11 September, 2001. Jassim and Salwa meet in Jordan, but the fact that Jassim lives and was educated in the United States makes him even more attractive to Salwa, and his residence in America offers her, among other things, a way out of Jordan. A client of Salwa's, Jack Franks, has actually witnessed a move in the opposite direction: his daughter is a young white American girl who fell in love with an Arab man, married him, and moved to his home country in the Middle East with him before the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Jassim, for his part, is attracted to a white American divorced waitress, Penny; while he eventually confesses that he is married, Salwa actually does cheat on her husband with her white colleague, Jake, who seems interested in Arab cultures and casually studies them, as he is trying to “see it from the inside” (Halaby 127); he also apologises to her after accidentally assigning a client to her who was clearly suspicious of Arab people (114), which seems to indicate he feels bad for the discriminatory treatment Salwa has to suffer as an Arab woman. Through sexual and romantic attraction, Salwa and Jassim both begin to form affiliative bonds with others, even if they are eventually not successful, which resist categories and classifications, as they merge the worlds of Arabs and Westerners as well as those of Muslims and Christians. By showing the safety and comfort they find in these interpersonal relationships (see page 36), Halaby further underlines the positive effects of the transgression of imagined demographic borders in post-9/11 America.

Yet another resistance to categorisation is found in the *The Last Templar*, in the shape of the terrorists that have dressed up like old Templars for their attack on the exhibition of Vatican relics. Authorities are shown to target Arabs and Muslims – as evidenced by FBI agent Sean Reilly's contemplation of potential terrorist watch lists, and by Monsignor Brugnone's assumption that the attackers would be Muslims (see page 34) – as they assume increased anti-Western and anti-Christian sentiments among the members of these groups; the Templar attack, carried out by people who are later discovered to be Westerners, shows that there are white, Western, non-Muslim



individuals that invoke the image of an ancient Christian order to attack and damage Christian relics displayed in a Western city. The reader also finds out that these terrorists are, in a sense, acting from religious extremism: the Templar Order was dedicated to the reunification of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism by erasing the distinctive characteristics of each religion. If they achieve their goal of eliminating the differences between these three religions, this would mean there is no longer any risk of members of one religion warping their beliefs to serve as a justification for extremism and terrorism against those members of the other faiths, as there would no longer be grounds for the Othering of the other religions. The Templar attack thus not only indicates that the fear of foreign, Muslim, and Arab terrorists only is irrational by showing that terrorists do not exclusively belong in these categories: their actions also show that in an apparent contradiction, religious extremism and terrorism can be intended to prevent religious extremism and terrorism.

Lastly, Alameddine's *Koolaid*s resists categorisation in its structure, as well as the behaviour of its characters. As discussed before, many different styles and types of texts are included in this novel, ranging from personal diaries to news stories to hypothetical conversations between historical figures; thus, it crosses the borders of literary genres. In addition to this, the novel does not limit itself to one set of dogmatic religious ideas: as Shannahan mentions, Alameddine draws inspiration from several different scriptures, primarily the Bible and the Qur'an (Shannahan 132), while the characters of *Koolaid*s also refuse or fail to conform to the rigid heteronormative standards implied in the scriptures. These religious texts condemn homosexuality, according to many people's interpretation of these texts, but not paedophilia, prostitution, or incest: one of the narrators (probably Mohammad) analyses the story of Lot in Sodom, in which he deflects the rage of a mob by offering them his virgin daughters – who, by the way, later both sleep with him in order to have children, when they are hiding far away from other men after having left Sodom. The narrator is outraged: “God tells us 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” (Alameddine 64). The novel

also shows the hypocrisy of individuals, rather than of the entirety of the scriptures, especially in the form of Samir Bashar's father. When he comes to visit, Samir is in a panic about what items to remove from his living room, as he is worried some books may indicate his homosexuality to his father: as he later states, he is convinced that “to be who I was meant a complete disinheritance” (Alameddine 185); the identity to which he refers is his being a homosexual man. When his father arrives, however, it becomes clear that he intended to use his son's apartment in order to “recapture old times” with an old girlfriend (124); Samir says he feels betrayed by this. The adultery of Samir's father, which is actually a severe religious transgression, shows the hypocrisy of those who reject homosexuals citing religious dogma, and it also illustrates how nearly no one fits into the picture of what is sexually acceptable, and how the line between Christian and non-Christian cannot be drawn on the basis of sexual norms. This, again, challenges the idea of homogeneity in any one group, here on a sexual level.

#### 4.2 *Conformation*

In contrast with the transgressive characters in the previous section, each of the novels shows us characters who de-emphasise certain aspects of their personality that may make them stand out from those around them. Instead of opposing categorisation, they attempt to conform to a perceived standard. This section will, among other things, investigate the effectiveness of conformity and the repression of one's individuality, assuming the goal is to fit in.

First of all, in *Sitt Marie Rose*, the reader is shown that the deaf-mute children have a desire to belong to a group; however, as previously discussed, they are aware that a sense of belonging does not result automatically from filiative bonds to a particular group. The students reflect on their marginal position in Lebanese society, a result of their handicap, for which they are Othered by virtually everyone. Their collective narrative voice states: “Nobody loves us. Our parents beat us. It makes them angry that we're deaf-mutes” (Adnan 44). Despite this, the children show a subtle

desire to take part in the civil war: they are attracted to violence, in the form of the weapons carried by the militiamen who come to take Marie-Rose hostage, citing only their size as an obstacle keeping them from using these guns (43), meaning that when they grow up, they will (be able to) take part in the inter-sectional violence. Their attraction to violence and to the weapons the militia carry indicates a desire to belong to the Lebanese by association with those who claim to represent the Lebanese nation. The children do not end up taking part in the violence between Lebanese and Palestinians, but neither do they protect Marie-Rose when she is taken hostage and tortured in front of them. Though they are, of course, just children, the novels shows how their passivity in the face of violence implicitly endorses it, which could be taken to be a sign of their desire to fit in with the militia (as representatives of the Lebanese the children wish to belong to) by supporting their actions. The fact that they refer to themselves as “US, the deaf-mutes” (43) might just imply that they actually also symbolise the United States, meaning that their passivity represents the passivity of the U.S. military in the Lebanese Civil War while the people in Beirut were suffering (see also page 38). The above shows that the children's desire to conform to the militia's violent standards in order to belong to their group eventually remains unfulfilled.

Yet another form of repression in an attempt at conformity is shown to be ineffective when it comes to establishing a sense of belonging and of being accepted in *Koolaid's*. When Samir Bashar's father comes to visit him in the United States, Samir frantically searches his apartment for books and objects that might suggest he is homosexual; he has not come out of the closet to his conservative father, and still fears rejection. When his father arrives, however, he is not the least bit interested in Samir's sexuality, or the degree to which he adheres to heteronormative standards. Samir had hoped to be reassured in his father's acceptance by minimising his homosexuality; however, the novel only shows his father wanting to “recapture old times with an old flame. In my bed” (Alameddine 124), and little else. This indicates that the changes Samir makes when it comes to his own sexual expression do not have the desired effect on his relationship with his father: he

had hoped that his façade of conformity to heteronormative standards would make his father accept him, but this clearly does not happen.

Salwa and Jassim, in *Once in a Promised Land*, also attempt to repress and play down those parts of their lives that might make them stand out by trying to conform to the perceived norms of American society. Jassim in particular believes himself to have fully integrated in and assimilated to life in the United States. He has even distanced himself from his father's faith, as shown when he explicitly states he does not believe in God, while his father does (Halaby 46), thus weakening the affiliative bonds he shares with his family. Jassim also distances himself from other Middle-Easterners: when he encounters a couple of Jordanians at Wal-Mart, he is instantly reminded of the *souk* (also *souq*, an open-air market) in Amman, Jordan, which he dislikes because of the presence of poor people. He also instinctively recoils at the thought of associating with poor Jordanians in the United States. Anastasia Valassopoulos also argues that Jassim comes to “reject the allure of an ethno-national-centred community”, which he associates with nostalgia, sentimentality, and poverty (Valassopoulos 600). However, it is still his Arab looks and his supposed allegiance to Islam, through the stereotyping and Othering of Arabs as Muslims, that makes him a target for racial profiling and false accusations and suspicions of terrorism on multiple occasions, meaning that his attempts at assimilating into American society and distancing himself from his Middle Eastern background have been unsuccessful.

Another instance of repression occurs in *Once in a Promised Land*: Salwa and Jassim keep many secrets from each other. Jassim initially denies that he is affected by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and he maintains that it has nothing to do with him, which is part of his process of distancing himself from religion and religious extremism. Still, he is evidently shaken by this event to the point where he becomes distracted while driving, and accidentally hits and kills a teenager; this indicates that he has denied being affected by the 9/11 attacks on his personal life, meaning that he has not allowed himself to process and come to terms with the impact of this event. Jassim's suppression of

his connections to his ethnic background has thus had an undeniable detrimental and traumatic impact on his own life. On top of this, the increased discrimination against those with Arab and/or Muslim backgrounds eventually causes him to lose his job; he keeps all of this from his wife. Salwa, for her part, also keeps secrets from Jassim, one of the largest being her accidental pregnancy and subsequent miscarriage. She only tells her friend about this, and hides her distress and pain from Jassim, as she is aware he never wanted children; Salwa is afraid that he will disapprove of and reject her behaviour, seeing as she is the one who forgot to take her birth control pills. All of these secrets have a detrimental effect on their relationship (see also page 36 on Dewulf). Salwa eventually leaves for Jordan, and Jassim wonders if perhaps what he wants her to be “could not exist in America. [...] And he feared that he could no longer exist in Jordan” (Halaby 303). This shows how the accumulation of secrets and a lack of communication drive a wedge between the couple, which situation Jassim is not sure can ever be resolved. His attempts to distance himself from his Arab background in order to free the way to assimilation in America are shown to be unsuccessful, as Jassim is still stereotyped and discriminated against as an Arab man, and remains burdened by his filiative and alleged affiliative bonds to his ethnic and religious heritage.

#### 4.3 *Chapter conclusion*

The transgressive characters mentioned above mainly serve to challenge the apparent trend among certain militant groups to reduce the struggle between many different groups of varying allegiance and degrees of violence to one binary view of the conflict. Their very presence illustrates the heterogeneity of all groups – in *Sitt Marie Rose*, for example, Marie-Rose's views clash with those of the militia, indicating that their view of the Christian camp as homogeneous is incorrect. This heterogeneity is reinforced by the structure of the Lebanese Civil War novels in particular. On top of this, *Once in a Promised Land* shows the positive effects of transgression by presenting the reader with an image of Salwa's and Jassim's sense of comfort and emotional peace when they share their

secrets with Americans who are not of Arab descent.

The novels also indicate that conformity is not an absolutely and wholly effective option when one is looking to be accepted by their environment. In *Sitt Marie Rose*, a focus on the story of the deaf-mute children reveals that though they desire to belong with the militia – to them, the militia are a representation of the Lebanese people as a whole, thus also a representation of their families – the militia reject the students because of their handicap. By belonging to the militia, they would be able to show they are also an essential and valuable part of the Lebanese people; however, it is their handicap and their “smallness” or age (neither of which are the result of any fault of their own, but simply states of being) that makes them unfit to join the militia and the civil struggle in general. In both *Koolaid's* and *Once in a Promised Land*, certain characters attempt to play down the physical or personal characteristics that are a part of them by accident of birth: Samir tries to avoid a confrontation on his homosexuality with his father and decides to remove anything that could hint at his sexuality, and Jassim distances himself from the Arab American community. Again, these attempts at conformity are not successful, as Samir's goal of acceptance is not quite achieved, and neither is Jassim's. The repression of one's nature or preferences in order to remain or be accepted by another person – simply, to not be rejected – comes up again in *Once in a Promised Land*: both Salwa and Jassim keep secrets from each other, as they are afraid their partner will be unable to continue to accept them after their secret is revealed. This seems to show that Halaby believes openness and honesty are paramount, and that repression will not have a positive effect on the interpersonal relationship, nor on the individual; this can be applied to both interpersonal and inter-demographic relationships, as the open and straightforward communication between members of different demographics is shown to be beneficial in section 4.1.

## Conclusion

*There's no "they lived happily ever after"?*

“Happily ever after” happens only in American fairy tales.

*Wasn't this an American fairy tale?*

It was and it wasn't.

– Laila Halaby, *Once in a Promised Land*

The intention of this thesis has been to investigate the position of Lebanese Americans in American society through the analysis of Lebanese American fiction. First, it considered the construction of borders between groups through the inclusion of the Self and the exclusion of the Other; secondly, it showed how migrants problematise the definition of nations; and thirdly, it looked at the attitudes of several characters towards the established borders, which they either rejected, or attempted to conform to. What will follow below is a summary of these analyses, as well as an attempt at distilling one grand answer to the question of how the Lebanese American community portrays the impact of the Lebanese Civil War and the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on their own community as well as on the relationship between them and other Americans; this conclusion will also pay attention to the matter of suggested solutions for the reconciliation of Arab Americans and their fellow American citizens.

The first chapter of this thesis, meant to provide the reader with the necessary historical and theoretical background for the rest of this work, indicated that the Lebanese Civil War is generally assumed to have resulted from tensions between Lebanon's many religious and ethnic factions as the presence of Muslim Palestinian immigrants was perceived as a threat by the Christian Lebanese.

The perceived encroachment on one's political power can also be seen as the motivation for the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Both during the Civil War and the ongoing post-9/11 situation, the culturally dominant 'native' group have invented grounds for the Othering of less privileged and powerful cultural minorities; these grounds often have to do with filiation in the sense of “relating to accidents of birth”, since people are shown to be categorised on the basis of their birth into, for example, a certain national or ethnic community.

The second chapter focuses on the process of group formation by analysing the themes of fragmentation and unification. Fragmentation is the splintering of society into different groups with subtle (perceived) differences, while the section on unification shows how each novel portrays the efforts of certain religious groups to unify their sub-sects by broadening and simplifying the requirements for inclusion. This (re)establishment of the requirements for inclusion also call for an indication of the requirements for exclusion, or Othering, which means that the attempts at unification within one religion simultaneously make for fragmentation of society on a larger scale. As also indicated in this chapter, the Lebanese Civil War novels exhibit fragmentation in their very structure, reinforcing the reality of Lebanon's heterogeneity – which such militant groups as the Christian militia in *Sitt Marie Rose* would deny for the sake of unifying all Christians. Such a fragmented structure is much less prominent in the post-9/11 novels, which seems to indicate that the authors of these novels sought to reinforce the unity of American society after a sudden division between Arab and non-Arab Americans, connected with an abrupt Othering of Arab people, occurred as a result of the 9/11 attacks.

The third chapter on migration divides the four novels over two sections based on whether they portray the view of 'natives' on the position of immigrants (perception), or the experience of the transnational move by migrants (participation). The two Lebanese Civil War novels show that migrants are exploited for their labour or for their entertainment value, while they remain not wholly appreciated by the 'native' group: this is shown through the Syrian guest labourers and



would-be film subjects are in *Sitt Marie Rose*, and the misunderstanding of Mohammad's paintings in *Koolaid's*. These novels promote the stimulation of inter-demographic understanding by showing that this is where the truth lies. The post-9/11 novels show that Arab Americans and Muslims in the United States are overwhelmed by a sudden Islamophobia, which in *Once in a Promised Land* eventually causes Jassim to lose his job, leaving him unable to even contribute to society in the way the immigrants in the Lebanese Civil War novels are shown to do. The third chapter also portrays the (perceived) attitude of non-Arab Americans towards Arab or Muslim Americans, showing the ignorance and well-intended but essentially useless efforts to help the Lebanese during the civil war, as well as the complicity in racial profiling in the post-9/11 novels.

The fourth and last chapter focuses on the way people approach the issue of the assimilation of immigrants into the dominant 'native' society. They can either choose to conform to the (perceived) norms and standards of this society, or they stay true to their moral convictions of the equality of all demographics, meaning that no one faction should be forced into submission to the views and norms of the dominant group. Such transgressive characters as Marie-Rose in Adnan's novel, as well as the failure of establishing acceptance through the suppression of the self in *Koolaid's* and *Once in a Promised Land*, illustrate the undeniable reality of the heterogeneity of both Lebanese and American society. On top of this, the novels show the benefits of crossing the borders between constructed communities and enhancing communication between the members of different demographics.

In addition to the themes mentioned here, there are several occasions where this thesis touches upon the function of romantic relationships between members of different demographics. In *Sitt Marie Rose*, there is the happy romantic relationship between Marie-Rose and her Palestinian boyfriend, and in *Koolaid's*, the dying Mohammad is finally accepted by the horsemen who have come to collect him after they initially rejected him for his homosexuality (see also page 15). When he is accepted, an atmosphere of and love is reflected in the words of the fourth horseman, who says

he loves Mohammad. This symbolises the final reconciliation between Mohammad as a homosexual man and the heteronormative Christian faith. In the post-9/11 novels, there is no such optimism about the reconciliatory power of love. *The Last Templar* reflects no inter-demographic romantic relationships; in *Once in a Promised Land*, however, transgressive romantic relationships are present (see also page 45). The daughter of Salwa's client, Jack, had married a Jordanian man prior to the 9/11 attacks, and is supposedly still with him; Jassim and Salwa attempt to establish extramarital romantic or sexual relationships with non-Arab Americans, but since Jassim confesses his marriage to his would-be lover before a relationship unfolds, and Salwa's lover ends up assaulting her, one could say that these post-9/11 transgressive relationships are unsuccessful. Therefore, I would conclude that the Lebanese Civil War novels exhibit a sense of optimism about the unifying power of acceptance and love, which they suggest as a potential solution for the tension between Arab and non-Arab Americans, that the post-9/11 novels do not possess.

All of the above is believed to show that the Lebanese Civil War novels show only a partial rejection of immigrants, while the post-9/11 novels show a more complete rejection of Arab Americans; also, though the focus in the Lebanese Civil War novels seems to be on the reinforcement and recognition of heterogeneity, the post-9/11 novels seem to argue for the establishment of unity. However, the post-9/11 novels also indicate a sense of pessimism towards the possibility of inter-demographic reconciliation. What this indicates is that the 9/11 terrorist attacks have had such a negative effect on the relations between the various factions of America that the Arab American fiction discussed in this thesis shows a hopelessness when considering solutions to this issue.

To facilitate the selection of the novels to be discussed in this analysis of Arab American literature, I had chosen to limit the scope of this thesis on Lebanese American fiction. While this thesis argues in its introduction that novels produced by members of this significantly large group of Arab

Americans will likely be representative of the entirety of the Arab American community, it also shows the unique historical background of the Lebanese American demographic. Also, I had decided to try to squeeze into the grand total of four novels all of the following: two Lebanese Civil War novels and two post-9/11 novels, two novels by female authors and two by male writers, as well as two novels focusing on the migrant experience and two showing the 'native' perception of immigrants. This may have made for a varied, but also a (perhaps unnecessarily) dense selection. Unfortunately, I did not manage to delve into the differences between the novels by female and male writers as deeply as I had hoped. Another point of critique for this thesis would be that while it intended to investigate the impact of the Lebanese Civil War, it did not actually compare the Lebanese Civil War novels to novels written prior to this massive domestic conflict. Perhaps other investigations of Arab American literature will manage to further illuminate all of these issues.

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